



Merger Frequently Asked Questions

June 13th, 2024

A note from the Elders:

The answers to these questions are NOT meant to be understood as if the merger a settled matter for the elders. Rather, these questions are answered in such a way as to communicate what we would be expecting should the merger move forward.

Potential Merger Process & Timeline

Is there an anticipated timeline for completing the work to lead our churches to merge?

There is no set timeline for determining the suitability of a merger. We anticipate this work to take 4-6 months but it could take more time depending on the particulars of our situation. This timeline is commensurate with other recent church mergers from whom we have sought some counsel. We desire to take as much time as is needed to help everyone discern whether a merger is the right decision. We do not want to prolong the process longer than is necessary.

What steps do the elders believe need to be taken to move us through the process of merger?

We recognize that there is no predefined manual for navigating church mergers; therefore, we are seeking guidance from those experienced in this area. To this end, we have already engaged in substantial informal discussions between the leadership of both churches and consulted with the Concord Baptist Association as well as Nashville's Edgefield Church, which has successfully undergone a similar merger within the last 2 years.

Currently, it seems advisable for the elders from both congregations to carefully examine the essential elements to determine whether there is a shared agreement on foundational values, beliefs, and visions. Over the coming weeks, the elders intend to conduct detailed meetings to devise a preliminary plan. This proposal will then be presented to a Merger Exploration Team with representatives from Grace Church that will be formed by the elders in accordance with our constitution. This team will be comprised of representatives from both churches, for thorough review and discussion. The team will have the opportunity to pose questions and propose modifications to enhance the clarity and effectiveness of the plan. Should the pastoral leadership and the Merger Exploration Team reach a consensus, we anticipate putting forward a motion outlining specific action steps for each congregation to consider and discuss prior to a vote.

What is the responsibility of the Merger Exploration Team?

The Merger Exploration Team's primary task will be to thoroughly review several key areas: legal and foundational documents and policies, statement of faith, financials, and the philosophy of ministry that will guide the activities of the proposed merger.

This team would have no decision-making authority in itself. Every major decision would be part of the final proposal brought to each congregation for consideration and approval.

How big will the Merger Exploration Team be and what will the makeup of the team look like?

We expect the Merger Exploration Team to consist of 10-12 members, with each church contributing 5-6 representatives. This team will have a broad range of representatives from both Grace Church and Miracle Baptist Church, ensuring that we effectively represent and uphold our churches' values, convictions, and mission.

If we get to the final vote to merge both churches, will that vote be a “voice” vote or a “ballot” vote?

Our bylaws require a supermajority of the church to vote in favor of a motion for a merger or dissolution in order to pass. With a quorum of 50% of our members present, our bylaws require an affirming vote of 75% or more of those members in order to pass. We will take a ballot vote for this congregational decision.

Foundational Documents and Legal Processes

Whose Constitution and Bylaws will we use?

It was the recommendation from the Revitalization Assessment Team from the CBA that Miracle would benefit from merging with a healthy growing church plant. That recommendation entails the bringing together of two congregations, both bringing their strengths to the table, in an effort to see a healthy church form from the merger. One of Grace Church’s strengths is the attention to detail in our foundational documents that lay out a polity and structure that is biblical and fruitful. Therefore, Grace Church’s Constitution and Bylaws will remain the foundation for the potential merged church.

Will we use the same Member Covenant that Grace Church uses presently?

As with the constitution and bylaws, the membership covenant of Grace Church would remain the covenant agreement for members in the event of a potential merger.

What will the legal process look like? Will GC adopt MBC and MBC formally dissolve; or MBC adopt GC and GC formally dissolve; or will both churches dissolve and form an entirely new entity?

The legal process of merging our churches involves several complex dimensions, necessitating counsel from an attorney. Regardless of the specific legal approach chosen—whether Grace Church adopts Miracle Baptist Church and the latter dissolves (we believe to be the most viable option), Miracle Baptist Church adopts Grace Church and the former dissolves, or both churches dissolve to form a new entity—the outcome will align with the recommendations of the CBA Revitalization Assessment Team. The established structure and pillars of Grace Church would be maintained and adopted in the merger. This approach would leverage the strengths of both congregations to build upon this foundation.

How will the membership of the newly merged church be determined? What will be the process for the members of each church to become members of the newly merged church?

The elders of both churches are committed to ensuring that the membership process for the newly merged church is straightforward and does not place undue burden on the members from either church. Our goal is to handle this transition with great care.

To ensure that all prospective members are aligned with the foundational convictions of the merged church, we anticipate implementing the following process:

- There will be a Foundations Course to establish unity around our shared vision and mission.
- An opportunity for the elders to connect with and understand the needs of their congregation better.
- A covenant-affirming Sunday, where Grace Church invites the members of MBC to unite with us, together as one church under a new name.

