

Revitalization IN BI-VOCATIONAL MINISTRY

When Justin Smith became the senior pastor of **Warwick Baptist Church** in Newport News in November 2016, the role was full of opportunities and challenges. The church was in a season of transition and had to ask some tough questions about what the future of Warwick would look like or if it would have a future at all. Although the church was small in membership, God had provided a core group of people who were committed to seeing the church thrive. Smith felt a clear call to lead his flock bi-vocationally through a time of revitalization.

The first phone call he made was to Dave Bounds, his regional SBCV catalyst. Bounds immediately put Smith in touch with the late Reggie Hester, a

revitalization strategy leader, who would become invaluable in helping this first-time pastor lead the church through an initial revitalization effort.

After engaging in a revitalization process, Warwick Baptist Church had a new vision, well-defined ministries, and focused ministry leaders. People were excited about what God was doing. The church had two weekly prayer meetings that were consistently well attended. There were block parties, youth retreats, and new faces showing up on Sundays. It was wonderful to see all that God was doing in the ministries of Warwick Baptist Church, but equally exciting was witnessing the personal spiritual growth that was taking place in the members. It is clear that God has done a work of revitalization in this local church.

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While some may see bi-vocational ministry as a negative, Pastor Smith sees positives. He works 60 hours per week an hour away from his home. Due to his busy schedule, the church family knew that if Warwick were going to thrive, everyone would need to be involved. The church has approached ministry with a team approach. Lay leaders taking ownership of church ministries is something many full-time pastors wish would happen in their churches. This tends to occur more organically in churches with bi-vocational pastors because the church family doesn't look to the senior pastor for every need. Smith has been amazed at the ability and willingness of the church members to move Warwick Baptist Church forward. He feels privileged to have access to a group of seasoned leaders to listen to, pray with, and learn from. He has also drawn strength from other pastors around Virginia whose churches are, likewise, in the process of revitalization. These pastors have encouraged him during this season.

The message of Warwick Baptist Church is clear. There is hope for churches with bi-vocational pastors to experience revitalization! ■

