

North Langley Community Church and Jericho Ridge Community Church: Merger Opportunity

Frequently Asked Questions

Submitted by NLCC and JRCC Leadership

1. How did this merger idea come about?

During the summer of 2024, Transitional Pastor Wally Nickel, on behalf of the Jericho Ridge Community Church elders, contacted NLCC to inquire about the possibility of a church merger. JRCC's Elders had already been considering this option for several months while discerning God's vision for their future. On Sept 3, 2024, elders from both churches met and discerned together that there was shared interest in a possible merger and a desire to work towards that possibility.

2. Why are we considering a merger?

NLCC and JRCC leadership are considering a merger because we believe that the fast-growing area of Willowbrook and Clayton Heights needs a thriving, outward-focused, gospel-centered church. NLCC desires to be a multiplying church and a part of that vision includes a potential fourth campus, so NLCC leadership is considering if JRCC is the place to establish that campus through this merger.

JRCC, a church plant of NLCC 19 years ago, is now in a life-stage that desires to be a viable church presence in the community but is struggling to see that vision happen. The JRCC leadership is pursuing this merger in order to rebirth and revitalize their congregation. JRCC and NLCC leadership share a common missional vision that will bring new leadership, finances and people to the new campus.

Authors Tomberlin and Bird describe a *rebirth merger* this way: Rebirth mergers occur when a struggling church gets a second life by being restarted under a stronger, vibrant and typically larger church. The majority of successful mergers are rebirths. (p 65, Better Together, Making Church Mergers Work)

Both churches share a common desire to reach the immediate community with the love and message of Jesus. We will do this through creating a welcoming space for all, providing relevant worship and consistent gospel preaching, and together becoming people apprenticed to Jesus in small groups, equipping members to reach out in love to the world around them.

3. What are the benefits of this proposed merger?

Both churches are exploring how we might be better equipped to accomplish our vision in the Willowbrook/Clayton community by working together. NLCC would have a church property to launch a new campus along with the legacy of faith and people who desire to see a new work of God at JRCC. JRCC would see their building and congregation being rebirthed to accomplish the mission and vision they desire.

4. What is a multisite church?

A multisite church is one church meeting in multiple locations, establishing campuses in the same region that share a common vision, budget, leadership, DNA and governance. A campus is a church community where church ministry (i.e. worship, kids' programming, outreach, preaching, discipleship) takes place to fulfill a shared mission that uniquely reflects the needs of that particular campus and community.

5. Who will be our pastor?

NLCC's lead pastor is Matthew Price. NLCC is in the process of discerning and calling a pastor to lead a fourth campus, at the JRCC location should this merger take place. Along with a full-time campus pastor, leadership will also look to hire part-time directors in worship and in children's ministry.

6. Will our church have a new name? what will it be?

Bringing two churches together would result in a new name. The church would be a campus of North Langley Community Church and could likely be referred to as the Willowbrook Campus of NLCC. NLCC's other locations are the Walnut Grove Campus, the Yorkson Campus and the Aldergrove Campus. However, it is yet to be determined what the new campus would be named.

7. What will happen to the pastor and the staff?

Through discernment and sensitivity towards use of gifts and current roles, existing staff at JRCC will either be retained where needed or, through mutual discernment regarding the needs of the new campus, they will move towards retirement, resignation, or lay off. This will be done with care and generosity. If retained, pay packages/benefits would come into standard alignment with NLCC as determined by NLCC's Personnel Committee.

8. What will happen to the Jericho Ridge church board and committees?

In a rebirth merger, existing boards and committees of JRCC are dissolved and in subsequent months, leaders from those teams may be incorporated into committees and teams at the new campus. Members of JRCC are invited and encouraged to take an active part in the Launch Team and Interest Meetings of the new campus, thus joining the new campus from the beginning. In a rebirth merger, the new church would be shepherded and governed under NLCC's Elder board. Note: Elders at NLCC are required to be members for at least one year and are then discerned, trained and brought to the congregation for affirmation.

Similar governance structures are presented in the Bylaws and Guidelines/Policies of both churches. Both churches are Elder-led; the Lead Pastor reports directly to the Elders, while the staff reports to the Lead Pastor. NLCC utilizes a governing/shepherding elder board approach, bringing only major decisions (hiring of Lead Team, Lead Team Pastors & Campus Pastor, annual budget/borrowing and major capital expenditures for approval) to the congregation for a vote.