These steps would be refined by the elders from both churches and then reviewed by the Merger Exploration Team. This would ensure thorough discussion and approval before we present the process to each church for further discussion and a vote.

What confession of faith will be used post-merger?

Following the potential merger, the church's doctrinal guidance will continue to be shaped by the current statements of faith and core theological convictions of Grace Church. Specifically, Grace Church affirms the New Hampshire Confession and the Baptist Faith and Message, 2000, as outlined in our bylaws. These documents would serve as the foundational doctrinal vision for the merged church.

Will we change our name? Do we know what that name is yet?

The merger represents a collaborative effort between two churches, each bringing their strengths to form a mission-oriented church. This is not one church acquiring another, but a union aimed at enhancing our collective capabilities.

Currently, a new name has not been determined. We would plan to propose potential names to the congregation once we determine that a merger is indeed feasible.

Will we remain members of the Southern Baptist Convention and the Pillar Network?

Both churches have a longstanding and committed involvement in the Southern Baptist Convention, and we plan to maintain our Southern Baptist identity after the merger. Additionally, the Pillar Network, which is a coalition of Southern Baptist Churches united by certain core convictions held by Grace Church, will continue to be an important partnership for us. It is our intention to remain active members of both the Southern Baptist Convention and the Pillar Network.

Will the merger affect our commitment to non-Southern Baptist mission partnerships in the U.S. or overseas?

Our commitment to our mission partners would remain a priority throughout the merger. Financial support for these missions is already included in our annual budget and would continue post-merger. We currently have no scheduled mission trips, but we will keep in dialogue with our mission personnel to plan future support teams. Additionally, the merger would eliminate the uncertainty of our long-term meeting place, potentially freeing us to expand our mission initiatives without incurring significant debt.

Has an estimate been determined for the legal fees for the merger? Who will be responsible for the legal fees?

Currently, we do not have a precise estimate for the legal fees associated with the merger. Based on experiences shared by other churches that have undergone similar mergers, the costs are expected to be confined primarily to the preparation and submission of necessary paperwork and documentation with the State of Tennessee, as per the merger agreement approved by both churches. While there might be a need to consult with an attorney to decide the best legal pathway for our specific circumstances, any such fees are anticipated to be minimal.

Who is responsible for the fees?

Before any official decision on the merger is made by a vote from both churches, any fees for legal consultations will be shared equally, split 50/50. These consultations will primarily focus on briefings about the most suitable legal pathways for our situation. Should both churches vote in favor of merging, any subsequent legal fees related to filing the necessary paperwork and transferring

assets would be covered by the newly merged church, as all assets at that point would be in the process of being merged.

When will the legal aspects of the merger begin?

The legal proceedings for the merger would commence only if each church votes affirmatively to merge. It's important to note that any legal counsel sought by the elders prior to this vote is for advisory purposes only and does not legally bind the church. The elders do not possess the authority to make legal decisions on behalf of the church without explicit approval from the church membership.

Budgets and Financials

Does Miracle Baptist have any indebtedness and will we be required to assume or liquidate that debt prior to finalizing the merger?

Miracle Baptist Church is debt-free and owns all property and assets at their location.

Will there be an estimated budget and expenses for post-merger life and ministry?

Yes, an estimated budget for the post-merger church is in development. For 2024, Grace Church's budget is set at approximately \$290,000 with expected financial receipts around \$325,000. Miracle Baptist Church's budget for the same year is about \$238,000 with projected receipts estimated at \$220,000. We have prepared a budget comparison sheet to provide an overview of what the combined budget might look like post-merger. The anticipated merged budget is estimated at \$397,000 with projected receipts exceeding \$500,000. This merger would allow us to increase ministry effectiveness while reducing budgetary expenses, even as we address the costs associated with enhanced facilities and staffing needs. Please refer to the provided Budget comparison for detailed information.

What will be the increased expenses of maintaining utilities and upkeep for the building?

There would indeed be increased expenses related to maintaining the Miracle Baptist Church building, especially concerning utility costs and upkeep. We believe that the budgets of both churches complement each other effectively. This synergy would allow us to manage costs better, offsetting increases in some areas by achieving savings in others, and addressing some previously delayed maintenance issues.

Can we afford to assume Ben Morrow as a Full Time Staff Pastor?

Yes, we believe that we can comfortably afford to bring on Ben Morrow as a Full-Time Staff Pastor in the event of a merger. Grace Church's 2024 budget includes provisions for a Bi-vocational Pastor, a position we have yet to fill. Additionally, we are projecting to exceed our 2024 budget by \$60,000 or more, based on current giving trends. With the combined resources from Miracle Baptist Church, the elders are confident that supporting Ben Morrow in a full-time capacity will be financially feasible.

Safety and Security

Are there any concerns for the safety and security of our members at the location?

