

ACME Proposal Conversation

The spring has been a busy one in the life of our church—and our annual meeting on Sunday, April 27 at 6:00 PM will reflect that! At the meeting, we will be affirming new officers and members, voting on leaving the Venture Church Network, voting on joining the Association of Churches for Missions and Evangelism (ACME), approving our 2025-2026 budget, and considering moving forward in discussions on a church plant. That’s a full agenda! I want to take a moment and address just one of those agenda items.

In this article, I’ll summarize answers to questions we’ve been asked over the past couple of months about ACME. I’ll start with some “big picture” questions and then dive into more specific details.

What Types of Relationships Bring Joy to a Church?

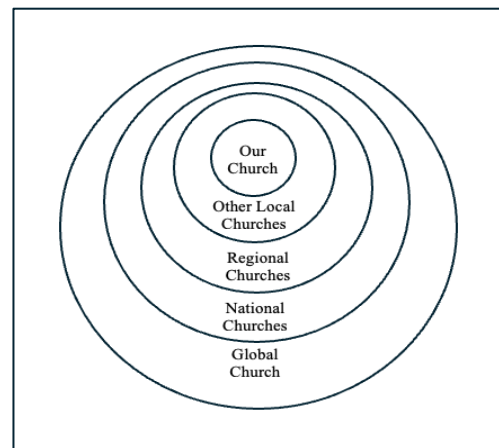
One of my favorite sermons in our series through Philippians was the final message. As we brought the series to a close, we read the final three verses of the epistle: “Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit” (Phil. 4:21-23).

As we ended the final sermon, we read updates from sister churches and rejoiced at God’s work in churches throughout Central Illinois. How kind of God to let us have a *glimpse* into how He glorifies His name beyond the gathering of BCC!

In those final verses of Philippians, we encounter a variety of relationships that exist between believers. There are individual relationships: Paul offers his greeting to “every saint.” There are discipling relationships: Paul mentions “the brothers who are with me,” like Timothy. Finally, we see there were relationships between local churches: “All the saints” in Rome “greet you (plural)” in Philippi.

These verses confirm what we learn in the rest of Scripture about how we relate with other local churches. We are aware of one another (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor 16:19). We physically care for each other (Rom. 15:25; 1 Cor. 16:1–3; 2 Cor. 8:1-2). We spiritually encourage one another (Eph. 6:18; Acts 11:22-26). We pursue doctrinal unity (Acts 15). These relationships nourish us.

As we think about where God has placed our church in 2025, we are excited about the opportunity to pursue these relationships. It might be helpful to think of our relationships with other churches as concentric circles. In the center are our relationships with believers at our church. As we move out from the center, we have relationships with other local churches, regional churches, other churches in the US, and churches around the world.



We have a biblical obligation to all churches but as we move outward, the closeness of these relationships lessens. Relationships within Bethany Community Church are the tightest. Every Sunday we worship with these saints. Relationships with other churches in our region are less close in terms of doing life together, but there is still a high likelihood that these relationships are a significant part of your life. All of us rub shoulders with other believers. You might work in a cubicle next to a believer from Grace Church in Morton. Your kids hang out with kids from Bethany Baptist Church. You might attend a conference with the saints at East White Oak Church.

As we go beyond our region, the tightness of those relationships lessens still more. For example, maybe only one of our pastors has visited a church we pray for in Indiana. Or maybe only a few people from our church develop a relationship with a church in Mexico City through a missions trip. These relationships are still important. We need to have touchpoints with other churches.

The problem, of course, is geography. Not *every* church member can be in significant relationship with *every* church member at *every* other local church. How can we pursue relationships with other churches?

How does Bethany Community Pursue Relationships?

Relationships within our local church are easiest to pursue. The primary way we exist in relationship with one another is gathering for worship. We also attend Sunday School, care groups, prayer meeting, Sunday Night service, youth group, or Awana. We care for one another as we find out another member is hurting.

We care for local churches in Central Illinois in a variety of ways. We pray for them. We have pulpit exchanges. At the pastoral level, I gather with other area pastors about once a month in an informal group called, “Sola Five.” Sola Five consists of pastors who adhere to the affirmations and denials of *Together for the Gospel* (<https://t4g.org/about/affirmations-and-denials/>) and are committed to the “five solas” of the Reformation: Based on the authority of *Scripture alone*, we hold that we are saved by *grace alone* through *faith alone* in *Christ alone* for the *glory of God alone*.

