

STARTING A LOCAL NACBA CHAPTER

By Ernestine Haas

ALTHOUGH the National Association of Church Business Administration provides a wide spectrum of services and resources to its national members, it is the local chapter which provides its members with vital local networking support. By coming together for monthly meetings, members of local chapters can share resources, seek advice from those who have had similar experience, hear presentations on topics of interest, and enjoy the fellowship of others in the work of church business administration.

Although NACBA has 73 active chapters, there are many areas of the country which do not have a chapter close enough for church business administrators to be involved. For this reason new chapters are born each year. Starting a new chapter strengthens the profession and provides new members with a network of colleagues with whom they can connect. NACBA has a number of national members who have had great success chartering new chapters. Some chapters were started in areas where there were none; some were started by members of an existing "Mother" chapter to provide expanded

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geographic coverage where it was needed.

Kay Irvine, FCBA, Central Area Six Regional Director, has been leading efforts to start a chapter in the El Paso area because there has been no chapter in that area at all. When business administrators in the El Paso area expressed an interest in establishing a chapter, Irvine began emailing and calling various administrators for support. She met with those interested, and they launched a campaign making phone calls and sending postcards and e-mails.

Neil Geppelt played a key role in chartering the New Orleans Chapter. "After attending the national convention for two years and seeing the camaraderie and desire for quality standards," he said he knew that a local chapter would help him and other church administrators in his area develop in their profession. Among the organizers of that chapter were administrators from churches from several denominations: a Methodist, a Catholic, an Episcopal, and an African-American Baptist. After their meeting notice appeared in the Business Section calendar of the newspaper, the chapter attracted a financial representative who sells to the ministerial trade. "He has become a pillar of the group and its support," Geppelt said.

Carol Cooper, FCBA, has been very instrumental in establishing a new chapter in the south Puget Sound area in Washington. Although the Pacific Northwest Chapter of NACBA has met in the Seattle area for more than 40 years, there was a need for another chapter. "The region at the south end of

Puget Sound is 60 miles south of Seattle," she said, "and the drive time to Seattle is about one hour each way under ideal conditions. This, plus the increasing freeway congestion, has discouraged participation in the Pacific Northwest Chapter by persons from our south Puget Sound area."

Ron Prevatte, FCBA, President of the new Alabama Capital City Chapter, had a similar situation. There was not a chapter in the Montgomery area and he was a member of the Central Alabama Chapter. Because that chapter meets regularly in Birmingham, which is an hour and a half away for him, it has been difficult for him to take the time to attend chapter meetings. So, Prevatte took on the task of starting a new chapter.

The birthing process of a new chapter comes easier for some than others. Irvine says that the first efforts in El Paso last summer were not eagerly received because of scheduling the meetings in the evenings, but there were six people at the organizational meeting and another 8-10 administrators who have expressed an interest. She anticipated that the April meeting would provide a good idea as to the potential beginning membership. The Alabama Capitol City Chapter met for the first time in August and Simeon May, NACBA's CEO, met with them in September. "Birmingham was extremely helpful in helping us get started," Prevatte noted. They started with eight members and are now up to sixteen, with an average attendance of twelve. "I determined there was a genuine interest after talking with several other administrators, he said. He and Richard



Alabama Capitol City Chapter officers: President Ron Prevatte, FCBA, Minister of Church Administration, First Baptist Church Prattville, AL; Secretary Treasurer Jane Barrett, Church Administrator, Mount Hebron West Baptist Church, Elmore, AL; Director of Education Phill Martin, FCBA, NACBA National Staff and guest speaker, Vice-President Richard Harvey, FCBA (Richard has since moved to Nashville and opened a practice in church consulting)

Harvey, FCBA, another administrator in the Montgomery area, met with Phill Martin at the National Conference in Boca Raton and he says, “The rest is history!”

All agreed that making a list of potential members is a critical step. For those who are interested in starting a new chapter, the following steps help in obtaining names of prospects:

- Contact the national office for a mailing list of national members and individuals in the area who might be prospects.
- Obtain a mailing list from regional associated ministries organizations.
- Contact church administrators who have attended “Mother” chapter meetings.
- Go through the yellow pages for names of pastors and churches.
- Contact churches in the area and learn who is on the staff.

Once the preliminary contacts are made an organizational committee

should meet on a regular basis at a time separate from the time designated for the chapter meeting. The monthly chapter meeting with devotion, program and lunch does not give adequate time to discuss organization “or the advantages of NACBA or chapter membership, or just bonding as a group,” Carol Cooper points out. Then, planning interesting, vital programs for the monthly meeting is essential. Prospective members can provide suggestions for topics and speakers.

