

The *Heart* of Bi-Vocational Church Revitalization

A new believer exudes joy over being baptized at New River Fellowship as church members watch. Jordan Sechrist serves as the church's bi-vocational pastor.



Jordan Secrist has served as the pastor of **New River Fellowship** in Christiansburg, VA, for the last year and a half. Even though the church had experienced turbulent seasons, Pastor Secrist and his wife, Abigail, were attracted to the heart of the members who remained.

When engaging in the process of church revitalization, there are many things to be done, and it's usually ideal if the pastor can make church ministry his full-time job. However, many churches in Virginia are increasingly finding they cannot afford a full-time pastor. Bi-vocational pastoral ministry is becoming a more common and accepted norm.

In fact, many churches are seeing church revitalization take place through bi-vocational ministry. Pastor Secrist explained, "Every leader at New River Fellowship is bi-vocational, along with every member." He points out that it is common for everyone in the church to have multiple priorities, such as a job, family obligations, community activities, etc. Secrist sees this not as a weakness but as an advantage for everyday Gospel revival.

The methodology of bi-vocational revitalization may look different than some traditional approaches. Secrist initially talked with leaders about following a typical path of revitalization, which would fill the calendar with activities, plan new programs, and start new initiatives to try to attract new members. However, initial feedback revealed that this approach left leaders and members alike feeling overwhelmed when they considered their obligations outside of church ministry. Furthermore, since the church had experienced a difficult time, many still needed to heal and recover from past difficulties.

Secrist, instead, refocused the church revitalization strategy on the spiritual health and well-being of those within the church. The church was led through a time of reckoning with its own spiritual life. Secrist exclaimed, "We've seen those with testimonies of trauma, abuse, and addiction find a home to worship a God who reconciles brokenness to His image."

The move from task-based to heart-based revitalization is doing the more profound work of revitalizing hearts. This helps the church become spiritually ready to minister to others. God has already shown New River Fellowship the

fruit of this work. Pastor Secrist's favorite examples include seeing a Hindu family come to know the Lord; seeing dramatic heart changes regarding church growth; and reaching the local community among long-time members.

Pastor Secrist finds joy in balancing bi-vocational ministry. He says it has caused him to recognize his limitations and rely more on God.

Likewise, New River Fellowship is relying more on God and deepening its dependence on Him. ■

Church members at New River Fellowship come together to share a dinner in celebration of the Christmas holidays.

