

If I were Donald Trump's pastor

By [John W. Vest](#)

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Nothing has generated conversation on my Facebook page lately like posts about Donald Trump. Yesterday I posted a story about [Catholic bishops taking on Trump](#). Noting that he claims to be a Presbyterian, I wondered if Presbyterian leaders should be addressing his rhetoric as well. A variety of people weighed in, and given the predominance of liberals among my FB friends most of the comments were in favor of critiquing the Donald. It was also pointed out that the PCUSA's Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns [has in fact responded to Trump](#).

Steve Salyards (the GA Junkie) has [a good post on this](#). He points out that Trump was confirmed at [First Presbyterian Church](#) in Jamaica, Queens, but seems more recently associated with [Marble Collegiate Church](#), a congregation in the Reformed Church in America. Steve goes on to use Trump as an interesting test case to ponder how big the PCUSA tent really is. Here is Steve's thought experiment: "Is the tent big enough to include an individual who publicly expresses views that some (many?) would strongly disagree with but who has the characteristics for membership and who seeks to be considered a member of the denomination?"

All of this has inspired a thought experiment of my own: what would I do if I were Donald Trump's pastor?

For the purposes of this musing, let's assume that Trump is in fact an active member of a Presbyterian congregation. Given his travel schedule, let's say this means he attends worship eight times a year—Christmas, Easter, and six other Sundays. Should a pastor do anything when a high profile member makes a series of very public statements that run counter to the beliefs or ethos of the church?

I'm not talking about his political or economic views, by the way. There are plenty of faithful Presbyterians who are political and economic conservatives. I'm more concerned about his racial stereotyping and his over-the-top negative posture toward people who disagree with him. Neither of these seem consistent with the way of Jesus Christ.

Most pastors probably wouldn't admit this, but I have little doubt that whether or not and how much he contributes financially to the church would in some way influence how his pastor would deal with him. As much as pastors and church leaders want to operate with pure integrity, I know congregations that give a lot of latitude to big donors whose public persona or actions reflect poorly on the church. It's hard to know how we would respond to situations like this if they were real and not hypothetical. I'd like to think that I wouldn't let his money influence my pastoral leadership, but how many of us know how we would really respond if a major capital campaign were hanging in the balance?

If I were Trump's pastor, I would in no way criticize him in public but I would request to meet with him in private. I would ask him about his spiritual well-being in the midst of his campaign and offer my pastoral support. I would tell him that my role as the pastor of his church compels me to point out that some of his public statements and actions do not correspond with my understanding of the gospel and invite him into conversation about this. As I tend to do in any pastoral care or counseling situation, I would ask him where he thinks God is in his life and how his beliefs inform his actions. I would offer to pray with him and promise to pray for him in the days to come.

My pastoral interactions with Donald Trump would be guided by the foundational belief that he is a beloved child of God. Like all of us, he has faults and imperfections—his just happen to get global media coverage.

It would be a sacred privilege to be Trump's pastor, and a rare opportunity to be a spiritual advisor and gospel advocate for a powerful person with the potential to have a meaningful influence in the world.

How about you? What would you do if you were Donald Trump's pastor?

*Originally posted at [Vest's blog](#)*