

## The CE Interview: Simeon May and J. Phillip Martin

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**Two years shy of its golden anniversary, the National Association of Church Business Administration (NACBA) is on the cusp of a new era as it makes major strides toward a higher level of performance and professionalism.**

*by: Rez Gopez-Sindac, editor*

On the frontline of this exciting journey are two first-rate former church business administrators who possess exceptional knowledge of the industry and a strong passion to help local congregations become more efficient and effective in managing the business operations of the ministry.

Simeon May is NACBA's chief executive officer. He joined the association in 1983 when he became the minister of business administration at First Baptist Church in Richardson, TX, a role he faithfully served for almost 15 years. He served on the NACBA board from 1989 to 1996, and in 1998 he became the association's fourth executive director. Six years later, Simeon received the designation of Certified Association Executive (CAE) from the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE), and in recognition of this exemplary achievement in the field of association management, the NACBA board of directors officially changed Simeon's title from executive director to chief executive officer.

J. Phillip Martin, director of education, has an extensive background in church business administration, having served numerous local congregations in various administrative and management roles. A certified Fellow in Church Business Administration (FCBA), Phillip served on the board of NACBA. He has also held key leadership positions in a number of church and community organizations. As NACBA's first director of education, Phillip is in charge of the association's training and certification programs as well as technology research and development. Phillip is the Web master for the association's Web site, [www.nacba.net](http://www.nacba.net). Without a doubt, Simeon and Phillip are setting a high standard of leadership and professional service for all 2,900 members of NACBA. And judging from the members' active participation in the annual national conferences, certification and education programs, and other opportunities for growth and networking available at the local chapters, these men's efforts to propel the profession of church business administration to a new level are gaining solid ground. And the excitement has only just begun.

**Church Executive: Many church business administrators already have MBA degrees and some even have theological training. And yet, education remains a very high priority at NACBA. Why is it important that individuals in this particular profession become proactive lifelong learners?**

**Phill:** People who serve in the local churches in the area of administration cannot do the job successfully if they are to depend only on some academic accomplishments. Church business administration is an ever-changing, dynamic profession. There have been more changes in the last four or five years than there were in the 20 preceding years. We're particularly seeing changes in the areas of risk management, tax and legal structures and other issues. With the passing into law of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, we're seeing more calls for procedures and reporting from nonprofits as it relates to financial accountability. We're starting to see the IRS using a more aggressive approach toward churches. Moreover, the complexity of technology is such that there is a never-ending need to learn and be able to respond. I really believe that to be an effective church administrator, one should strive to continually learn and grow.

**Simeon:** There are a lot of differences between managing a congregation and just doing a typical administrative job. There are things that are unique to the church world. Those who come from secular universities or secular jobs tend to have a more secular knowledge of business that does not always translate into the specifics of a local church. On the other hand, those who come from the seminary may have a more general degree in Christian education or faith formation. There are a few exceptions - there are those who attended schools that have programs that are specifically focused at church management. What are the educational resources and tools that the association provides to members and congregations?

**Phill:** At the center of what NACBA has been doing for the last 49 years is the annual national conference. This is a five-day gathering of practitioners and experts in the church business

administration profession. About 700 to 800 church administrators attend the conference to get resources, training and inspiration, as well as to network with their peers. The conference features excellent keynote speakers, 80 workshops on a variety of issues, and a host of products and services ranging from financing and fundraising to computer software to furnishings and facility management.

The second largest focus of the association is certification. We have partnered with seven higher education institutions, five of which are theological institutions that are offering a master's level program. We work with these institutions in setting standards for members who desire to be certified Fellow in Church Business Administration.

One of the strong areas of continuing education is through our local chapter networks, which are primarily run by volunteers. There are 73 chapters right now across the country, and most of them meet on a monthly basis not only for fellowship and networking, but to get updates on new policies and practices. They do this by bringing in an expert who will present a seminar on a particular area of need. In areas where we don't have a strong chapter base, we're looking at doing some regional workshops that will be sponsored by the national organization.

**The church business administrator wears many hats. What skills or experiences are helpful for anyone to be effective in this role?**

**Simeon:** People come in to this role from a wide variety of backgrounds. For example, in my case, I am a CPA. I came out of the accounting world to take the role as the church business administrator. Phill, on the other hand, was already doing ministry work in the areas of music, education and administration. We have people from the military, engineering world, HR profession and other disciplines.

