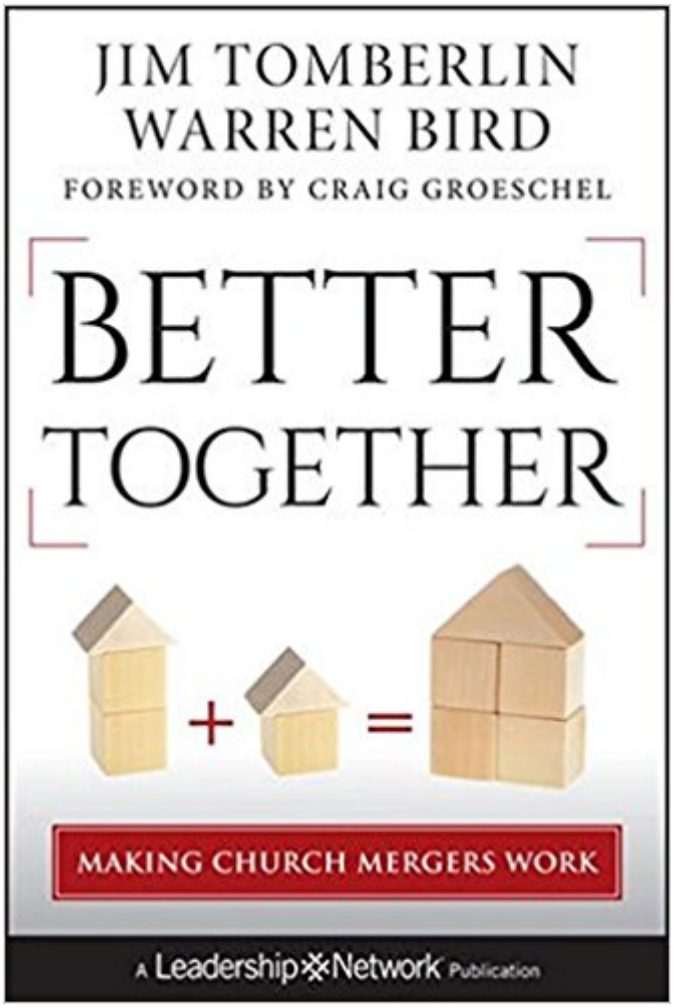
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Better Together: Making Church Mergers Work



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Synopsis

Thousands of Protestant churches are perplexed by plateaued or declining attendance, while other congregations nearby thrive. Is there a way for them to combine forces, drawing on both their strengths, in ways that also increase their missional impact? Church merger consultant Jim Tomberlin, with co-writer Warren Bird, makes the case that mergers today work best not with two struggling churches but with a vital, momentum-filled lead church partnering with a joining church. In this new book, they provide a complete, practical, hands-on guide for church leaders of both struggling and vibrant churches so that they can understand the issues, develop strategies, and execute a variety of forms of merger for church expansion and renewal to reinvigorate declining churches and give them a "second life."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

BETTER TOGETHER THOUSANDS of Protestant churches are perplexed by plateaued or declining enrollments, while other congregations nearby thrive. Is there a way for them to combine forces, drawing on both their strengths in ways that increase their missional impact? Church merger consultant Jim Tomberlin and award-winning writer Warren Bird make the case that mergers today work best not with two struggling churches but with a vital, momentum-filled lead church partnering with one or more joining churches. Based on solid research and practical experience, the authors provide a hands-on guide so that lead churches and joining churches can each understand the issues, select an appropriate model, and develop strategies that will create a positive, healthy

merger. This much-needed resource describes the range of mergers for strong, stable, stuck, and struggling churches. While many congregations are motivated by survival, an increasing number identify "mission" as their primary impetus. No matter what type of merger a church may be considering, the authors address key questions about the process: How can a merger help a church go forward? How will a merger process unfold? Where can a declining church find another congregation to join? What are the pitfalls that both pastor and congregation should avoid? How can "better together" lead to more, rather than fewer, life- giving, high- impact, reproducing churches? No matter what your motivation for merging your church with another— to begin a new church lifecycle, cross racial lines, reach more people for Christ, multiply your church' s impact, or better serve your local community— Better Together will give you the tools you need to create a thriving new entity.

