



# MERGERS

Combining Churches to  
Multiply Disciples

MATT ROGERS

# MERGERS: COMBINING CHURCHES TO MULTIPLY DISCIPLES

BY MATT ROGERS

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*This project would not have been possible were it not for the people of Covenant Grace Baptist Church and Renewal Church. God honored the work of many godly men and women who prayed and worked to make this merger a reality. This book is written in hopes that our story will serve as a model others can follow as we seek to see North America transformed by the good news of Jesus Christ.*

Matt Rogers, Pastor, The Church at Cherrydale

PREFACE

## THE STORY OF THE CHURCH AT CHERRYDALE

Renewal Church was your average church plant in the Southeast. We were a young church planting team—assessed, trained and sent by a healthy local church to make disciples in a community and to establish a church. The lackluster religious climate of upstate South Carolina, coupled with the waning cultural significance of the Church, provided easy justification for starting a new church in the Southeast.

Renewal Church began meeting the third Sunday of March 2010 in a hotel conference room in Greenville, South Carolina. In three years we expanded to an elementary school with 175 in attendance.

A few miles down the road, Covenant Grace Baptist Church—a church that was the result of a merger between Buncombe Road Baptist Church and Leawood Baptist Church in May 2012 (two churches both about six decades old)—was experiencing its own expansion. This new church occupied a facility in a prime location in Greenville and, under the pastoral direction of Dr. Ben Skaug and a healthy staff and lay leadership, the church sat poised to be a strategic beachhead for the gospel in its community. Then a pastoral transition left the church facing the daunting challenge of maintaining its forward momentum while searching for a new pastor.

And this is where our stories met.

Both churches faced clear challenges in their efforts to make disciples in the same city. We knew that moving into a strategic, permanent location without damaging our momentum and mobility would be among the toughest decisions we'd have to make.

Covenant Grace, on the other hand, needed missionary leadership capable of catapulting the church forward into its community to make disciples.

Could it be possible that God might provide for these needs best by combining these two churches?

What made the partnership between Renewal and Covenant Grace such a miracle is how highly unlikely it seemed. Neither church was dying, they were similar in size, and they each had a number of distinct strengths and weaknesses. The thought of combining these churches was daunting, even to the most visionary of leaders.

But on Sunday, September 15, 2013, after a lengthy process, Covenant Grace Baptist Church and Renewal Church merged to form The Church at Cherrydale.<sup>1</sup> Looking back on this process it is clear that the outcome of the merger was solely a gift of God. God was gracious to use our meager efforts and simple trust to grant us an outcome that exceeded all our hopes and dreams.

I hope the lessons learned through our failures and ultimately through the success of our endeavor can provide some type of map others can follow when they walk a similar path.

Through a merger process similar to the one outlined in this book, it may be possible to see God birth a healthy and viable means for bringing about the needed revitalization of our churches as well as the long-term stability of church plants. Our cities certainly need it.

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<sup>1</sup> The church can be found online at [tccherrydale.com](http://tccherrydale.com). Additionally the author's personal blog can be found at [equiptogrow.com](http://equiptogrow.com). Here you can find additional resources on church planting topics as well as request consultation with a team from The Church at Cherrydale should your church be considering a merger process similar to the one outlined in this book.



## CHAPTER 1

# THE OVERWHELMING NEED

U.S. cities are filled with established churches. They've lived complex stories of cultural changes, entrenched church forms and functions, pastoral transitions and the natural ebb and flow of gospel fruit and painful frustration.

Many now find themselves in a place of stagnation or decline. They reminisce of a time past when the nursery was full, the congregation was passionate, the lost were reached, and they were a major means of mission to their city. And then came the new facilities with offices, classrooms, meeting space, gymnasiums, kitchens and auditoriums to seat hundreds if not thousands. But something happened, and they lost sight of their mission. For many, the church become a place of programs rather than a people on mission.<sup>2</sup>

Now we often see the skeletal remains of a glorious past—empty sanctuaries and classrooms and billions of dollars in unused church property.<sup>3</sup> Anthony Robinson compares the established church in North

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<sup>2</sup> For a more thorough treatment of the need for missional ecclesiology in the North American context, see David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991); Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> This contrast was clearly demonstrated in an article by Christopher Calnan, "Falwell Plants Biggest Sanctuary," *Christianity Today* 42.10 (September 1998): 20 in which he describes a 12,000 seat sanctuary that was a part of a \$200 million project on 1,400 acres. On the bottom of the page was the story

America to David wearing Saul's armor to fight Goliath.

