

Feasibility Report and Merger Framework

Living Hope Community Church and First Baptist Church of Doylestown

In order to determine the feasibility of a ministry partnership, Living Hope Community Church (Living Hope) and First Baptist Church of Doylestown (FBC-D) underwent a feasibility assessment. This is an essential step in helping both churches learn each other's culture, identity, and convictions. Commissioned by their respective elder boards, Living Hope's Multi-Site team and the Pastoral Search Team (PST) from FBC-D met three times over the course of several weeks to complete the entire assessment. The following report represents the initial discussions and begins the framework by which we will move from two churches to one church in two locations. This framework must be voted upon by both congregations for affirmation.

Doctrinal

Theological Beliefs

Living Hope and FBC-D have very compatible historically orthodox, evangelical, and theological beliefs. The leadership of both churches feels there is strong alignment theologically and thus proposes moving forward in the adoption of all doctrinal statements within the Living Hope constitution.

Affiliations

Living Hope has no affiliations to denominations or associations. FBC-D was once a member of the American Baptist Convention and then the Conservative Baptist Association. FBC-D is no longer affiliated with those associations.

Governance

The structure of leadership in the constitution and bylaws of both churches are similar. Living Hope is and will continue to be a staff-led and elder-ruled model for governance. FBC-D believes the church should be self-governing. Members of both churches, in good standing, are given an opportunity to vote annually on budgets and elected positions. Due to the nature of this merger, both organizations will seek congregational approval via a vote.

Membership

The requirements for membership at Living Hope are a) have a clear confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; b) be baptized; c) agree to live within the structure of the constitution and doctrinal statement of Living Hope; d) be no less than 12 years old (members under the age of 18 shall not be accorded voting privileges but may contribute to the church's decision making process); e) Commit to support the church through prayer, ministry and giving; f) complete the membership course for Living Hope. The members at FBC-D are those who have been baptized by immersion upon a credible confession of faith and have associated themselves for worship, instruction, evangelism and service. FBC-D members and attendees will have several opportunities in the first few months, through a series of membership classes, to become members of Living Hope.

Ministry

Mission, Vision and Values

The vision of both churches is completely compatible with one another. The vision of Living Hope is to lead others to Jesus through building relationships, cultivating community and inspiring hope. The vision of FBC-D is to lead all people to life and growth in Jesus Christ and increasingly seek to love God, love others, and share Jesus.

Strategy

Living Hope intentionally makes disciples in relational environments with a missional mindset - a process called "Relational Discipleship" which drives all ministries. FBC-D has a strong focus on discipleship especially in the context of Life Groups. Existing Life Group leaders at FBC-D will be offered both training and coaches to align common language and methodology with Living Hope.

Worship Style

Singing, Prayer, Communion and our Tithes & Offerings are all forms of worship. The worship style at Living Hope is decidedly contemporary. The musical sets encompass a wide range of genres with the majority being of a modern and contemporary style with a great appreciation and love for the old hymns of the 16th to 20th centuries. FBC-D incorporates both contemporary worship songs as well as hymns.

Preaching

Living Hope strives to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26-27) exegetically within a three-year period, prayerfully discerning what the congregation is in need to receive from God. FBC-D has also used an appropriate blend of both exegetical and topical teaching based upon the season and nature of where their congregation is spiritually. These trends will continue. Weekend teaching will be live at both campuses with the capability to use a mixture of video and live, when necessary to connect the two locations.

Programs

The core of the programming at Living Hope includes NextStep conversations specific to Sunday mornings: Starting Point, Mission Point, Grace Point, Baptism and Membership; Family Ministry to include Children, Students and Young Adults; as well as Life Groups and focus ministry groups throughout the week. FBC-D incorporates Life Groups and Ministry for Kids and Students in order to grow the love of God (UP), love for one another (IN) and sharing Jesus through opening our lives in word and deed (OUT). Programming at both campuses will maintain the priority of Relational Discipleship. Intentional, Relational and Missional are the three criteria by which ministries will be evaluated on a regular basis.

Missionaries

Living Hope and FBC-D currently support local, regional and global missions. Missionaries of FBC-D will not be penalized for the merger and Living Hope will honor the present commitments made by FBC-D to its missionaries for at least a two-year period of time. During that two-year period an evaluation will take place to determine the alignment between the mission and vision of Living Hope with all missionaries at both campuses. Only those missionaries whose mission and vision align in a similar fashion to the Relational Discipleship model of Living Hope will continue to receive support.