Yes, moving to La Vergne has raised some safety and security concerns due to its higher crime rates compared to Smyrna. However, safety and security are priorities for all churches, and the challenges at Miracle Baptist Church's location are manageable. The church has maintained a safe environment with no major security incidents over the past 20 years. Moreover, revitalizing efforts in

communities like La Vergne have historically enhanced community safety, as evidenced by similar initiatives around the Nashville area.

Will there be provisions made for safety and security?

Yes, we plan to allocate resources from our annual budget and potentially future capital campaign funds to enhance the safety and security of the facility. Measures could include more training and certification for our existing security team, potentially hiring off-duty law enforcement officers for Sunday services and other activities, and upgrading physical security features such as outdoor lighting, cameras, and privacy fencing. These steps are in line with common practices at other churches.

Corporate Worship

Will our corporate worship change in style or substance?

No, our approach to corporate worship would not fundamentally change. We would continue to adhere to the regulative principle as a guide for constructing our worship services, similar to our current practice at Grace Church. No significant alterations in style or substance are anticipated.

Will there be a change in the songs we sing?

No, we would continue to use the same canon of songs currently in use. We remain open to incorporating new songs that align with our doctrinal beliefs and support congregational singing.

Will the members of their worship and A/V teams integrate with our teams? Who will be in charge?

Yes, members from both the worship and A/V teams of each church would be integrated, leveraging their talents for the edification of the congregation. We would aim for these teams to complement each other and enhance a worship environment that honors and glorifies Jesus while encouraging congregational participation. The integration process would be overseen by a deacon.

Will we still take the Lord's Supper each week?

Yes, in line with the regulative principle, we would continue the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper after the merger. This practice is a core conviction that we intend to maintain.

Ministries and Weekly Schedule

Do we anticipate our weekly activities and programming to change, either by expanding or contracting in any way? If so how?

The merger aims to integrate the strengths of both churches while maintaining a balanced schedule. We would continue our practice of evaluating ministries annually and would adapt or expand MBC's present activities that align with our mission and philosophy. Decisions on these changes would mostly be made post-merger, unless specific pre-merger conditions are raised by MBC. Currently, no conditions have been specified.

Are there ministries at MBC that we do not have at Grace that we anticipate continuing post-merger?

Yes, there are ministries at MBC that we hope to continue and potentially expand, depending on member interest. One key example is the Food Pantry ministry, which we would like to grow to serve more families. The continuation and expansion of this and other MBC ministries would be evaluated based on the involvement and interest from our current members at Grace Church.

What will happen to the ministries at MBC that mirror the ministries at Grace Church?

Ministries at MBC that are similar to those at Grace Church would be merged, with the goal of combining the best elements of each to strengthen the overall ministry. This includes children and youth ministries, Sunday School, and men's and women's ministries. The integration of these ministries would be overseen by our deacons and elders.

What happens to the leaders of those ministries that are blended together post-merger?

Post-merger, we hope that all ministry leaders would continue to serve in ways that edify the church. At Grace Church, each ministry is overseen by either an elder or a deacon, and this structure would continue. Additionally, consistent with our current practice at Grace Church, we would maintain a strong emphasis on empowering our members to take active roles within these ministries.

How do we anticipate merging the Sunday School Classes across all age groups and their teachers?

Initially, we plan to organize a large, unified adult Sunday School class to promote cohesive instruction and discipleship. This would include a Foundations Course for the members of the potential merger at the outset. Moving forward, we would introduce a variety of short-term classes that focus on specific topics and theological themes. These classes would be designed to meet the diverse needs of our members, enhancing our educational offerings as the church grows.

Will we offer fellowship tailored to "stages of life" for our adults?

Yes, we currently offer specialized fellowships for college and young adults, married couples, and senior saints on a monthly basis, typically during the week. While Sunday mornings are dedicated to promoting a cross-generational vision of ministry among all adults, we also provide opportunities for fellowship and growth within specific life stages at other times during the week or month.

Who will decide the curriculum that is used for each class?

The elders are responsible for overseeing the biblical instruction of the church, including ensuring that the curriculum aligns with our statements of faith. While group leaders and ministry directors can select curricula, all materials must be approved by the elders to ensure they are appropriate.

Polity, Staffing & Leadership Team/Committees

What will be our leadership structure post-merger?

Post-merger, we would expect to maintain the basic polity and structure currently in place at Grace Church. As we continue to grow, we anticipate expanding our existing structure to accommodate new staff and adapt to new demands while preserving our biblical vision for church polity. Our leadership structure will continue to be "elder-led", "deacon-served", and "congregationally-governed."

Will our present elders and deacons remain our elders post-merger?