Many North American congregations are like David, limited by the armor of previous generations—namely, impressive church buildings that are much loved symbols of the church's history and role in the community but are now a liability. Often the mission of such churches becomes mainly that of maintaining the building, updating it to meet safety and accessibility requirements and paying the rising cost of heating—all with the resources of a declining membership.<sup>4</sup>

The institutional demands of the church have exceeded the missionary fervor of the church and, as a result, the established church as a whole is suffering.<sup>5</sup>

The statistics are staggering. Ed Stetzer writes that 80 percent of churches are stagnant or dying.<sup>6</sup> Thom Rainer stated that approximately 100,000 churches in America are on the brink of death.<sup>7</sup> Such an elevated death rate could easily curb the gains that would be made from an increase in church planting activity.<sup>8</sup>

Dying and stagnant churches have become the norm. The Annual Church Profile of the Southern Baptist Convention in 2011 reported that 8,000 Southern Baptist churches in the U.S. did not baptize anyone that year,<sup>9</sup> a trend that has led to a relatively flat baptism rate among Baptist

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"Dying Church Bequeaths Sanctuary to Anglicans."

4 Anthony B. Robinson, "Five Churches, One Building?" *The Christian Century* 125.24 (Dec. 2008): 24-26.

5 See Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 187.

6 Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 10.

7 Thom Rainer, "Autopsy of a Deceased Church," Thom S. Rainer, n.p. [cited 19 March 2014]. Online: <http://thomrainer.com/2013/04/24/autopsy-of-a-deceased-church-11-things-i-learned/>

8 Ed Stetzer, "SBC 2011 Statistical Realities – Facts Are Our Friends But These Are Not Very Friendly Facts," *Christianity Today*, n.p. [cited 16 August 2013]. Online: [christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2012/june/sbc-2011-statistical-realities--facts-are-our-friends-but.html](http://christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2012/june/sbc-2011-statistical-realities--facts-are-our-friends-but.html). In this article Stetzer notes that the total number of SBC church grew by 37 churches between 2010 and 2011, not even a full percentage point.

9 Russ Rankin, "SBC Baptisms and Churches Increased in 2011, Membership Declined" *Lifeway*, n.p. [cited 16 August 2013] Online: [lifeway.com/Article/news-sbc-baptisms-churches-increased-in-2011-membership-declined](http://lifeway.com/Article/news-sbc-baptisms-churches-increased-in-2011-membership-declined). A full version of the 2011 Annual Church Profile can be downloaded from this site.

churches for the last 50 years.<sup>10</sup> That same year it was reported that the total membership of the Southern Baptist Convention had declined for the fifth year in a row, with a total membership reduction of more than 2 percent of all SBC churches.<sup>11</sup> Mike Dodson and Ed Stetzer report in *Comeback Churches* that only 11 percent of Southern Baptist churches in the U.S. are experiencing healthy growth.<sup>12</sup> For most churches it seems energy has drained, momentum has stopped, and leaders of churches and denominations are trying to figure out what to do.

## What Do We Do?

As leaders of the church in our day, we are faced with the question: what do we do with these facilities and the people who call them home? This decision is not a mere theoretical practice but a question with great missiological significance. Any number of alternatives is possible.

We could shame them by heaping on guilt and conviction for their failings. The globalization of the world and the celebrity culture of the evangelical church already do this pretty well. Established church pastors often understand their condition, compare themselves with churches that seemingly have health and then live under a sense of condemnation and regret. If leaders are not careful they can easily feed into this shame cycle.

We could ignore them by giving the majority of attention and resources to the few churches that are healthy and growing. In one sense it is wise to focus on the churches that are healthy. These churches often have a unique blend of visionary leadership, contagious discipleship and admirable missionary living.

And yet to prioritize healthy churches to the neglect of the vast majority of churches that are plateaued and declining does a disservice to the latter by failing to honor the legacy of faithful saints and squandering the vast resources that these churches have at their disposal.

We could pamper them by neglecting hard conversations, finding

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10 Ed Stetzer, "The Missional Nature of the Church and the Future of Southern Baptist Convention Churches" Presented to the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry conference, "The Mission of Today's Church," New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, February 12, 2005.

11 Stetzer, *Statistical*, n.p.

12 Study reported in Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 25.

props to keep them afloat and investing an exorbitant amount of time trying to bring about incremental and, often, minimal change. The temptation is to invent a steady stream of programs, training methodologies and support systems in hopes of revitalizing churches. At times this process results in fruit, but often comes at the expense of vast amounts of effort or energy that could have been spent more profitably.