Praise for BETTER TOGETHER "Better Together is certain to become the standard reference for churches that see mergers as a strategic tool for kingdom impact. Tomberlin and Bird give us useful language, a helpful guide to the opportunities and challenges of church mergers, and the tools to navigate a successful merger." —ANDY STANLEY, senior pastor, North Point Ministries, Alpharetta, Georgia "As part of the Ginghamsburg team that engineered a merger to create a 'new', thriving, urban congregation, I deeply appreciate the information, inspiration, and practical toolkit in Better Together. It will help your church navigate the pitfalls and potholes that we had to discover the hard way." —KAREN SMITH, executive director, Missional Operations, Ginghamsburg Church, Tipp City, Ohio "Better Together will become the go-to book on how to do mergers well—the kind of mergers that are about multiplication more than subtraction and expansion more than elimination. Jim Tomberlin and Warren Bird provide invaluable help through research, great examples, practical guidance, and helpful language." —ED STETZER, president, LifeWay Research; author and blogger, edstetzer.com "As Mars Hill expands, we are experiencing exactly what Tomberlin and Bird are reporting—multisite churches have an opportunity to merge with existing churches to multiply gospel effectiveness. This is a very timely and helpful book for our church and many others." —MARK DRISCOLL, founding pastor, Mars Hill Church; founder, Resurgence; co-founder, Acts 29 Church Planting Network "Jim Tomberlin and Warren Bird are on the front lines of a church world changing so rapidly most of us have a hard time keeping up. Better Together is the best kind of work: based on real-life facts, marked by thoughtful interpretation, and filled with a vision for the beauty and flourishing of the church. This book could open untold doors for your church and ministry." —JOHN ORTBERG, senior pastor, Menlo

Park Presbyterian Church; author, The Me I Want to Be

In past decades, church mergers were often two struggling churches hoping for survival and coming together as equals, often not being very fruitful in partnership and declining to the level of the largest of the two churches. But there is a growing trend for more vibrant partnerships forming between a strong vital church (called the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“lead churchÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•) and other churches that need fresh life and momentum (called ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“joining churchesÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢). Instead of being motivated by survival, they are called together by a vision for mission and for doing more together than they can do apart. 80 percent of 300,000 Protestant American churches are declining or plateaued. 1 percent close each year, often not prepared for the cost of change. But 2 percent of them merge annually and another 5 percent have been talking about it. But how can they discern whether a merge is an appropriate step and then navigate the process?Jim Tomberlin and Warren Bird explore the models, processes, opportunities and pitfalls of church mergers in their Leadership Network book Better Together. Tomberlin pioneered the multisite strategy at Willow Creek and founded MultiSite Solutions that consults to churches exploring multisites or mergers. Bird is the research director of Leadership Network, through which he has been doing extensive research over five years on church mergers, multisite development, revitalization and planting. They argue that church merging is becoming recognized as a viable revitalization strategy for stable but stuck churches, and also strong churches who are dissatisfied with the status quo. Like Peter who caught a load of fish and needed another boat to come and partner with him to capture all the blessing, churches are asking whether they can better reach their community and advance the Kingdom of God by working closer together.Better Together is compiled as a valuable resource and fieldbook for churches and leaders considering partnering or merging with another church. In four sections it explores the new landscape for mergers; processes of healthy church mergers; practical next steps for churches open to exploring a merger; and appendices and resources including a checklist of merger steps and case studies of successful mergers.Drawing on broad research of what is fruitfully working, the authors outline the issues for lead churches and joining churches: how do mergers help churches grow? What is an appropriate merger process? How can churches find another church to join? What pitfalls should church mergers look out for? What happens with existing pastoral staff? Do merging churches need an exterior consultant, a vote, a name change, plans for likely conflict? The book offers advice on preparing well, initiating the conversation, assessing how the churches compare, monitoring the legal and financial aspects, and following a merger process through well ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ managing transitions, integrating systems, clarifying