Barbara Hollingsworth, NACBA Membership Associate, is point-of-contact for chapters at the national office. She is the person responsible for communicating with local chapters, maintaining chapter files, and providing Chapter Reports and Achievement Records for the annual national conference. When asked what is involved in starting a new chapter, Hollingsworth said that the most important factor in the successful birth of a chapter is “that one person willing to do the work—a ‘mover and shaker’ willing to take care of all the

nitty-gritty details who is enthusiastic about NACBA.” When she receives calls from people eager to start a new chapter, she points them to the Chapter Builder Section of the NACBA Web site. That link provides a wealth of resources for starting and growing a chapter:

- How to Begin a New Chapter
- Chapter Charter Application
- 501(c)(3) Application Process for Chapters
- Best Practices
- Chapter Program Ideas
- Local Chapter CEU Program
- Local Chapter Information
- Sample Chapter Constitution and By-Laws
- Sample Chapter Membership Application
- Chapter Officers Job Descriptions
- Chapter Officer and Marketing Training Outline
- Chapter Officer Installation
- Suggestions for Improving Chapter Meetings
- Graphics Library

Hollingsworth, herself, is a wonderful resource for new chapter organizers. She will send a list of prospects from the national office database, noting those on the list who are current or past national members. She provides information to organizers on the general format of chapter meetings and how most chapters operate and tells them



Rio Grande Chapter officers in El Paso: President Vicki Mastroiani, First Baptist Church, Vice-President David Hougham, Coronado Baptist Church, Secretary/Treasurer JoAnn Casper, St. Francis on the Hill Episcopal Church.

how chapters can offer CEU programs. Prior to the first official chapter meeting, she will send a packet of materials which are helpful providing basic information about NACBA to those attending the meeting: included in the packet would be membership applications, product brochures, NACBA brochures, certification brochures, copies of the *NACBAgram*, and copies of the *NACBALedger*.

Once a chapter has been “born” at its first meeting, it must adopt a Constitution and Bylaws, and elect a slate of officers. Next, the officers should select a name for the chapter. (This should be a name which would identify the chapter nationally.) When those steps have been taken, the chapter completes an Application for Charter as a Chapter and submits it to the national office. Chapters are chartered at the national NACBA conference.

The growing pains are fairly common to all newly born chapters:

- **Finding a convenient meeting time and location** Many chapters meet during the lunch hour, but Neil Gepphelt said, “While we [the New Orleans Chapter] initially met during the lunch hour, we switched to the early morning hour as some felt it was better to start the morning with the meeting, rather than trying to get away from the church during the mid-day period.”
- **Determining a membership fee** Factors which influence the costs of operating a chapter include mailing costs for membership recruitment, newsletters, and announcements. Additionally, the cost of paying honoraria for speakers and fees for workshops can affect the amount of the membership fee. Some chapters start out with more aggressive campaigns than others; thus, their membership fees may need to be higher.
- **Planning interesting programs** “Plan it, and they will come,” could be the motto of a successful chapter.

One very important factor in the success of a chapter is the effectiveness and relevance of the programs presented at the chapter meetings. Enlisting speakers and presenters takes time, but planning ahead and scheduling months in advance can sometimes provide outstanding, vital programs which will bring in not only current members, but their colleagues and associates who are prospective chapter members.

- **Recruiting new members** For the chapter to grow, it is vital for national NACBA members to be actively involved. They can help keep the chapter focused on the mission of NACBA and can promote the national conference and resources available through the national office. Barbara Hollingsworth says that the key to keeping a newly born chapter alive is continuing to contact new people. Periodically, she sends a list of new national members, who are also good local chapter prospects, to Chapter Presidents, Regional Directors, and Area Vice Presidents.

Each chapter has needs and characteristics which make it unique. Although some chapters have a membership primarily from one denomination, most chapters are diverse across denominational lines. Some have a bi-lingual concern represented. Some chapters have a large percentage of their members who are national members of NACBA; some have only a few. Some chapters have a large number of members who are serving in staff positions other than that of an administrator. The largest chapters average about fifty in attendance; the smallest, about five.

Organizing and birthing a local chapter is not without its challenges. Since churches in the south Puget Sound area are not as large as those in the Seattle-Tacoma area, Carol Cooper says, “Some issues of concern to the larger church are not as concerning here.” Soren Brockdorf led organizational efforts for the Florida First Coast Chapter because



Stan Solomon, the new administrator from Heritage Baptist Church enjoys his first NACBA chapter meeting with meeting host Alan Hess, Associate Pastor for Worship and Administration of Ridgecrest Baptist Church in Montgomery, AL.

there was no chapter in that area. He says that finding a central location for the meetings has been difficult because the area is so spread out.

However, the rewards of the opportunities for networking, fellowshiping and sharing among colleagues in the work of church business administration on the local level are invaluable benefits of membership in a local chapter. NACBA charters an average of two chapters at the national conference each year. Those who have been instrumental in the birth of new chapters are ordinary people with an enthusiasm for NACBA who have taken on the task of organization and accomplished extraordinary results. Ron Prevatte says the Montgomery Chapter is eager to keep things going: “We enjoy being together even though many of us are fairly new to the area and to our jobs. It has been a real blessing to see how we have bonded and meshed together. There is a real camaraderie with our group.” They have had several members join NACBA and have 16 dues-paying members. “We are off to a great start he says, “We want to keep the momentum going.” 