We could attempt to staff each with “God’s man.” In many churches, this is the only assumed alternative to keep the church alive. People say “If we just get God’s man for this church as our pastor everything will change.” The reality is that pastors receive vastly more than their share of blame when things are going bad, and they are the object of too much hope for bringing about transformation.

In certain cases individual men have been gifted, equipped and positioned to bring about a revitalization project in a struggling or dying church. However, this is far from normative. The reality is that, in most cases, placing an individual pastor in such an environment results in personal, family and ministerial implosion.

Or we could merge them with an existing church in the city with which they can unite to expedite the changes needed to bring the church back to life. Partnering with another church that has life, energy and momentum may be a viable means of expediting change and invigorating the church.

In fact, church mergers may be a tool for the revitalization of established churches at a rate that far exceeds the rate of transformation from one pastor attempting to lead a revitalization project alone.

Many books have been written on the subject of church revitalization, yet it remains daunting at best.<sup>13</sup>

Dodson and Stetzer write, “Most churches will not make the adjustments and changes necessary to move from stagnation and decline to revitalization and growth.”<sup>14</sup> Stetzer concedes that “Church revitalization

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13 For example, see Gary L. McIntosh, *There is Hope for Your Church* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2012); Alvin Reid, *Revitalize: Your Church Through Gospel Recovery* (Raleigh: Gospel Advance Books, 2013); Mike McKinley and Darrin Patrick, *Church Planting is for Wimps: How God Uses Messed-Up People to Plant Ordinary Churches that do Extraordinary Things* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010); Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback*, 2007.

14 Dodson and Stetzer, *Comeback*, 18.

does not happen much, but it does happen sometimes.”<sup>15</sup>

The synergistic momentum that comes from such a merger may provide the critical mass necessary to thrust the church immediately into a new season of growth. The immediate influx of people and missionary fervor can often lead to a sedation of the arguments and criticism that often result from revitalization projects.

The evangelistic contacts that come from this critical mass may aid the mission of the church since, “Older churches have often exhausted their natural evangelistic contacts through family, friends and colleagues of their members.”<sup>16</sup> A merger results in the birth of a new, united church, and it has been proven that “new churches win more people to Christ than established churches.”<sup>17</sup>

The unity that comes from such a transition can serve to protect a pastor and his family from the shrapnel that typically flies during attempts at church revitalization. The Lord, in various ways, may merge various local churches to demonstrate His power and provision for the church. Where do these churches come from? The answer is found in church planting.

## Church Planting

Few can deny that church planting is on the rise. What was once a fringe segment of highly charismatic and entrepreneurial leaders has now developed into a movement spanning the globe and comprising diverse groups of men who love the church and desire to make disciples. Church planting fervor seems to be at an all-time high.<sup>18</sup> For 2011, the North

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15 Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 11.

16 Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 32-33.

17 Stetzer, *Missional*, 7.

18 Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, “The State of Church Planting in the United States: Research Overview and Qualitative Study of Primary Church Planting Entities,” *Christianity Today*, n.p. [cited 16 August 2013]. Online: [christianitytoday.com/assets/10228.pdf](http://christianitytoday.com/assets/10228.pdf). In addition one might consider the sheer abundance of evangelical books highlighting the missiological implications of church planting such as: Stetzer, *Missional*, 2006; Aubrey Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011); Darrin Patrick, *Church Planter: The Man, The Message, The Mission* (Wheaton, Crossway, 2010); Stuart Murray, *Planting churches in the 21st Century* (Scottsdale, Herald Press, 2010); Ott and Wilson, *Global*, 2011.

American Mission Board reported that the number of church plants grew by 27 percent, from 780 to 990 between 2010 and 2011.<sup>19</sup>

But this growth also spans denominational lines and is the stated goal of many young evangelical leaders who have seen their predecessors struggle through the travails of church revitalization projects. For many the thought of starting a new church with a healthy theology and philosophy is much more appealing than spending decades trying to revitalize often-unwilling churches.

Healthy leaders are being produced, thanks in large part to the health of many evangelical seminaries and the fruitfulness of a small number of rapidly replicating local churches that are making strides to train these leaders.<sup>20</sup> Increasingly these men and the churches they lead are marked by:

**Convictional theology** – Theology is unavoidable and necessary. However, it seems that church planters have developed a reputation for minimalistic theology and the perception that they're embarrassed by highly nuanced theological issues. This couldn't be further from the truth. Today's church plants are often rooted in the truthfulness and sufficiency of Scripture and the necessity of expository preaching that faithfully declares the beauty of God's revealed Word. This leads to a thorough and overt theology that shapes their teaching and the culture of the churches they plant.

