

Grace Church on the Mount & Bethlehem Church Meshing FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions

(Note: these FAQs will be updated as more determinations are made)

Q1: Have other ministries successfully become one church in two locations?

A: There are 6,000 church mergers each year in the USA. Studies show that 90% of all multisite ventures are successful. Currently, 5% of churches (15,000) report they are in conversations about merging.

Q2: What are the benefits of becoming ONE church in two locations?

A: At the core, the leaders in both churches unanimously agreed we are better together than we are apart. Our churches are closely aligned doctrinally and philosophically, and we have already successfully partnered over the years. We believe that the proposed merger of the two churches has a greater potential to affect the Kingdom of God than if they stayed separate:

- There can be greater impact by combining resources, rather than duplicating efforts.
- Bethlehem's legacy can live on in a combined ministry with Grace Church on the Mount.
- It can be a powerful demonstration of a Kingdom mindset to the community.
- Bethlehem Church wants to thrive not just survive.

Q3: What is the time frame for the two churches to become one?

A: Most likely a decision will be before Easter 2019 to either move forward or not. Any motion to mesh the churches will only be put forth after there is a reasonable expectation that the vote will be affirmative in each church. Focus groups and straw polls will be announced.

Q4: Are the leaders from both churches in full agreement?

A: The leaders of both churches have unanimously agreed that this is a good idea to be exploring at this time.

Q5: Will each campus have its own Senior Pastor?

A: There will be one Senior Pastor of the church. Bethlehem will have a Campus Pastor specifically dedicated to serve that campus. The Campus Pastor at Bethlehem will be a part of a teaching team who will be preaching at both locations.

Q6: Who will do the preaching at each of the campuses?

A: Grace uses a team approach to preaching. The sermon content is the same in both locations and will be delivered live (not video).



THE CENTER

Revised 12.3.2018

Grace Church on the Mount & Bethlehem Church Meshing FAQ

Q7: Will there be a name change?

A: Once the decision to combine is final, the church will just be called “Grace Church.” One church in two locations; Netcong Campus, and Bethlehem Campus.

Footnote: Any needed constitutional changes for legal documentation will need to be made after the fact.

Q8: Is the doctrine, polity, and vision compatible?

A: The two churches are highly compatible. They are nearly identical in all the essential areas of doctrine, polity, and vision. This has been demonstrated over the years as the two churches have collaborated in other endeavors. Copies of the constitutions and doctrinal statements from both churches are available for both churches. [Click here](#) to see a side-by-side comparison of the two churches. [Click here](#) to view the doctrinal statement for Grace Church on the Mount and [click here](#) to view their constitution. [Click here](#) to view the doctrinal statement for Bethlehem Church and [click here](#) to view their constitution.

Q9: What is the optimal distance between locations?

A: Most mergers are thirty minutes or less travel time of each other.

Q10: How will the fiduciary (financial and physical) matters be meshed?

A: Once both churches have voted to become one church, a legal process of transferring all of the finances, property, equipment, debts, and deeds will be followed. Like a marriage, all things tangible and intangible will be combined and ultimately controlled by the members of the new union. The campuses will not operate independently relative to polity, finances, assets of any kind, or debts.

Note: Bethlehem Church is currently debt-free and, for now, somewhat financially stable. However, income and attendance trends will make the ministry there unsustainable. Keeping the wonderful heritage of Bethlehem Church alive through this union is much preferred to struggling to simply survive. The attendees want to see the ministry thrive. Due diligence is currently underway to provide all the necessary documentation. A verified record of accounts will be available soon.



THE CENTER

Revised 12.3.2018

Grace Church on the Mount & Bethlehem Church Meshing FAQ

Q11: How will membership work?

A: If you are a current active member of Bethlehem Church, you will be warmly welcomed to transfer your membership by attending an informational membership meeting and indicating your agreement with the church's beliefs and practices. Both churches practice believer's baptism by immersion. Believer's baptism by immersion is a requirement of membership at Grace Church.

Q12: Does either church belong to a denomination?

