

## Grace Church on the Mount & Bethlehem Church Merging FAQ

### Frequently Asked Questions as of 3/7/2019

(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. Assuming at least one of the churches is reasonably healthy; 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:** Both churches are closely aligned doctrinally and philosophically, and have already successfully collaborated in special events 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:** The official vote is scheduled for March 24-31.

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

**A:** The leaders of both churches have unanimously agreed to proceed with the process for merging with each other 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 and in person (not video).

#### **Q7: Will there be a name change?**

**A:** Once the decision to combine is final, both locations will be called "Grace Church." (Legal name – Grace Baptist Church) One church in two locations; Netcong Campus, and Bethlehem Campus.



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### 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. [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:** Immediately upon the affirmative vote of both congregations, the corporations shall be considered one. Authority to process of transferring all of the finances, property, equipment, debts, and deeds is automatically conferred by the results of the vote. 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.

### Q11: How will membership work?

**A:** If you are a current active member of Bethlehem Church, you will be warmly welcomed to complete a special application and attend 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



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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.).

### **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 both campuses. The goal is to have both campuses fully functioning and offering quality programming for all ages, effectively reaching and discipling people from their respective geographic areas.

### **Q16: Where can I serve as a volunteer?**

**A:** Ideally, every member should have a meaningful place of service within the church that aligns with his or her gifts, abilities, and passion. To have a vibrant church functioning in both locations, the demand for volunteers will increase significantly. Most attendees will settle into one campus or the other as their normal place to serve. However, because it is one church in two locations you may want to volunteer at the other campus for special programs or events.

### **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 chose to align with the mission and vision of the church are automatically considered part of the missionary family. There is no distinction between them. Like church staff members, missionaries are reviewed periodically and the missions’ team of the church needs to determine if they recommend financial support to continue. If the merger does not happen, and attendance declines, it is unlikely that Bethlehem Church will be able to continue to support their current missionaries as they have in the past.



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### Q18: What will the voting process look like?

**A:** Each church will adhere to its own constitution when voting about this matter. The leaders should have a strong sense that their unanimous recommendation to merge will be approved by their respective congregations before calling for the official vote. Everyone is encouraged to attend information meetings and to ask questions. Bethlehem Church will offer an early vote on Sunday morning March 24<sup>th</sup> for those that cannot attend on March 31<sup>st</sup>.

Motion: "To approve the dissolution of Bethlehem Church and to transfer all assets to Grace the Church on the Mount as soon as possible with control of ministry and operations to be turned over to Grace the Church on the Mount upon Bethlehem's congregational approval, all being conditioned upon Grace obtaining their congregational approval to receive all of the assets of Bethlehem Church."

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

**A:** Yes, assuming both congregations continue to pray, serve, attend, invite others, and give as unto the Lord. Grace has been postured 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. 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 without merging. For Bethlehem, simply dissolving and distributing assets to other ministry causes does not address the expressed desire of so many to be a part of something exciting, expanding the cause of Christ. Just starting over is highly risky and is not a real option without radically changing the kind of church Bethlehem has been historically. And the time and energy required to start over can be more effectively and efficiently used by combining with a likeminded church like Grace which already has momentum, a shared vision nearly identical to Bethlehem's, and mature, stable, and seasoned leadership.

### Q20: Were other options considered?

**A:** The governing boards from both churches have been performing their due diligence, which includes prayer, discerning and evaluating various options, and ultimately making a specific recommendation to be voted on by the church body. Elders from Grace Church on the Mount have considered options for expansion for several years and will need to do something to accommodate their growth potential. Throughout 2018 Bethlehem Church went through a visioning process that originated from the consistent input and refining of the congregation. That



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3 year vision plan was ready to be implemented when the merger opportunity was presented. This plan included hiring a new senior pastor. After the public announcement to begin to explore a possible merger, the EFCA was informed. In response, they asked to meet with the elders to propose another option. Although Bethlehem Church was not looking for other options because a 3-year plan was already in place, the elders agreed to hear the proposal from the EFCA. After prayer and careful consideration, the elders determined the proposed plan was neither viable or in the best interests of the congregation. If either church decides not to proceed with the merger, Bethlehem would return to evaluate the viability of the 3-year plan that was previously adopted.

### **Q21: Will the Campus Pastor have the qualities of a shepherd?**

**A:** Yes, one of the key attributes of the Campus Pastor is being a shepherd over the body of believers at the Bethlehem Campus. As noted previously, he will present at the Bethlehem facility and will be screened to ensure he possesses the agreed-upon qualities of a shepherd. In addition to the shepherding role, other resources at Grace Church will be available to him (i.e.: the Women's Coordinator) should a congregant feel more ease in meeting with a woman.

### **Q22: What happens if Grace Church ever had to dissolve?**

**A:** Just like Bethlehem, Grace Church's constitution requires that if the church dissolves, the assets must be used by a tax-exempt non-profit, faith-based ministry "with the Statement of Purpose and Declaration of Faith expressed in our Constitution & Bylaws"

### **Q23: Will Grace send an Influx of people to Bethlehem to revitalize the ministry there?**

**A:** Grace plans to ask a significant number of people from the Grace campus to make Bethlehem their home campus and immediately after the Kick-off start attending each week there. The goal is to add immediately a critical mass to start staffing the key ministries of the church.

## **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:



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- 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 a more combining of the 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, who 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:** Even in 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.

### **BQ3: Could Bethlehem survive without merging? If 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 have continued with each one of them up until 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. Trying to go forward without a truly viable plan is irresponsible.



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### **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.