**Robust ecclesiology** – Convictional theology develops a robust ecclesiology. Pragmatic decisions made simply "to reach people" are inadequate in the development of ecclesiological parameters. As a result, church plants often give careful definition to the offices of pastors/elders and deacons, the necessity of regenerate church membership, the protection of the purity of the body through church discipline, the administration of

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19 Tobin Perry, "SBC church plants: up 27 percent in 2011," Baptist Press, n.p. [cited 16 August 2013]. Online: <http://bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=38039>

20 My experience was shaped in each of these ways. The theological and missiological training I received at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary equipped me for the task of pastoral ministry in a host of ways. This combined with deep involvement and discipleship through North Wake Church, Wake Forest, N.C., and Crosspoint Church in Clemson, S.C., were the primary catalysts for my church planting efforts. Men like Jeff Doyle, Larry Trotter, Mark Liederbach, Ken Lewis, Jeremy Chasteen, Jason Finley and Bruce Ashford were chief conduits of God's grace in my life

the ordinances in a way that honors their role in the life of the church and the systematic exposition of the Scriptures.

**Simple philosophy** – A vast majority of current church planting work is predicated on a simple ministry philosophy that seeks to create the most streamlined approach to disciple-making. This means that the life of the church throughout the week is marked by a desire for biblical community and not programs. Also, it means that the gathering of the church is increasingly liturgical, edifying in its music and centers on the role of the preaching.

**Holistic missiology** – Missions is often thought of as something that only a minor segment of the church does, often in international contexts. Others consider missionary proclamation as what pastors do during a sermon or members do when they walk through an explanation of the substitutionary atonement.

These things are vital. Yes, missionaries do need to take the gospel to the nations, reaching the unreached and unengaged of the world. And yes, we are all called to proclaim the finished work of Christ. But, almost out of necessity, church plants build around a missionary theology that sees all of life as a missionary activity lived to the glory of God in the context of one's daily life. This infuses missionary purpose into the ordinary rhythms of life for everyone in the church.

**Geographical base** – This holistic missionary living takes shape and form in a specific context. Rather than targeting a specific people group or ethnicity, increasingly it is common for church plants to root themselves in a certain geographical area, attempting to reach every person within that defined circle. Churches are seldom planted around the homogenous unit principle that underscored the Church Growth Movement, but rather around a desire for multicultural and multigenerational involvement that reflects the surrounding area.

**Desire for partnership** – Churches cannot settle for simply shuffling Christians from existing locations to newer, hipper churches. Every city in the U.S. needs the established churches to labor together, leveraging their unique church personalities

and giftedness. Daniel Akin and Bruce Ashford say our mission hinges on this. They write, “Our mission will not fare well if it is not cooperative. This includes local church cooperation with other churches, local associations, state conventions, seminaries and agencies.”<sup>21</sup> This means that the cooperation on which programs like the Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention were built is essential to the DNA of church planting work. Additionally, churches are being led to seek out meaningful partnerships with churches in their cities so every man, woman and child can be exposed to the good news of the gospel.

**Infectious humility** – Church planters do not have the best reputation. Reactionary and antagonistic planting efforts have sadly been the norm, and many established churches have been wounded because of a lack of care by church planters in their cities. Young planters are working to change this perception. We stand on the shoulders of established churches and their leaders. Wise planters see partnership with established churches as a mark of integrity and seek to honor and collaborate with these churches. Healthy churches are springing up that share many traits with the stated goals and mission of many established churches.

Churches with the characteristics noted above are springing up all around North America. Most often these churches meet in a wide array of facilities, from homes to storefronts to movie theaters to schools.<sup>22</sup> Often these settings make it possible for church planters to develop a core group of missionary church members and to establish a context for making disciples.