A: No, neither belong to a denomination. Both are independent, autonomously-governed Bible-believing churches that participate in various associations. Bethlehem Church voluntarily aligns with an association of churches called the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) and Grace Church voluntarily aligns with an association called Mission Mid-Atlantic (formerly known as the Conservative Baptist Association).

Q13: Which church will be in control?

A: If approved, there will only be one church. Although it meets in two locations, there will be no other distinctions in governance. Initially, for ease and clarity, the constitution, bylaws, Elder Board, principles, practices, values, mission and vision will remain the same as is in place at Grace Church on the Mount. Bethlehem Church in its entirety will be dissolved into the entity that will simply be called "Grace Church." Currently, the process of selecting elders, pastors, and making constitutional changes, etc. are nearly identical in both churches. In the future, the one new church will continue to be congregationally governed.

Q14: Will the service "style" and ministries be different on one campus or the other?

A: The worship style (Christian contemporary) and message content will be the same at both campuses. Naturally, each location will develop its own personality based on those who attend and the needs of their specific community. For instance, in the event of unnecessary or unproductive duplication, some specialized ministries may be offered at one campus and not the other (i.e.: Family Promise, ESL, food pantry, etc.).



THE CENTER

Revised 12.3.2018

Grace Church on the Mount & Bethlehem Church Meshing FAQ

Q15: How will the current and future staff be distributed?

A: Every effort will be made to retain the current staff that become members of Grace Church. There may be a need to hire additional staff, reassign some staff, or transition some staff in order to offer a full line-up of ministries at the Bethlehem campus. The goal is to have both campuses fully functioning and offering quality programming for all ages, effectively reaching and discipling people from their respective immediate area.

Q16: Where can I serve as a volunteer?

A: To have a vibrant church functioning in both locations, the demand for volunteers will increase significantly. While only some volunteer positions require membership, all current volunteers should plan to complete the membership process as soon as possible.

Q17: Will the missionaries from both churches continue to be supported?

A: Missions is a vital ministry in both churches. Once the two ministries have officially combined, all existing missionaries that align with the mission and vision of Grace Church are automatically considered part of the missionary family. There is no distinction between them. Like church staff, missionaries are reviewed periodically and the missions team of the church needs to determine if they recommend financial support to continue.

Footnote: Plans are being made to invite the missions' teams from both churches to meet early in 2019 to discuss the best way to make a smooth transition and to communicate with all of the missionaries.

Q18: What will the voting process look like?

A: Each church will adhere to its own constitution when voting about this matter. After a motion to combine is made in each church, a vote will be scheduled. There will be a minimum of two weeks for members to: pray, attend information sessions at either church, and have their questions answered by elders or pastors who will be available before and after the services during those weeks. Meeting locations will be announced in each church and posted online. Members of both churches will vote on the same day by secret ballot. Legal requirements following the vote may take up to 90 days to complete but the transition of leadership will happen immediately.



THE CENTER

Revised 12.3.2018

Grace Church on the Mount & Bethlehem Church Meshing FAQ

Q19: Can Grace Church afford to take on a struggling church?

A: Yes. Grace has been planning for a long time to either plant a church or combine with another ministry to accommodate the growth and momentum the church has experienced in recent years. All churches go through seasons of high momentum and low momentum. In the past, the roles have been reversed and Bethlehem was the large and growing church in the area. However, with the shifts in culture, and the potential for increased kingdom impact through synergizing efforts, it seems to the leaders like a win/win opportunity for the cause of Christ. The Bethlehem members have wisely managed their church funds and they continue to give sacrificially. The beautiful facilities have no debt and they have been able to meet payroll each week. Currently, the number of attendees who are able to contribute financially is insufficient to do more than just try to survive. The church members have embraced a vision plan that is excellent and fits ideally with the mission and vision of Grace Church. The current members want to thrive again! They long to be the lighthouse God created them to be along the highly visible Route 10. Yes, it will take sacrifice but we believe it can and should be done.

Q20: Were other options considered?

A: The governing boards from both churches have been performing their due diligence. Elders from Grace Church on the Mount have considered options for expansion for several years. Bethlehem Church elders have considered options presented by The Center Consulting Group, pursued a senior pastor search, and most recently, have carefully considered suggestions from a representative(s) from the EFCA. The elders from both churches have unanimously agreed to exclusively explore the option of becoming one church in two locations. No other options are being considered at this time.