Personnel

Senior Pastor

At Living Hope, Eugene Miller holds the role as Lead Pastor. At FBC-D Adam Sheaffer provides oversight to many of the pastoral responsibilities and the Sunday morning planning. Campus Pastors will lead the individual campuses under the leadership and supervision of the Senior Leadership Team (Eugene Miller - Lead Pastor, Nick Campagna - Executive Pastor of Ministries and Cole Simcox - Executive Director of Operations).

Boards and Committees

Living Hope and FBC-D both have active Elder Boards which assist in the governance of the churches. After the merger, the Elder Board of Living Hope will remain the same (all of whom must still qualify according to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1). FBC-D Elders will serve initially in an advisory capacity and may eventually be invited to be voted onto the Elder Team. Local campus leadership will be primarily led by the Campus Pastor with oversight from the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Living Hope has directors and leaders whose teams serve in specific areas of ministry and operations. FBC-D has leaders of committees for ministry. The staff and SLT of Living Hope will be responsible to assign teams to meet the needs of both campuses beyond the scope of Life Groups and ministry groups (i.e. facility team, finance team, ministry center planning team, benevolence team). All committees at FBC-D that are not converted to staff or SLT assigned teams will be phased out.

Staff

Living Hope currently employs 10 full-time and 1 part-time individuals. FBC-D employs 4 part-time staff individuals. Living Hope will retain any existing staff at FBC-D who will be trained consistent with the typical onboarding and mentoring of new employees at Living Hope. Pay/benefit packages will be examined and will come into alignment within the standard ranges of Living Hope prior to September 1, 2022.

Legal

Lawyer

Len Davis, Esquire, will be representing Living Hope Community Church and operating in the "scrivener" (a clerk or scribe) capacity as both churches move towards a legal merger.

Church Name

Living Hope will begin to use geographic locations to identify campuses. First Baptist Church of Doylestown will adopt the name Living Hope Community Church but will be known as the Living Hope - Doylestown Campus.

Voting

Both churches will need to vote to confirm the merger. As stated in the bylaws of Living Hope, a quorum of voting members is needed to garner a vote of affirmation. This vote will replace the constitution and bylaws of FBC-D with the constitution and bylaws of Living Hope Community Church.

Dissolution

According to the corporate statutes of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the merger process will result in the legal dissolution of the joining church. Therefore, a vote of dissolution is not required by the FBC-D congregation in order to accomplish the merger.

Property/Facility

The expressed plan of Living Hope is not only to keep the Doylestown Campus but to maximize its use for Kingdom impact. The Doylestown campus is strategically located in the borough of Doylestown at 311 West State Street. The vision for reaching the community of Doylestown is unwavering. There will be a campaign for campus renovation and relaunch over the next few months. Living Hope will assume ownership of all property of FBC-D.

Budget

Living Hope will be one church: one vision, one mission, one leadership team, one staff and one congregation. As one church in two locations, Living Hope will operate one single budget. Giving, budgets and current account balances from Living Hope and FBC-D will be combined and managed by the Executive Director of Operations, finance team and staff bookkeepers.

Assets and Liabilities

The Multi-Site Team along with the leadership of FBC-D has been exchanging all necessary information in order to bring clarity and transparency to all withstanding assets and liabilities. Under the Pennsylvania statutes of corporate mergers, all assets and liabilities will be assumed by Living Hope Community Church.

Debt Management

Living Hope has a current debt of approximately \$1.5 million (as of Dec. 2021) as a result of the 2018 renovation of the Dublin campus. According to records FBC-D was able to pay off the major 2005 renovations in September of 2020. It is our goal not to assume any additional debt in the merger process. Debt reductions plans are the responsibility of the Living Hope Finance team.

Expectations

This merger is a “rebirth” of a struggling church that gets a second life by being restarted and joining a more vibrant leading church. In this scenario, Living Hope is the *leading* church and First Baptist Church of Doylestown is the *joining* church.

Timeline

The plan for the merger process:

- December 1, 2021 – Congregational announcements of intent to merge were made by both LHCC and FBC-D.
- January - February 2022 – The plan is to host a number of town halls, in-home meetings, and discussions to answer questions and dream of the possibilities of our future. It is the intention of Living Hope to support FBC-D during this time through various resources including Sunday preaching, music, and other volunteer support.
- March/April 2022 – Vote congregationally for affirmation and legal approval
- Fall 2022 – Rebirth and Launch Living Hope - Doylestown Campus