



IN THE GAP • Helping churches navigate leadership change

Fairview Heights, like every other community, has seen its share of changes over the years. “This part of town where the church is located was probably once a little more vibrant than it is now. So, communities just beyond us continue to grow and expand, and we’re at a bit of a transition point,” **David Grove**, a deacon at First Baptist Church, said.

In addition to those community changes, the church found itself experiencing another important transition in early 2021. Their pastor of more than 10 years announced he would be retiring. They would be searching for a new pastor at what had become a critical point in the life of the church. The transition in the community had led to changes in the church, which a difficult year dealing with the challenges of Covid had only accelerated.



EMERSON

“Attendance probably peaked in the early 2000s, and then really for the last two decades we’ve been in a gradual, fairly predictable decline,” Grove explained.

The retiring pastor, as well as deacons like Grove, knew the church needed to manage this change in leadership well. So, they devised a plan called “Passing the Torch,” and they reached out to **Mark Emerson** at IBSA for help.

Emerson is an expert on pastoral transitions and search processes. In the past few years, he has helped dozens of churches as they sought their next senior pastor or staff member.

“We were able to come in and to consult at the very early stages of that process. We were able to share with the leadership about our training tools and our help in training search teams,” Emerson said.

That help proved invaluable to the search team at First Baptist. **Gloria Hogue**, who served as the chairperson, said that shouldering the responsibility to find the right man to faithfully teach God’s word, guide a church to reach its community, and care for families through difficult life situations was a heavy burden. “It felt like a huge, huge weight,” she said.

But as the team began to meet, she was soon set at ease by having Emerson as a guide and resource. “It was extremely helpful to just have a blueprint already written out for us,” said Hogue (above right, with Grove). “He provided all these materials and training for us, and then was always available to answer every question we had.”



Through many prayers and meetings, the church called their new pastor almost a year after their search had officially begun, and after less than a year, they are already seeing a new season of healthy ministry emerge.

“When Pastor Scott came in view of a call, we had a full sanctuary. It felt like a time of celebration, and no one had even voted yet,” Hogue said. “People are still coming up to me saying, ‘Thank you so much. You did such a great job.’ I’m like, ‘I didn’t do this. God did this. God brought him to us.’”