Q21: What happens next?

A: Neither church wants to rush the process. Both churches need to be at peace with the timing. In order to keep things moving several key events are being planned:

- Pastor Armin visiting Bethlehem (Dec. 2)
- Informational meetings at Bethlehem (Dec. 5 & 9)
- Elder boards from Grace and Bethlehem meet together with the Center (Dec. 17)
- Christmas Eve services at Grace – Bethlehem invited (Dec. 24, 2018)
- Q&A with elders and pastors before or after services (Dec. 2018 - Jan. 2019)
- Focus Groups at both Bethlehem and Grace (mid-Jan.)
- Official Vote (likely before Easter 2019)



THE CENTER

Revised 12.3.2018

Grace Church on the Mount & Bethlehem Church Meshing FAQ

Bethlehem-Specific Questions

BQ1: How will a meshing of Bethlehem and Grace differ from what happened years ago with Cornerstone?

A: There are major differences:

- Cornerstone was unable to financially support itself before and after Bethlehem's involvement. At present, Bethlehem is still able to support a pastor and maintain its facilities. It will not place financial liabilities upon Grace at this time. Further, Cornerstone was “burned out” while Bethlehem still has many strengths.
- While Cornerstone's location was a huge liability which nothing could help, Bethlehem has a superb location and longstanding links to our community. The present proposal involves more a combining of two ongoing and complementary sets of ministries, while Bethlehem had to manage and oversee nearly all of Cornerstone's circumstances.
- Bethlehem would be supplied with a full-time pastor; one that is part of a rotational preaching team. (The rotation is itself a good thing). Cornerstone's pastor left within a year and Bethlehem's part-time hire later left as well. This put Bethlehem in the very difficult position of hiring a pastor for a church that was continuing to decline (not adding a single new congregant) despite large-scale outreach efforts.
- Although we had only good intentions, Cornerstone was our first (and only) experience at uniting with another church. We inevitably made mistakes and encountered several unexpected pitfalls. This time we have The Center – with much experience in these matters – to guide both churches.

BQ2: Why can't Bethlehem just hire a new pastor?

A: In even just the past two months, participation, giving, and support has dropped back. We no longer have the resources we need – especially people of varying ages – for even the ideal pastor to turn Bethlehem around. A new pastor would have crushing responsibilities and needs that we could not help with. Reports from other churches warn of the near impossibility of a church returning to health simply by hiring a pastor.



THE CENTER

Revised 12.3.2018

Grace Church on the Mount & Bethlehem Church Meshing FAQ

BQ3: Bethlehem can survive, so why go through all of this now?

A: It is not clear that Bethlehem can maintain its present position much longer, and some existing ministries – even though we’ve continued with each one of them up till now - would have to be closed down. A church cannot survive with only the goal of surviving. We still need transformation in keeping with the priorities we have recently committed to together. We still need to return to being a strong, unified, future-oriented church with missions and expanded outreach high among our priorities.

BQ4: Why does Grace Church on the Mount believe God is leading them to explore this possibility at this time?

A: There are a few reasons why Grace Church on the Mount believes God is leading them to explore this possibility at this time:

- Each church has separately been seeking God for its next directions and we are seeing God pointing us to join together. Grace sees that just as we do.
- Each church seems to find answers to its most pressing concerns and needs in the other church. For example:
 - Grace has been seeking for its ministries & outreach to have a greater impact in our shared area and Bethlehem provides an ideal springboard for that.
 - Bethlehem seriously needs an infusion of resources and Grace can provide that.

BQ5: What’s next?

A: The following dates have been selected for “next steps”:

- Pastor Armin will speak for a short time at Bethlehem on 12/2 to share his heart and vision.
- Two expected discussion/information sessions will be held for Bethlehem people:
 - 12/5 light refreshments provided (Wed 7 PM)
 - 12/9 Sunday following service and light lunch (noon)



THE CENTER

Revised 12.3.2018