At the regional, national, and global level, we also partner in a variety of ways. We support missionaries from other churches. We contribute to the Southern Baptist Convention as we send people to Southern Seminary and Midwestern. We become close with other churches through relationships like our friendship with Brackenhurst Baptist Church in Johannesburg, South Africa, where Doug Van Meter serves as the Senior Pastor and our supported missionaries Tommie and Allison van der Walt are members.

We have also been a part of Venture Church Network (formerly Conservative Baptist Association, <https://venturechurches.org>). Through Venture, we historically had some level of relationship with other local and regional churches that were part of Venture Midwest (if you’d like more information about our decision to leave Venture Church Network, email the church office for a link to our January Sunday Evening Service at info@bethanycommunitychurch.org).

What Type of Relationship is an Association?

It depends on the association. An association is a less formal relationship than a denomination. In a denomination, there is an entity “above” the church that exercises authority over member churches.

In an association, individual churches maintain their autonomy. There is no external authority above the church that can speak into its doctrine or practice. An association can decide to exclude a church if that church veers from the doctrinal or philosophical commitments of the association. Likewise, a church can opt to leave an association if it finds that it is no longer aligned with the philosophy, doctrine, or practices of that association (e.g., where we believe we are with Venture).

Some associations have a variety of facets to that relationship. Associations might do youth retreats together, conferences, pastor retreats, or even combined worship services. Other associations may exist for a single purpose, such as missions cooperation.

Generally, associational relationships are not felt strongly “churchwide” within a local church. The association often operates in the background, serving as a resource for ministry, introducing a church to missionaries, or fostering friendships between pastors. In fact, they are usually more of a resource for pastors than the average church member. The church is aware of those relationships as other associational pastors might visit and preach or as they go to conferences at other associational churches. An association might also be more noticeable at a time of crisis if they provide assistance to a struggling church.

A church might also choose to be part of several associations, formal and informal. Many of the churches that are part of ACME, for example, are also members of the Southern Baptist Convention are part of several associations. If we joined ACME, Bethany would continue to be part of other associations. We would continue to participate in Sola Five, support the SBC and its seminaries, and support missionaries from other churches.

What is ACME?

The Association of Churches for Missions and Evangelism (ACME), “exists to unite and mobilize like-minded churches to fund pastors, church planters, missionaries, and other projects around the world.” It does this by pooling money “from its member churches to provide grants...[to] fund like-minded work such as: church plants and revitalizations, international missionaries, and other like-minded ministry. Ideally, ACME churches would give between 2-4% of their budget to support this work.”

The funds given by ACME churches go to support the grants given by ACME. ACME is *not* a sending agency. It gives grants to missionaries and projects around the world. It *exposes* churches to missionaries and sending agencies but it is not itself a missions agency. Here is a link to the grants given in 2024: <https://acmefellowship.org/2024grants>

ACME churches and the work they support share eight distinctives:

- Expositional Preaching
- Historic Baptist Ecclesiology
- Reformed Soteriology
- Meaningful Membership and Discipline
- Elder-Led Congregationalism
- One, Unified Assembly
- Biblically Oriented Public Worship
- Church-Centered Missions and Evangelism.

Additionally, the faith and practice of an ACME church is consistent with historic evangelical confessions and positional statements. For more information about ACME visit:

<https://acmefellowship.org>.

What type of relationship will we have with ACME?

One of the questions I've been asked is "Will ACME *replace* Venture?" The focus of ACME at this point is more targeted than Venture's: Missions and Evangelism. Donations to ACME fund one-time grants to missionaries or individuals who have similar philosophical commitments as ACME. Right now, these grants are determined by a governing board, but the bylaws of ACME state that over the next few years, a new process will be developed as more churches join.

As ACME churches focus on grants, relationships among member churches will deepen. The long-term goal is that churches at the national level would "gather...into a family of fellowships. Churches cooperate better when they can know, encourage, and strengthen each other in regional (multi-state) fellowships." I've been invited to sit in on some meetings where they discuss the regional partnerships and I've been excited about the possibility of participating in a regional ACME fellowship.

As the regional fellowships grow, our church will participate in regional activities as they develop. We're not sure what those might look like, but they could include conferences or youth retreats. Already, our pastoral staff is developing informal relationships with other ACME pastors.