**Phill:** We also see a lot of folks hired out of their congregations. Another good thing we're seeing is that the number of women who are doing the function of an administrator is growing steadily. A lot of times we see churches acknowledging the work that they do by giving those women the title of administrator. Unfortunately, many times churches don't look too closely at the area of compensation, which is why many of our female administrators who are as competent as their male counterparts are under compensated. One of the things we try to do as an association is to work for equal pay for women based on role expectations.

**Not long ago the association launched the online Salary Survey Program for its members. What are the benefits of this product?**

**Simeon:** The online compensation survey provides congregations accurate national, regional, state and local salary information. It allows churches that are looking to fill a staff position to know the going market rate, and it also tells churches whether or not they are compensating their staff accordingly.

Participants to the survey can have access to the standard reports and they can also create a custom report based on the criteria they set. For example, if someone wants to know the salaries for senior ministers serving the United Methodist churches that have budgets of \$5 million or a weekend attendance of 1,500, they can enter that criteria and get a custom report.

Back to the issue of gender, one of the things we include in the report is the breakdown between male and female pay, and it actually shows where the discrepancy is. We know of one church that used that survey in order to get pay increases for the female members of its staff based on the jobs that they were doing. Our survey is also broken down by ordained vs. non-ordained staff. In the Baptist world, you see more business administrators who are ordained clergy, but in other denominations, the church business administrator is almost never an ordained minister. And so the survey shows the difference in pay between ordained and non-ordained ministers. We also break the survey down by region, budget size and worship attendance. With our old book, we were limited to 25 job titles, but with the online survey we are able to cover 60 church positions.

To help people understand what we've done in going online, I've used the analogy of a portrait vs. a motion picture. In the old days, doing salary surveys was like taking a picture of your family. You would then keep that picture and you would be able to look back at it again. In the past we would take a 45-day period where everybody would give us salary figures and we would put them together in a

report. What we've done now through this application software model is we're able to continually look at the movement of salaries. Data is being entered almost everyday, and it is moving on a real-time basis. At any moment during the year that you look at a particular staff salary structure, you're going to have the most current data available from that time period.

**What do you make of some observations that the job of the church business administrator has become more of a career than a calling?**

**Phill:** I think it's always important to keep things in proper perspective particularly in the church where you talk in terms of why the organization exists. One of the things we try to maintain is that the administration and management of a congregation is not an end in and of itself, but it's facilitating the ability of the church to do ministry more effectively. When administration becomes a barrier to doing ministry, then it's not good administration. I think many of the people who come out of the secular world to join the church and end up doing the job of an administrator do it out of a sense of call - a sense of ministry first and then secondly a way to make a living. I don't sense a shift in that at all.

**Simeon:** It is definitely a calling to ministry. And who should be more accountable in this world than the local congregation? Local churches should be setting the example on how to be open, responsible, accountable, and do things properly. There are a couple of Scriptures that really exemplify what we are about in the church business administration world. In 1 Corinthians 14:40, we are told to do all things decently and in order, and in 2 Corinthians 8:20-21, Paul talked about being accountable and doing things the right way not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men. And that is where the church business administrator really helps a congregation.

We think that when a church reaches somewhere around 500 people in attendance or has a budget of about half-a-million dollar to \$1 million, they really should start looking very strongly at having someone in the role of a full-time church business administrator to help them do things decently and in order.

**Many large churches have executive pastors on staff, and a number of emerging and growing churches are following suit. How is this development going to affect the office of the church business administrator?**

**Phill:** That's a tough question to answer because I think that in many congregations the executive pastor very much functions in an administrative role - he or she is the chief operating officer. In some churches a business administrator may report to the executive pastor. In other churches this may not be the case; they may have a financial manager, building administrator or operations manager. We've identified 13 disciplines that we think relate to church administration or management. There are multiple structures that are at work - you don't have to copy the organizational chart of another church to be an effective congregation. I think the executive pastor model will work well in many places - it all depends on the relationship between the senior pastor and the executive pastor. Whether it's a trend across all denominations, I'm not sure that's the case.

