

Search committee pressure eased with latest 'how to' manual and training from MBCB

*By Tony Martin
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How does a church go about securing a pastor and church staffers? The Leadership Department at the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) exists to equip churches to do just that and has a resource designed for this purpose – the Minister Search Guide.



Pace (left) and Barker. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)
John Pace is the department director and Greg Barker is the

department consultant. Both are long-time Mississippi Baptist pastors.

“One thing Greg and I talk about a lot is how we want to lead churches to be more prayerful and more thoughtful,” Pace said. “It shouldn’t be just a popularity thing. We’ll work through that material in the [Minister Search Guide] with the search committee, and with the church beginning, continuing, and ending in prayer.

“We want churches to say, ‘We want God’s person, and not just someone who might look interesting to us.’”

Barker, who frequently works with churches seeking a pastor or staffers, said, “Churches can be sort of lost without a resource. Some churches refer to the old ‘search committee.’ You’d be sitting in church some Sunday and five or so people would walk in. The question would be, ‘Who are those folks?’ It would be people looking for a pastor who looked good and sounded good.

“The process is not, ‘Hey, this guy looks good. Let’s pick him.’ Instead it’s, ‘Can this guy help us?’ We start off by developing a profile of the church, which is also the profile of the pastor they’re seeking. It helps the church focus on their purpose – it’s not just looking at resumes.”

The booklet has been through several editions with some changes over the years. It has existed for some time but was been recently updated to reflect modern concerns and considerations. “We worked on that update for a year,” Pace said. “We worked a lot on the questions a church should ask as they look for pastors and staffers.

“I had been pastor at First Church, Terry, for 20 years before coming [to MBCB], so there were a couple of generations in the church that had never called a pastor. When I met with the deacon chairman to tell him I was leaving, I was grateful the church had a good constitution and bylaws. Most churches do.

“There was a process for putting together a search committee and finding an interim. Greg trained the committee in the process. The committee posted a flow chart for everyone to see so that the church would know where they were in the process.”

Barker trains about 100 search committees each year. “The process takes about an hour. Sometimes I’ll get a request from a church, ‘We need some resumes.’ Well, the preacher left Monday. They aren’t ready for resumes so I’ll say, ‘Let’s slow down a minute and talk about the process.’”

“I’ll lay it out. I tell them that there’s no cost to the church, and I’ll come at a time that is convenient for the committee. I’ll sit down with them and train them.”

The resource is available as a free online download, and Barker can also provide hard copies if needed. “Greg brings at least one copy with him,” Pace said. “I had a call from a larger church in the state recently that was looking for a pastor and the chairman said, ‘I don’t know what to do,’ so I was able to send him the link.”

“He downloaded the link, printed it out, took it in to his deacons that night. He said, ‘We were terrified but now here’s the process.’”

Pace and Barker prefer that churches not just download the book and go it on their own. “We’d prefer Greg work through the content with them and build a relationship with us,” Pace said. “We just want them to get some qualified guidance. We want to give them some insights and some direction, and make sure it’s going to be a prayerful, meaningful process.”

The Minister Search Guide can be viewed at mbcb.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Minister-Search-Guide-2020.pdf. For more information, contact the MBCB Leadership Department at (601) 292-3305 or e-mail elindigrin@mbcb.org.