

stuff you wish they taught in seminary



Asking for a Raise:

10 TIPS

**YOUR EXECUTIVE PASTOR
WANTS YOU TO KNOW**

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If you're a staff member at a church, there may come a time when you wonder, *how do I ask for a raise?*

For some reason, asking for a raise when you work for a church or nonprofit can bring up all kinds of uncomfortable feelings, ultimately leaving team members feeling isolated.

Most executive pastors realize that you need and want to be well remunerated for your work at the church, but how do you go about asking for a raise? **What kind of approach should you take?** Is there a better time to ask for a raise than another? How should you approach what could be a potentially sensitive subject?

There are two realities at play here:

1. You need a raise. You're at the point where you're seeing a gap between the amount of compensation and the amount you need to live, and your current salary isn't cutting it. You're wondering if the time to ask is now.

Before we move on with this conversation, remember that it's just money. You need to step back from the anxiety you may be feeling about asking for a raise and try to be as objective as possible. Sounding stressed out or too powered up at the beginning of this conversation will only make it more difficult for both you and your executive pastor.

2. Your church doesn't have unlimited resources. In fact, there are limited resources at your church. During the budgeting process, your executive pastor and leadership team aren't scheming up ways to squeeze maximum effort out of you for minimum remuneration. The truth is there are many factors they are considering as they figure out how much to pay you for the work you do. Leadership has to balance out the financial needs of various people, departments, building expenses, and all the other things it takes to run a church.

Another element to consider is that once you engage in this conversation, your executive pastor will be thinking not only about you but also about others on the team who earn a similar salary. Your leaders understand that if they make a significant change in your salary, they're going to need to make changes across the board. Your salary is part of a group of salaries at the church—a point worth acknowledging as you begin this conversation.

5 Factors to Consider Before Asking for Raise

Ask before you start your position

The best time to ask for a raise is when you're starting a new role.

Many studies have shown that the only way to increase your income at any significant level is to move from one organization to another. [ref] Now, I'm not advocating that you move from church to church! Just keep the idea of asking before you start in mind the next time you consider a new position, and don't take a job at a church where the proposed salary will be too tight for you to live on and to care for your family. **The highest leverage that you'll ever have when it comes to negotiating compensation is when the church is looking to hire you.** Churches seem to be the most flexible in budget considerations during hiring seasons.

See how you can add more value

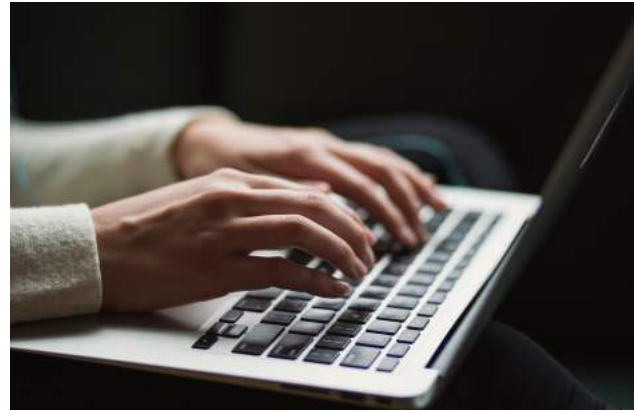
The best approach involves asking your supervisor about how you could make more money in the coming year. **This conversation needs to center on your performance over the last year and how that connects to increasing your compensation accordingly.** You simply cannot go to your supervisor or executive pastor and announce that you want more money without connecting that request to your responsibilities or scope of ministry. You need to demonstrate the connection between your pay and the value that you bring to the church.

One best practice would be to go to your executive pastor three or four months before the end of your fiscal year and ask what you would need to do in order to receive a raise in the year ahead. This way, you give the pastor time to consider your ask for a raise—nobody likes the pressure of last-minute requests.

Do some research

There are resources out there that reveal how much other pastors or nonprofit leaders make in comparable positions and locations. ([Here's one](#), [or this one is good too.](#)) **It would be helpful to have this research on hand as you approach your executive pastor.** This information isn't meant to be used as a weapon; in other words, don't go into attack mode armed with statistics. Instead, use your research to understand where your salary stands in comparison to what others are earning in the same role at local or regional churches of the same size.