These first stages of any church plant can happen with little money

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21 Daniel Akin and Bruce Ashford, “A Mission Focused on This Nation (Multi-Faceted, All-Encompassing, Church Centered) Between the Times, n.p. [cited 16 August 2013]. Online: <http://betweenthetimes.com/index.php/2009/11/06/aspect-4b-a-mission-focused-on-this-nation-multi-faceted-all-encompassing-church-centered/>

22 Daniel Sanchez, Ebbie Smith, and Curtis Watke, *Starting Reproducing Congregations: Strategy Planner* (Canada: Church Starting Network, 2001), 98-99. Here they list the following possible meeting places for church plants: homes, schools, colleges, hotel conference rooms, community activity building, building used by another congregation, portable buildings, club houses, vacant retail store, lodges, business place conference rooms, restaurants, theaters, recreation centers, bank conference rooms, stadiums, tents, activity buildings in apartments, and patios in apartments.



and a small facility. However, this is not sufficient for the long run. The second strategic time in the life of a church plant happens when the church reaches a size that necessitates a larger facility as a permanent base of operation.<sup>23</sup> The options that the church plant often considers in this critical stage are to:

- **Buy land and build a building** – While this is the easiest approach, it often leads to a young church incurring massive debt, which hinders its mission and ministries and burdens the pastoral leadership under an insurmountable weight.
- **Lease a permanent facility in the city** – This option leads to even greater financial pressure on the church because it can result in large upgrade costs, leaving the church with little to show for its investment. Some church plants are blessed with benevolent owners who provide space at a greatly reduced rate; however, this is far from the norm.
- **Merge with an established church** – Jim Tomberlin and Warren Bird point out that this can propel the new, united church to a “new pattern of life and growth.”<sup>24</sup> After surveying 400 churches, they found that mergers were on the rise in the U.S. and Canada,<sup>25</sup> with approximately 2 percent of churches merging annually.<sup>26</sup> A recent article in *Resurgence* concluded, “Multisite strategies in general, and mergers specifically, provide a bright future for the church in America.”<sup>27</sup>

For this future to be realized, it is vital that pastors pursue church mergers from a biblical foundation rather than simply a pragmatic necessity. It is to this biblical foundation that we now turn.

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23 This will often happen at the 3-5 year mark of the church's life or when the average congregation size reaches approximately 200 people.

24 Jim Tomberlin and Warren Bird, *Better Together: Making Church Mergers Work* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), xvi.

25 *Ibid.*, xvi.

26 Warren Bird and Kristen Walters, “Multisite is Multiplying” Leadership Network, n.p. [cited 16 August 2013]. Online: [willmancini.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/LN\\_multi-site\\_report.pdf](http://willmancini.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/LN_multi-site_report.pdf).

27 Justin Anderson, “Five Critical Lessons from a Church Merger,” *The Resurgence*, n.p. [cited 16 August 2013]. Online: <http://theresurgence.com/2011/05/22/5-critical-lessons-from-a-church-merger>.

## CHAPTER 2

# THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Partnership with other churches in a city is a complex venture that often reveals unhealthy motives, deep-seated insecurities and poor decision-making processes within church leadership. It is vital for the leader to first ask what biblical motives should undergird a desire for partnership.<sup>28</sup>

### Mission of Disciple-Making

The primary motive for church mergers must be the glory of God demonstrated through the multiplication of disciples of Jesus (see John 15:8).<sup>29</sup> The reality of the mission of God and the clarion call of the Great Commission should propel churches toward a kingdom mindset that would allow individual churches to sacrifice preferential or territorial concerns for the overall health and growth of the church in the city.<sup>30</sup> The fact that all churches should share a common mission of disciple-making serves

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28 Tomberlin and Bird provide a list of reasons that churches are made better and stronger through a merger. While their list has some similarities with the one provided in this paper, the attempt of this section is to outline the motives that serve as precursors to a merger discussion rather than desired outcomes. Their list includes the fact that the church would be unified, purposeful, collaborative, harmonious, stronger, effective, fruitful, externally focused, healthy, reconciled, humble, redemptive and like heaven. Tomberline and Bird, *Better*, 10-11.

29 For foundational works on missional ecclesiology consult Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

30 The significance of the kingdom is underscored by the fact that the gospels mention the kingdom 121 times and the church twice.

as hope for unity in mission (see Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:16–17; John 17:23; Acts 1:8).<sup>31</sup> United mission, not independent survivability, must drive the decisions of church leadership as they seek to discern the best means for disciple-making in their context. Fruitfulness in disciple-making through a church merger may result due to the number of potential disciple-makers in the united church, the synergetic mission of the people to the city, the energy and passion that results from growth or through simply having facilities in which to house needed programs that facilitate disciple-making.

## Model of Unity

Church mergers demonstrate the unity that Christ purchased on the cross for all those He has adopted into His family. There is “one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (see Ephesians 4:4–5; 1 Peter 2:9–10). This reality should serve to demolish elements that cause division in humanity and unite all of God’s people, Jew and Gentile alike, into one new humanity united in the gospel (see Ephesians 2:15–16).