9. What will happen to the Jericho Ridge church building?

JRCC's desire is to use its building as a thriving ministry centre to reach people in the community with the gospel. The facility was purchased at great sacrifice, and many have poured time and resources into retaining the building as a place of local church ministry. Both churches wish to see that legacy continue. With a church rebirth merger, JRCC property would be gifted to NLCC to continue to be used for Kingdom purposes. All funds needed for operations, possible renovations and maintenance would then be the responsibility of NLCC. NLCC is currently exploring all financial obligations and a sustainable plan for assuming debt and mortgage repayment.

10. NLCC's Yorkson Campus meets at Richard Bulpitt School. Because NLCC does not own a building in Willoughby, is there consideration of moving the Yorkson Campus to the Willowbrook/Clayton location?

The Yorkson Campus was planted in the rapidly growing area of Willoughby at Richard Bulpitt School about 8 years ago. NLCC leadership continues to believe that Willoughby needs a vibrant, growing church and many people at the Yorkson campus live nearby and walk to church. The population of Willoughby continues to expand, and while being a "portable" church brings unique challenges, Willoughby is a community distinct from the Willowbrook/Clayton area and places of worship are needed in both communities.

11. What will the worship services be like?

While NLCC's worship style is decidedly contemporary, there is a good mix of reflective, more traditional music and hymns incorporated. Prayers, responsive readings and testimonies are regularly included. Gospel-centred preaching is a main component of worship services. Communion is celebrated on the first Sunday of each month. Prayer ministry is offered by trained prayer teams during and after the services. As well, traditional hymn singing is offered mid-week at the Walnut Grove Campus with our seniors.

12. Who will be the main preacher? And how will sermons be delivered?

Preaching will primarily be live/in-person at the new campus. The campus pastor will preach about 50% of Sundays, with NLCC's Lead Pastor in-person approximately once per quarter. For the remainder of Sundays other NLCC pastors and speakers, approved by NLCC's lead pastor, will be invited to preach.

13. How will the budget and finances be managed?

NLCC operates its campuses with a Central Support system combining one leadership team, one staff, one budget and one bank account. While giving can be tracked at all campuses, giving, budgets and accounts from JRCC and NLCC will be combined and managed by NLCC's Stewardship team and financial staff team, to address the needs and mission/vision of all campuses.

NLCC leadership and Development teams will work with JRCC's facility oversight and Finance team to assess all deferred maintenance needs, ongoing property issues, operations costs, lease agreements and possible renovation requirements. Their findings will be reported to the NLCC Elders and Stewardship Team to develop the best possible scenario for handling building and property requirements.

14. How will the current membership be transferred?

Membership in the MB church family is connected to baptism and at NLCC, all new members are included in a course that helps them understand who NLCC is—DNA, Mission/Vision and what membership at NLCC means. Members at NLCC are voting members of NLCC's society. All JRCC members and attendees would be encouraged and invited to be a part of the new campus. JRCC members who desire to join the campus and become members would be invited to go through a simplified session, which can be hosted at JRCC as a way for them to get to know NLCC, be known by the NLCC family and transfer their membership.

15. Will JRCC's denomination and affiliation change?

Both JRCC and NLCC are part of the Mennonite Brethren denomination. The new campus would belong to the MB denomination as a campus of NLCC. NLCC and JRCC are committed to the evangelical and theological beliefs articulated in the MB Confession of Faith Statements. Adult baptism, expressed primarily through immersion, indicates membership in the church community. Both churches hold an egalitarian view of Women in Leadership, believing that women can hold any leadership role in the church, including Elder. Both churches uphold a biblical, traditional view of marriage between one man and one woman as expressed in the MB Confession of Faith, and JRCC leadership unanimously supports this position.

16. What will happen to JRCC's supported missionaries and organizations?

Discernment regarding the ongoing support of all global and local missionaries will be decided mutually with the Merger team.