One of the difficulties we have is in explaining the title of church administrator. If you look at the titles of our members, you'll probably see a pattern of 27 or 28 different kinds of titles that all have the administrative role or function. It gets difficult to articulate the titles particularly across denominational lines because the terms they use may be different but the functions are the same.

**Simeon:** I guess we have to tell the story why we are the National Association of Church Business Administration and not Administrators. In the early '80s, the organization intentionally changed its name from an association of administrators to an association focused on raising the standards of church business administration. The point of the change was this: The title is not the issue. The issue is who performs the administrative work in the congregation.

**Aside from the online compensation survey, there is another program, called Prism that is provided by the association. What do you hope to accomplish through this product?**

**Phill:** It's a resource that we have developed to help ministers receive honest and confidential feedback from a full spectrum of their professional community. It is based on a 360-degree model of evaluation and feedback that has been in use in the business world for probably the last 25 years or so. In a typical 360 evaluation, a participant may choose to identify the people from their full sphere

of ministry. They would have a supervisor, a coworker and a subordinate evaluate them by answering more than 100 questions on areas such as core competencies of ministry, administrative and pastoral care, faith formation issues, communication skills, and more. Then there are three open-ended questions at the end. All these go together to create a report that goes to the individual minister, and this gives them some feedback about their performance. The feedback may be used by a facilitator to help the minister create a personalized development plan that is geared toward strengthening some areas that may be weak. We've been doing Prism for a little over a year now. We have about 38 organizations that have used this instrument and about 120 people who have gone through the program.

**Are there any concerns about the possibility that some people might use this tool to advance their own agenda?**

**Phill:** Of course anytime you open yourself up to feedback and evaluation you are susceptible to people having agendas, but we try hard to implement this program in such a way that it is fair, honest and gives the minister a healthy experience. We would counsel against a congregation using it as a tool to undermine a minister. I don't think that's the intent of the instrument.

**Simeon:** Neither is the evaluation intended for the purpose of granting pay increases. It is not a tool to be used to compare one ministry to another and put together a merit pay increase. It is not something congregations have done a lot in the past, and so there are some apprehensions. But what we're finding is that those who have participated in it have found it to be a positive experience. In many cases the evaluation tool has helped some people refocus their ministries.

**As NACBA gears up for its 49th anniversary, what do you consider are the association's greatest accomplishments? Simeon:**

First let me say that people are continually amazed to learn that we're running a 2,900-member organization, organizing a national conference every year, and hosting a lot of other programs and activities with only five employees including me and Phill. We have to depend on our membership for a lot of things. We are thankful that we have a great board of directors as well as excellent local and regional leadership.

I think the number one accomplishment of the association has been the education of our members. Their willingness to excel in their role as church administrators has elevated their ministry and allowed people to see its importance to the long-term health of the local church.

Another great accomplishment is the fact that we are so ecumenical. I don't know of another religious organization in the country that has a wider range of membership than what we have. We cross all denominational lines, and every church - from the most liberal to the most conservative - is represented here. I believe we're a model of excellence when it comes to how a group composed of different denominations and independent churches work well together as one.

Another great accomplishment is that we've developed networking opportunities through our chapters and national conferences. NACBA provides avenues for its members to link with their peers and industry professionals as well as businesses that serve the church. These networking opportunities allow our members to have a support base, enabling them to do their work effectively.

**Going forward, what are the things that can be done to make NACBA even stronger?**

**Simeon:** We will continue to find ways to funnel our resources to our members and provide them more training and opportunities to learn. As we go down the road we see more avenues for using technology to help us provide the resources and training that our members are looking for.

**Phill:** We often get phone calls from people who are excited to find us and typically they ask the question, "Are you a new organization?" When we tell them we're doing our 49th annual conference this year, they're shocked. As hard as we work trying to connect people and tell the world we're here, we continue to be amazed at how many people out there are looking for the kind of affiliation that we provide. We're actively looking into starting new chapters, building new networks, and providing training and education even to those outside our membership. Organizationally, we are on a pretty sharp growth curve, and I think that's because people need the network that NACBA has built for the last 49 years. The foundation that we stand on was built by many dedicated people in the past. We

just want to keep it strong and affect more congregations.