This was true in the book of Acts where local churches worked inter-dependently, not independently (see Acts 15; Acts 11:28; 1 Corinthians 16). In his masterful work on the missionary practices of the apostle Paul, Roland Allen comments that “For him [Paul] the Church was prior to the churches. The churches did not make up the Church, but the Church established the churches.”<sup>32</sup> This interdependence is rare. The proliferation of denominationalism and church splits have resulted in a divided family, often committed to “their” local church, yet not in relationship with other believers from other churches in the same city.<sup>33</sup> Daniel Akin and Bruce Ashford warn that “For the sake of the billions who have never heard the gospel, we must rid ourselves of fundamentalist infighting that

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31 Bosch, *Transforming*, 463–64.

32 Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 127.

33 Darrell L. Guder, ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 254–68. One of the oft quoted marks of the church is that of oneness (Catholicity). This mark must be applied to the oneness among the universal church and not simply the oneness that should exist within any singular church.

distracts from and contradicts the proclamation of the gospel.”<sup>34</sup> Darrell Guder echoes this point when he writes, “When the church in its diverse structures presents to the world a witness of competitiveness, contention, wastefulness and mutual judgmentalism, then it is not bearing witness to the Christ who makes peace and breaks down walls of division.”<sup>35</sup>

Church mergers provide a public witness that the church is one (see 1 Corinthians 1:10) and is focused on making disciples. Church mergers should allow for different nationalities, generations and backgrounds to find unity in spite of their diversity.<sup>36</sup> The fruit of brothers and sisters dwelling together in unity is a laudable goal in church partnership (see Psalm 133:1).

## Multigenerational Discipleship

Not only are the facilities of many existing churches lying dormant, but so is the life experience and disciple-making capacity of many older Christians. The contrast is stark: church plants are filled with young, relatively immature Christians while established churches are filled with elderly saints. Church plants desiring to build a multigenerational discipleship ministry often lack mature believers necessary for discipleship and established churches may desire the same, but lack the young life necessary to have someone to disciple. The homogeneity of most churches means that church mergers can provide a helpful tool for creating a true multigenerational community within a singular local church, and thus reap the blessings associated with effective disciple-making (see Titus 2). Ethnic diversity is also a needed catalyst for discipleship. By merging believers from different backgrounds and cultural milieus, church mergers allow for unique disciple-making relationships that are not found in homogenous churches.

## Unified Gatherings

A proper ecclesiology necessitates the corporate gathering of the

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34 Bruce R. Ashford, ed., *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2011), 333.

35 Guder, *Missional*, 262.

36 Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2011), 185.

church on a regular, ongoing, unified basis. Alternative ecclesiological methodology may be justified in certain contexts such as the persecuted church, but the normative practice for the church in America should be for the local church to gather on a regular basis. Any singular local church has both organic and corporate components. As an organic church, it scatters through the week to live on mission and worship God in every area of life. Corporately, the church gathers to hear the teaching of the Scriptures, partake of the sacraments and be edified by other believers.

This concrete reality must gather in a unified fashion in a centralized location.<sup>37</sup> As Craig Bartholomew argues in *Where Mortals Dwell*, the people of God have always been marked by a sacred space.<sup>38</sup> This is not simply true of God's people but is a mark of anthropology. Lyle Schaller writes that "Place naturally is important to people and the more familiar the place, the greater the importance."<sup>39</sup> Modern missiological writings also highlight the significance of the gathering of the church marked by a sacred place.<sup>40</sup> Not only does a place have theological significance, but

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37 Sadly many writers equate the gathering of the church with institutionalism. Church buildings often have a negative stereotype in modern evangelical thought. For example Alan Hirsch laments such "spooky religious zones" and the tragedy of storing "seeds in ecclesial storehouses." (Hirsch Forgotten, 95, 130). Clearly Smart is correct when he writes, "Whenever it has ceased to be a mission and has become content to be merely a religious institution, it has withered and died...Therefore, in the light of history a church that is not a mission invading the world has reason to suspect that, however successful and impressive it is outwardly, it is in the throes of death." James D. Smart, *The Rebirth of Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 150. This mindset is exemplified in Mead's appraisal of the modern church: "The dilemma of the church in this transitional time is that the shells of the old structures still surround us even though many of them no longer work." Loren Mead, *The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier* (Washington: Alban Institute, 1991), 18. However, the oft thought equation is that to have a church building means that the church is institutional and thus lacks mission. Certainly church facilities can be a hindrance to mission and a drain on the time and finances of the church. This need not be the case. Facilities may actually be a helpful tool in the production of disciples in a city.

