

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

How Healthy Churches Take the Lead in a Merger

Episode 154

An Interview with Jim Tomberlin on What Makes Church Mergers Work

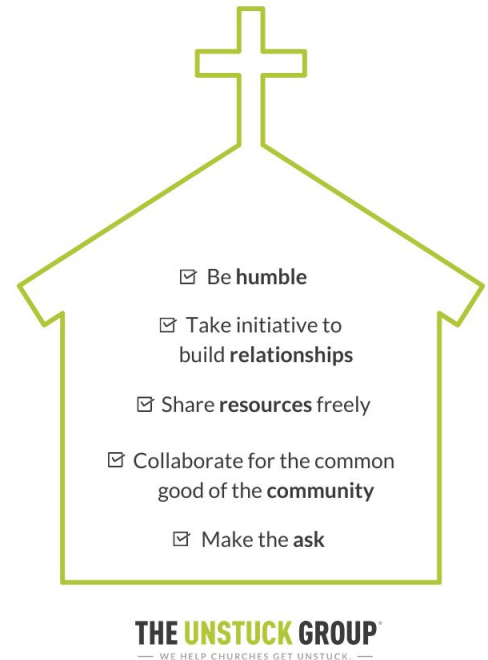
Over the past decade, we've seen a trend in churches merging together for many different reasons, and it seems likely that this trend will only increase in a post-pandemic world as the events of the last few months are only accelerating the advancement of decline in many. In this episode, Tony Morgan interviews Jim Tomberlin, co-author of the book [Better-Together: Making Church Mergers Work](#), for the beginning of a two part conversation on the emerging trend of *healthy, mission-driven church mergers* as an alternative to the old, failure-prone mergers of two declining churches.

Are Church Mergers Still a Thing?

- When Warren Bird and Jim Tomberlin published the original edition of *Better Together* in 2012, it was the first book to focus entirely on church mergers. They wanted to document the emerging trend of healthy, mission-driven mergers as an alternative to the old, failure-prone mergers of two declining churches. It was their intent to give common language to this growing phenomenon, to destigmatize the idea of merging with another church, and to provide a roadmap that churches could follow toward a successful, healthy merger outcome. Since then, this trend has been dramatically increasing.
- On the negative side—the decline in church attendance due to secularization of American culture, the fading cultural value of church attendance, and most of all the inability or unwillingness of many churches to adapt the unchanging Gospel to a post-Christian culture has made a lot of churches economically vulnerable and candidates for a merger. And that was before COVID-19!
- On the positive side—healthy, mission-focused churches are benefitting. The multisite movement continues to grow. Ten years ago 30% of multisite campuses came by way of a merger. Today it's more than 40%. In our recent survey we discovered that 20% of church planters found a permanent facility through a merger. We are also seeing mergers as a pastor-succession and a pastor-search strategy. In addition, denominations and networks are proactive and encouraging church mergers as a growth strategy for their healthy churches and as a revitalization strategy for their struggling churches. A small but growing number of church leaders are seeing mergers as a way of becoming more racially diverse.

Next Steps for the Church Who Wants to Take the Lead in a Merger

- **Be Merger-Friendly** - The lead church in a merger must demonstrate humility, a kingdom-minded focus, and compassion.
- **Connect** - Take the initiative to get acquainted with other churches in your area. You share a common geography—why not share friendship over a cup of coffee (even if just over a Zoom call for now)?
- **Resource** - Share information, materials, and training freely. Make your expertise available. Develop coaching or mentoring opportunities
- **Partner** - Collaborate together in areas of common interest and for the common good of the community.
- **Make the Ask** - Could your two churches be better together by merging? Will the community be better served? Will our churches be strengthened? Will the kingdom be further extended?



Next Steps

- Read the updated and expanded edition of [Better Together: Making Church Mergers Work](#).
- **Join us for a free webinar on August 27 at 1pm EST!**
Successful Church Mergers, hosted by Tony Morgan, Jim Tomberlin & Warren Bird.
[Register for free today!](#)
- **Learn more about how we help churches navigate mergers.**
We've found merging churches often miss the step of clarifying the future for the new ministry. If you're on the cusp of a merger, let us partner with you. We can help you navigate coming together as one church to clarify where God's called you to go and how you're going to get there. Learn more at theunstuckgroup.com/mergers.

Listen to the episode on iTunes or at theunstuckgroup.com/episode154.