Yes, our current elders and deacons will continue in their roles post-merger, with Ben Morrow joining as a staff pastor and elder. We are also evaluating the involvement of MBC's deacons to determine their interest in continuing to serve in these capacities.

Do we anticipate adding to our elders and deacons from MBC's pastoral and deacon teams?

We do not plan to add any new elders from MBC, except for Ben Morrow as a staff pastor and elder. We will engage with MBC's deacons to assess their interest in continuing as deacons.

What will happen to the non-pastoral staff in each church?

The non-pastoral staff at Grace Church would retain their current positions. MBC's part-time administrative assistant, who is not a church member, will not be retained. Regarding MBC's janitorial service, we would review their performance and costs to make an informed decision about continuing their services.

What will happen to the ministry teams and committees at MBC?

We would collaborate with the existing teams and committees at MBC to ensure their efforts and projects continue effectively. However, it's important to note that at Grace, we do not maintain permanent committees or ministry teams unless specifically established by the elders according to our bylaws. Post-merger, these MBC teams and committees will be evaluated by the elders to determine if and how they will be integrated or continued.

Will there be a "hiring" or "evaluation" process for Ben Morrow in order to bring him on staff and into our elder team?

Yes, Ben Morrow would undergo the same evaluation process as all other elders at Grace, which includes completing an elder application and questionnaire. Additionally, he would be required to undergo a background check as part of the standard hiring process for pastoral staff. His appointment would also adhere to the guidelines specified in our Personnel Policy, consistent with practices in our association and among churches with similar theological convictions.

Will there be distinctions between Pastor Tom's role and Pastor Ben's role and will job descriptions be written to enumerate them?

Yes, there would be clear distinctions between their roles. Pastor Tom will continue as the lead/senior pastor, focusing on vision, preaching, and leader development. Pastor Ben will take on the role of associate pastor, concentrating on executive and administrative oversight for ministries, with a specific focus on training, equipping, and deploying our deacons and ministry leaders. Job descriptions for both positions will be formalized to outline these responsibilities.

Who will be responsible for hiring/terminating staff, including the pastor/associate pastor?

Per our Constitution and Bylaws, the elders are responsible for nominating elders/pastors for church affirmation, installation, and ordination. The elders also have authority over personnel matters, including the hiring, termination, and evaluation of all non-pastoral staff positions approved in the church budget. Pastoral staff must be hired or terminated by a vote of the church. We plan to maintain this structure as it has effectively served our church.

Will the current elders be functioning as personnel committee in regard to issues of conflict among any paid staff?

Yes, the elders have the authority to address personnel issues, functioning collectively as a body to discuss and make decisions. Pastor Tom, as the current vocational elder, oversees the church's day-to-day needs, working closely with the elders and appointed deacons. With Ben Morrow potentially joining as associate pastor, he would support Pastor Tom in daily ministry tasks. Any conflicts among staff, whether pastoral or non-pastoral, would be mediated and resolved by the elders, as stipulated by our bylaws. Conflicts between pastoral staff or elders will also be brought before the elders for arbitration.

Facilities

What is the square footage of Miracle Baptist Church's facilities and how does it compare to our present location?

Our current location is approximately 9600 sqft with an additional 1100 sqft at the parsonage house. MBC has approximately 23,536 sqft. The exact square footage is not yet known.

What is the worship capacity of the worship center? Once we meet capacity, would the church expect to move to 2 services?

The worship center can accommodate up to 325 chairs, potentially more. This would nearly triple our current worship capacity at Grace Church, where we presently average about 120 in the sanctuary and 25 in overflow. The elders do not intend to move to two services. Instead, our goal is to plant new churches by developing core groups from our membership, to be sent out with elders and a church planter.

What is the present condition of the facilities and are there any delayed maintenance needs that we will need to address in the immediate future?

The facilities have been evaluated by a member in commercial construction and found to be structurally sound. From what we know as of now, there are some non-emergency delayed maintenance items, including roof and HVAC needs, as well as security and safety improvements. Short-term cosmetic updates, such as carpet in the auditorium and stage flooring, will also be needed. We plan to develop a long-term facility update vision, potentially with an outside contractor, within 3-6 months post-merger. The Future Grace Team will remain active to help with this, integrating members from MBC.

How will we determine what facility needs are priority and what the costs of those needs will be?

We would engage an experienced contractor to help us develop a prioritized plan for necessary updates, possibly in a multi-phase program. Our goal is to launch a capital remodel campaign in the short term to address these needs.

Is there a consideration for possibly starting a "capital improvement campaign" after the merger is finalized?

Yes, we would likely start a capital improvement campaign post-merger. Here's why: the Future Grace Team has been exploring options for building or buying property, which would cost around \$300-400 per square foot. A modest 10,000 square foot facility would be \$3-4 million. A capital improvement campaign, requiring much less, will be prioritized after the merger, with exact costs determined then.