38 Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

39 Lyle E. Schaller, "Human Ethology: The Most Neglected Factor in Church Planning," *Review of Religious Research* 17 (1975): 3.

40 Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006); Peter Read, *Returning to Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press), 1996.

also a host of pragmatic benefits.

Having a long-term facility allows a church to permanently anchor its missionary footprint in a city. It allows pastors to focus on mission and ministry without the weight and anxiety of constantly changing locations.<sup>41</sup>

Church facilities provide a perception of permanence for people considering partnering in the mission of a local church. Finally, a facility enables disciple-making structures that would otherwise be impossible—theological instruction (akin to Sunday School), new members classes,<sup>42</sup> small group leader training, counseling and youth and children’s programs.<sup>43</sup>

## Stewardship

Merging churches also honors God by effectively stewarding the resources He has entrusted to His church (see Luke 16:8-12). The American church’s abundance of unused or underused facilities and resources is a stunning condemnation of our use of “kingdom assets.” In his article “Finding New Life in Struggling Churches,” Ed Stetzer laments the decline of the Baptist heyday of the 50’s and 60’s. Today, he writes, “We have our own ‘crazy aunt’—tens of thousands of dead or dying churches. Like that ‘crazy aunt,’ we love her. We want to treat her with dignity. But, ultimately, we think she is hopeless and best ignored.” However, he continues, “We must engage dying churches not out of guilt but because of their potential—to be used of God again in a powerful way.”<sup>44</sup> Established churches can be renewed and stewarded to utilize the resources that are lying dormant and to save church plants from squandering resources they simply do not have.<sup>45</sup>

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41 Location stability allows pastors to manifest many of the principles taught in Rainer and Geiger, Simple, 135-64.

42 The value of new member’s classes are a major focus of Rainer and Geiger, Simple, 157-159.

43 Thom S. Rainer, *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999).

44 Ed Stetzer, “Finding New Life in Struggling Churches,” SBCLife, n.p. [cited on 16 August 2013]. Online: [sbclife.com/Articles/2004/02/SLA4.asp](http://sbclife.com/Articles/2004/02/SLA4.asp)

45 In Timothy Starr, *Church Planting: Always in Season* (Canada: Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada, 1978) one discerns a sense of the logic for church planting facilities in that era. Starr writes, “A suitable site with a large sign indicating a church building will be erected can assist in

Additionally, it is becoming increasingly difficult for church planters to find reasonable gathering space because of zoning restrictions and increasing governmental stipulations.<sup>46</sup>

Richard Baker, an attorney serving a number of churches, comments that “Churches do not realize the fight they’re in. If you go into a commercial district, they say you’re wrecking their tax base. If you go into residential, they say you’re disturbing their peace.”<sup>47</sup> Thus the pursuit of long-term gathering space is increasingly limited, while existing church facilities are already zoned as gathering spaces, often with the necessary restrictions having already been met.

Such decisions would allow church pastors and congregants to properly steward the treasure that lies in facilities and materials within local churches, repurposing them into “more than museums of past glory days.”<sup>48</sup> Leaders of local churches will be held accountable for such stewardship decisions (see Romans 14:12).

## Mission to the City

Unity and mission combine to produce a powerful testimony to God’s nature, character and mission in the city among the lost. Nonbelievers form an impression of the universal church and of God Himself based on their observations of the health of individual local churches. Nancy Demott, Tim Shapiro and Brent Bill observe that, “The buildings housing our congregations communicate. Even if the people themselves are silent, whether in prayer or in doubt, the stones cannot be silent.”<sup>49</sup> This

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stabilizing aa (sic) new work. It is also a testimony to the community. Purchasing land ahead of time can save considerably on the ultimate cost” (34–35). He goes on to say “land acquisition should be high on the list of priorities in starting a new church” (135). This trend has clearly shifted in most evangelical writing. However, the focus still seems to be on truing “secular spaces” into “sacred spaces” for the meeting of the church such as Katie Day, “The Construction of Sacred Space in Urban Ecology,” *Crosscurrents* 58.3 (Fall 2008): 426–440.