17. What about existing JRCC programs?

All programs will be evaluated to ensure that they align with NLCC mission and vision. Programs such as Alpha, prayer, kids/youth are key for each NLCC campus and are common to both churches. NLCC's Walnut Grove campus offers various programs that are available for all campuses. If JRCC life groups would desire to continue, they would come under the Central Support Discipleship resourcing.

18. What will the merger cost?

The costs of a church rebirth merger can vary greatly depending on the situation of both churches. In this church merger situation, NLCC would assume most costs of merging — legal, staffing, deferred maintenance of the building, possible renovations and ongoing missions support. NLCC is able to meet those needs but requires congregational approval for additional finances/borrowing of funds needed to assume the mortgage of JRCC.

JRCC carries a mortgage of approximately \$8,250,000, which is held by the Legacy Fund of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. While JRCC is currently not contributing to the mortgage payments due to its struggling financial situation, interest-only payments of approximately \$50,000/month are being serviced, primarily through ongoing lease agreements facilitated by Jericho Faith Society (which gives oversight to the building). CCMBC requires JRCC to begin paying on principle by January 2027.

19. Who will decide if this merger happens?

Approval of a rebirth merger at NLCC is through a vote of the Elder board. A 75% approval of the congregation is required to assume JRCC's mortgage.

Approval of a rebirth merger at JRCC is a special resolution that requires a 75% affirmation by congregation members. Following, the transfer of the JRCC property and dissolution of their society would then require a 66% affirmation by congregation members.

20. If the merger happens, what will change?

While much will change, both congregations would need to embrace this new opportunity as a way to do more together for the Kingdom of God than either church could do on its own. JRCC members would be part of birthing a new congregation in an existing location. The vision to see JRCC and NLCC work together to reach the Willowbrook and Clayton areas for Jesus can be an exciting, faith-filled adventure!

The merger model that JRCC and NLCC are working towards is a "Rebirth" model, where the Lead Church (NLCC) brings a campus pastor, people, finances and vitality to realize the shared vision of both NLCC and JRCC to birth a new campus at JRCC. All who are willing to embrace change and partner together, are invited into this shared vision of reaching the Willowbrook/Clayton community via JRCC's existing building and assets, which will be gifted to NLCC as a fourth campus ministry centre.

21. What is the timeline for this proposed merger?

Declaration Stage:

As God leads, and with the approval of both Elder Boards, the proposed merger would be presented to both congregations at both churches' November Congregational meetings.

Consolidation Stage, (two become one!):

Further steps would include the appointment of a campus pastor, and the building of a substantial launch team (150+) comprised of those interested from both congregations. JRCC would continue regular services and programming during this stage. Legal proceedings for dissolution/title transfer should commence following NLCC's congregational vote to assume the mortgage. Easter 2025 would be a time to celebrate JRCC's 20th anniversary and to commemorate the significant legacy of JRCC.

Optimally, there would be a time of closure, undertaking any possible renovations and rebranding the church, with a goal to re-launch as a new campus in September of 2025. In the interim, the new campus (including both congregations) would initiate missional outreach such as summer kid's camps, community interest events and the formation of new Life Groups prior to the campus launch.

Final Stage: Integration Stage:

The Integration Stage asks, “How are we doing?” An appointed transitional team from the joint Elder Merger team will remain in place for up to a year to monitor and address issues that arise related to the merger. The first few months are critical to establish the campus with new systems and to provide the new campus leadership team with post-merger evaluations concerning staff, ministries, building, finances, etc.

22. What will happen if the merger doesn't go through?

In the event that the merger is not approved and carried through, JRCC would pursue an alternate merger with an MB congregation.

23. What are my next steps?

- Pray! We encourage both church families to be praying about this rebirth merger.
- Be informed! We also encourage both congregations to be informed. Information and FAQs will be found on both NLCC's and JRCC's respective websites, along with an invitation to respond with questions or comments.
- Come in person! JRCC will hold congregational meetings in the following weeks to discern the Rebirth merger opportunity. JRCC's AGM will be held Nov 17. This merger opportunity will be presented at NLCC's Congregational meeting on Nov 18.
- Get involved! Both congregations will be invited to attend NLCC's Campus Interest meetings when scheduled to hear more about the vision to reach people for Christ through a campus in the Willowbrook/Clayton area.