

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

How Joining Churches Take the Follower Role in a Successful Merger

Episode 155

An Interview with Warren Bird on What Makes Church Mergers Work

A merger is always more successful when each church is clear on who leads and who follows. But for the church in the following role, deciding to merge with another ministry raises difficult questions related to governance, what happens to staff leaders and specific ministries, who has decision rights, and more. In this episode, Tony wraps up a two-part series by interviewing Warren Bird, co-author of the book [Better-Together: Making Church Mergers Work](#), to discuss how your church can successfully take the following church role in a healthy merger process.

Survival vs. Mission-Driven Mergers

- If you're in the position of the joining church, the biggest question is one of vision. Do you believe that you could be having a far greater impact using the resources God has given you right now?
- Old mergers were more survival driven, whereas today's mergers are more mission driven. The old were about trying to preserve an old way of doing ministry, but the new mergers are about embracing a shared vision for the future.
- Joining churches can approach a merger as a way to reinvest the kingdom resources that God's provided into greater kingdom impact. The core thing you're handing over is the mission; you're entrusting it to someone else to carry it forward successfully.

Reasons NOT to Merger

Church mergers happen due to a number of motives, wrong and right, immature and healthy. Improper or unhealthy motives include the following:

- **Preservation.** Sometimes people view the merger as a vehicle to perpetuate the current church culture or save a building with more hope in preserving the past than in developing a new future.
- **Maintaining the Status Quo.** Other people use the merger as a tactic to avoid or distract from addressing deeper problems or systemic issues. Their focus is to maintain the status quo. That's like a troubled marriage deciding to adopt a child to save the marriage and

avoid dealing with the marital problems. Mergers are not a strategy for maintaining the status quo. They are a strategy for dramatic change.

- **One-Sided Retirement Plan.** Some use the merger to create a co-pastor or multi-staff role as job security for a church leader or to help out a friend whose church is in trouble.
- **Steeplejacking.** Some target declining congregations for the sole purpose of taking over their facilities. Not caring about the people, they just want the assets. Likewise they use the merger as a strategy to raise cash for an endowment, deferred maintenance needs or personal gain. The key is for the church that might acquire such valuable properties to keep right priorities and pure motives.
- **Denominational Pressure.** A good number of mergers are within the same denominational family. But when churches are pressured to merge by denominational authorities it is a setup for disappointment or failure.

4 Questions for the Lead Church & Follower Church to Ask Themselves

- Would our congregations be better by merging than remaining separate?
- Could we accomplish more together than we could separately?
- Would our community be better served if we joined together?
- Could the kingdom of God be further enlarged by our joining together?

Next Steps

- Listen to Part 1: [How Healthy Churches Take the Lead in a Merger - Episode 154](#)
- 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.

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