Our ACME relationship, then, would help us fulfill the need to have "regional, national, and international" church relationships. It would not be the *only* way we do so but it will be part of the way we gain an awareness and love for churches in other places.

What are some of the benefits of joining ACME?

- **Supporting gospel ministry:** Being a part of ACME allows us to support gospel work throughout the world and provides a conduit to like-minded missionaries as we consider bringing on other partners to support.
- **Helping advance our vision to plant and strengthen other local churches:** ACME could be an asset to our church in several ways as we plant and strengthen churches. It might provide financial assistance if we applied for grants. Member churches with more

experience than BCC could help share their expertise. Other churches could help us find gifted individuals to come on as interns. ACME could provide a network we utilize to send trained interns to churches in need.

- **Iron-sharpening among pastors:** ACME provides us with a network of relationships where friendships can flourish. As some of us have spent time with other churches in the network to get to know them, we've already developed friendships.
- **Providing church-wide benefits:** As we develop relationships with other churches, there could be mutual benefits at a church-wide level. Perhaps we could help resource a church struggling financially in the future. Perhaps we can learn from a church with a similar philosophy of ministry on how to improve in areas with which we struggle. Pastors from ACME churches could provide pulpit supply and vice-versa. Resources produced by member churches could be trusted discipleship resources at BCC for care groups or other discipleship relationships.

What about our relationship with our current missionaries and the project fund?

One of the most confusing aspects of the conversation about ACME, at least for me, has been its relationship to our "Project Fund." The special projects fund is a fund set up to give one-time gifts to BCC sent and supported missionaries. Over the past year, there was a decrease in needs for our supported missionaries. As we looked at ACME, we saw that the project fund was helping fund projects similar to the projects ACME funds. The thinking was we could move some of the unused money from the special projects fund to ACME for the first year.

This resulted in the understandable perception that we were "taking" money from supported missionaries to give to ACME missionaries. An additional concern was that even if our missionaries are eligible to receive funds through ACME, there is no guarantee that they *would*. Furthermore, funding supported missionaries only through ACME could create a layer of separation between our missionaries and BCC.

In order to alleviate these concerns, some of our elders met with some of the members of the missions committee. The goal is to ensure that the Project Fund has all the funds the missions committee believes they will need to care for our supported missionaries' project needs. There is a current budget line in our missions budget that is for "Venture," and last year we put \$500 in that line. This year, the budget for 2025-2026 will change that line item in our missions' budget from "Venture" to "ACME" and increase that amount from \$500 to \$10,000.

The conversation about how much should be in the special projects fund will be a separate conversation that the missions committee has and then they can offer their recommendation to the elders and church.

What are the next steps?

Several people have asked me: “Do we *have* to join an association?” The answer is, “no.” We can glorify God and not be a member of any formal association. But I think it helps us fulfill many things we *are* required to do as a church.

ACME is not the only association we could join to glorify God and the decision to join should be a congregational decision. I do believe that for this season of our church’s life, this is our best option and I’m excited about the possibility.

The elders are proposing the following steps to move forward:

1. Vote to leave Venture at our April annual meeting on Sunday evening, April 27, at 6:00 PM. This requires a three-quarter majority. This vote will require changing our church constitution, the wording of which will be presented prior to that meeting for the church to review.
2. At the same meeting, vote to join ACME. This vote will require a three-quarters majority to pass. The association with ACME will not become part of our constitution or bylaws, so there isn’t a prescribed process we are required to follow, but a three-quarters majority seemed to be a wise bar to set.
3. At the same meeting, vote on the church budget, which will approve a budget with a line item for ACME. If the vote to join ACME does *not* pass, the missions committee will have the freedom to spend those funds on different missionaries or mission-related ministries.

Other Resources

Here’s a recent podcast describing ACME: <https://www.9marks.org/episode/on-acme-pastors-talk-ep-271/>

Church Family Q&A’s. There will be two Q&A’s prior to our family meeting on April 27. One will be Saturday, 4/12 at 9 AM in Room 107. The second will be the following Saturday, April 19, also at 9 AM in Room 107. A few elders will be there to answer any questions about anything we’ll be voting on, including ACME, the 2025-2026 budget, and leaving Venture.

I hope that’s helpful. The great thing about our church right now is a lot is going on. The challenging part of that is that with a lot going on, clear communication can be difficult as messages get muddled or lost in the noise.

Please feel to reach out with any other questions!

In Him,

Daniel (on behalf of the elder team)