When people do their homework, they're usually surprised to learn that they're paid more than their professional peers. This may or may



not be the case for you, but you can learn more about your own financial position by doing some research on how your salary and compensation package compares to other churches in your category.

Be kind and open-handed

Do not approach this conversation with any aggression. **Not only will aggression make the process more painful and back your executive pastor into an unnecessary corner, but it will also fail to work out for you in the end.** Nobody wants to feel like they've been held over a barrel or threatened in any way when it comes to salary negotiation.

Acknowledge the fact that the church does have limited resources and that you do feel well compensated for the work you're doing. Pose the question you came to ask, and then leave it to your executive pastor to think it through. Go out of your way to be considerate in your interactions and remember that your leadership has a lot to balance as they serve within your church.

Listen carefully

In any organization, asking for more money inevitably opens a conversation about your job performance. With that in mind, listen carefully to what they say. **Take notes and pay attention to the feedback you receive regardless of where the conversation goes and whether or not you get a raise.** You'll gain significant insight into how your organization perceives your performance, which can be critically important for you as you look to the future and to how you can serve the church in the coming years.

Don't Say These 5 Things When Asking Your Executive Pastor for a Raise

“I work as hard as the entire student ministry team.”

This sort of positioning is problematic on several fronts. First, you're talking about your *raise*, not about anyone else's performance. **It's bad form to cut down or belittle other team members.** It also doesn't gain you any chips by trying to differentiate yourself as somehow superior to other people in the organization.

More often than not, this approach will backfire; arrogance isn't usually a good team focused play in the overall mix of serving within a church. Focus on your work and your productivity without drawing comparisons between yourself and others.

“I've been here for six months.”

You should not ask for a raise within the first year of your time at a church. **When you started, you negotiated an income and that shouldn't be open for discussion for at least a year.** In fact, I'd say that you might need to go through at least one full cycle (maybe two) before you should pursue a raise. Don't go to your executive pastor prematurely.

“I really need the money now.”

This could be true. You may have found yourself in a tight financial situation. Maybe you're behind on bills, stepping into the deeper side of the pool known as debt; maybe unexpected medical expenses ran beyond your financial ability to pay them. If you choose to present actual needs to your executive pastor, be certain that you don't use those needs to leverage guilt.

In order for most churches to be able to pay someone more, it's going to take some time, effort, and energy on the executive pastor's behalf to make that work. Give them the opportunity to respond and the time to process. There's a trickle-down effect when we change anybody's compensation, and you need to acknowledge that it's not going to happen overnight.



“If I don't get the raise, I'm going to another church.”

Can I let you in on a little secret? *This never works.* **If you have one foot out the door, it's legitimate for your supervisors to wonder if you are truly focused on the mission in front of you.** In fact, many churches would interpret this as crossing the loyalty line. If you've indicated that you plan to find other employment, they might just ask you to go. Sure, there may be times where you are approached by other churches, and it's flattering to receive offers, but always remember that you need to check your heart as you interact with your own staff team.

At the end of the day, if money is what's keeping you at your church, your focus on the vision and mission has probably already faded. **Maybe it is time for you to move on to a new location.** I know that most people that serve at churches serve from a place of passion and drive. If you can't find within yourself a sense of that original ardor and motivation, then you might need to make a change to your service with that church.

Nothing.

Don't say nothing at all. Don't privately stew about it. If a storm is brewing on the inside about how much you make and your desire for a raise, **the worst thing you can do is to never bring it up with your supervisor or executive pastor.** Those private feelings can lead to anger, resentment, and overall negativity, all of which can bring you to the point where you'll become less effective and unable to serve efficiently.

Instead of giving the raise conversation the silent treatment, reach out. **I think you'll be surprised that your executive pastor will welcome the conversation.** It's bound to be a fruitful conversation regardless of how it concludes.

Have you ever asked for a raise at your church? How did it go?

What advice would you give to a friend who has been considering approaching their executive pastor for a raise?

I'd love to hear about your experience when you asked for a raise at your church. Share your thoughts and reflections in the comments section [here](#).

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