structure, avoiding overpromising, and committing to a bigger bolder vision of mission. One of the key issues is communicating thoroughly at all stages of any process, as one survey respondent suggested: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Church mergers are more like merging two family businesses. Relationships, trust, and communication are absolutely criticalÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (p.91).One of the key challenges of the book is for churches to understand who they are ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ whether strong, stable, stuck, struggling and declining ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ and why they are considering merging ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ for survival or missional purposes, and whether with multicultural, multisite, church plant network, reconciliation or other ends in mind. The best success, the writers maintain strongly, comes to churches with clear sense of mission and a shared approach to theology and ministry practice. The best model is not the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“ICUÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• combination of two sick churches, but either a healthy church combining with another healthy church in an equal ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“marriageÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•, or more helpfully a string church ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“adoptingÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• a stuck or stable church or helping ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“rebirthÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• a struggling or dying church. A helpful question is what Steven Gray asks declining churches: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“What if we were able to help you live out the vision that you were founded for in the first place, leading to an exponential impact in your community?ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (p.134).The idea and even the word ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“mergerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• may carry unfortunate overtones of corporate takeover. In my Australian context we have seen few successful mergers that produce more than the sum of the parts. This volume points to the promise of new possibilities and careful processes that are worth exploring and trialling for the sake of more fruitful local mission.Better Together is essential reading for any church leaders looking for new options or exploring possibilities of closer partnership or association with other churches, and for consultants and denominational resource-people planting ideas for the future of the church in declining contexts.This review was originally published in Mission Studies 30 (Fall 2013), 268-269.

Just went through a church merge and didn't get a hold of this book until the end of the process. My only regret is that I did not have this six months or even a year before to think through the process. If you are a struggling church don't look for another struggling church but rather read "Better Together" and turn your struggle into fruitfulness.

Our church is going through a merger. This book explained the purpose and process to go through church mergers. It was good to read that our merger is following the book. I feel more at peace and

comfortable with what is going on now.

This is a valuable book for those in vibrant, growing churches and for those in struggling churches. Sometimes one plus one equals more than two. Sometimes churches can do far more together, than they can do alone. When done properly, churches can merge and together their ministries multiply. This is about sharing vision, resources, and structure. In this book you will learn about the merged church structures that have worked best for the growth of ministry. Denominational churches have learned how to merge failing small churches with a more successful growing church and see the churches growing together.

The book was easy to read and provided exactly the information I needed as I helped plan our own congregation’s potential merger. I especially appreciated the distinction between an "ICU merger" (two dying churches merging in an attempt to survive) and other, healthier types of mergers. It invited the question: "How can we make this a healthy merger, even if a part of it is in the interest of sustainable ministry?" I recommend this book to anyone contemplating a congregational merger.

If you’re thinking about incorporating a church into your church or be incorporated this book is very useful. The information seems well researched. There are great anecdotal examples and hard numbers that give us a good picture of what’s happening across the country and what it looks like on a local level. Tomberlin and Bird do a great job of pointing out some obvious and not so obvious pitfalls for church mergers. Of course they start out by telling us why it’s a great idea and why it’s the latest greatest movement. Better Together is a great resource for those leading church mergers.

As a pastor with a vision of starting new churches and campuses, Better Together was a great resource for thinking through potential opportunities and pitfalls. I especially enjoyed the insights from other churches - what they did right and what they would do differently. If your church is considering going to multiple campuses, this is the book for you.

I really appreciate that this is not a "one size fits all" book. The depth of research and experience by the authors allows them to highlight a variety of situations, churches, and merger models. A very helpful book!

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