Returning to the BGAV

Shortly after Rev. Rodney Barwick retired as a pastor in the Concord Baptist Association, some members of Averett Baptist Church—another church in that association—visited him and asked if he would come and lead them. They were struggling.

At the time, Averett was a Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia (SBCV) congregation. “I knew before I went as pastor that they were not a BGAV church anymore, and I was hoping to be able to gently move them back toward it,” said Barwick. On his first Sunday as pastor on March 1, 2006, there were 21 people present in worship.

Up to that point, Barwick had experienced a long, positive history as a BGAV pastor. So when Averett asked him about becoming their pastor, he told them that he would seek to direct them back toward an affiliation with the BGAV. He knew, though, that it would take time and patience.

When Barwick began his ministry at Averett, he got to know people there and realized that they’d been led by just a few church members to move away from the BGAV because of some issues that had been important to those few people. As he had suspected, though, he found that the church as a whole was more compatible with the BGAV and other churches in the Concord Association—all of which were BGAV supporters.

There were a number of reasons why Barwick felt a closer alignment between Averett and the BGAV, but primarily he knew that the church could benefit from the excellent support they would have if they changed their affiliation. Barwick recalled that Tony Brooks, BGAV field strategist for the southside region, was particularly helpful during their process of discernment. Over the next eight years, Barwick listened a lot and got to know the people in his congregation.
During that time, the church began to grow in the number of those baptized and in worship and Bible study. Barwick continued to talk with the church leaders about their need for support and resources as they grew, and he gradually hinted at the opportunities they would gain by becoming a BGAV church again. “I took it very slowly, because I wanted to be sure people supported the idea and that all the pieces were in place.” Once he sensed that the church was ready for the change, he called Brooks and asked about the next steps. “Tony came down and met with us. He talked to our whole church, and then he met with all our deacons—active and inactive—and we had some great discussions. After that, we had a unanimous vote and took it back to the church with full support. There were no dissenting votes,” Barwick remembers.

Averett has continued to grow, and Barwick loves being their pastor. “Now we have 125 people on Sundays, and we’re known for our choir,” he said. They now have 23 choir members, and his wife is the director. Their weekly offerings have increased nearly tenfold since 2006, and they recently built a $600,000 education building that they are scheduled to pay off this December.

Barwick knows from his years of experience that change is a slow process, but it is worth the wait when the change is positive. About Baptist congregations, he comments, “You can lead them a long way, but you can’t push them anywhere. You must earn their trust and wait until the time is right.” Barwick is glad to be a part of God’s plan for Averett Baptist Church. “I love being a pastor, and I love my people.”