46 This is seen by the recent court cases filed against churches renting public meeting spaces such as those discussed in Cathy Lynn Grossman and Natalie DiBiasio, “Instant Churches Convert public Schools to Worship Spaces,” *USAToday*, n.p. [cited 16 August 2013]. Online: [http://usatoday30.usa-today.com/news/religion/2011-07-18-portable-churches-worship-schools\\_n.htm](http://usatoday30.usa-today.com/news/religion/2011-07-18-portable-churches-worship-schools_n.htm)

47 Bobby Ross Jr., “Bricks and Moratoriums,” *Christianity Today*, n.p. [cited on 16 August 2013]. Online: [christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/march/bricksmoratoriums.html](http://christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/march/bricksmoratoriums.html).

48 Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback*, 19.

49 Nancy Demott, Tim Shapiro, and Brent Bill, “Your Building Speaks,” *Congregations* (Summer

fact was true in Israel's history. God connected the honor and fame of His name with the obedience of His people, their obedience in worship and the state of His temple. Consistently God called His people to rebuild and repair, so the nations would know that God was a "repairer of broken walls, restorer of streets with dwellings" (see Isaiah 58:12).

As with the temple, disjointed, mission-less and fractured churches in North America are antithetical to the glory and majesty of God. Early in colonial settlements, "the location and grandeur of the church building was inexorably linked to the perceived moral tenor of the town and its people, to a sense of religious devotion and to the economic stature of the community."<sup>50</sup>

These facilities were used to form the spiritual identity of the people and to communicate to outsiders. As a result, "church buildings are usually the most famous, the strongest, the most beautiful buildings any town has to offer."<sup>51</sup> While these buildings continue to dot the landscape of much of North America, their poor condition and lack of vitality communicate the exact opposite in our day.

Conversely, our neighborhoods, schools, businesses and government agencies all receive a tangible benefit from having healthy churches in their city. Most of these facilities, built in the 50's and 60's, lie on the major intersections and population centers of many U.S. cities. City gentrification and suburban growth often reflect the changing of the population surrounding many church facilities, yielding a position ripe for missionary success.<sup>52</sup>

## Means of Sanctification

For those in established churches, there is great pain and loss associated with the death of a church. Jennifer Clark's poignant article, "The Special Shell," highlights the "religious memory" these buildings embody with

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2010), 23-24.

50 Jennifer Clark, "'This Special Shell': The Church Building and the Embodiment of Memory," *Journal of Religious History* 31.1 (March 2007): 68.

51 Margaret Visser, *The Geometry of Love: Space, Time, Mystery and Meaning in an Ordinary Church* (London: Penguin, 2000), 1.

52 See Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Work in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).



their connection to major life milestones, such as marriages, funerals, baby dedications and baptisms.<sup>53</sup>

Many buildings connect congregants to their familial past, as many churches have multigenerational family ties. Clark writes, “The church building carries in its form, religious purpose; in its day-to-day history, personal stories; in its very existence, communal tacit knowledge; and in its disrepair and renovation, the faded, selected, and reconstructed past we might like to call heritage.”<sup>54</sup> Rather than face the pain of seeing their building and sacred objects hauled off or demolished, church mergers allow older saints the joy of entrusting their church to others to continue its heritage even if this means “their church” will have to change.<sup>55</sup>

In a similar fashion, this type of partnership allows young church planters to show honor and respect to their church predecessors. Paul’s exhortation to “do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider each other better than yourselves” (see Philippians 2:3) applies to church planters and the churches they lead.

While models and methods may have changed, many of today’s church planters are doing so because of the investment of established churches. Regarding church facilities, often “Church authorities can be far more detached. They see the place less emotively, as an asset to be used and shared as a meeting place only, facilitating the dissemination of the theology—to hear the Word read and preached—but in itself, devoid of greater significance.”<sup>56</sup> Young leaders would be wise to acknowledge and honor the significance of sacred spaces, celebrate their historical fruitfulness, and cast a vision for their long-term utilization in the mission of God.

This biblical foundation now allows church leaders to consider what types of churches may be ripe for merger discussions.

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<sup>53</sup> Clark, Shell, 60.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>56</sup> Clark, Shell, 74.

## CHAPTER 3

# THE POTENTIAL MODELS

No two churches are alike, and no two church mergers will be alike either.<sup>57</sup> Ed Stetzer, writing on the future of established churches, observes that some churches simply need refocusing to aid the church in centering on mission, some need reengineering to get on mission, some need restructuring to facilitate mission and some need restarting to ever be missional.<sup>58</sup>

The varied condition of the church means that not every church plant is ripe for a merger. Understanding the types of churches that could benefit from a merger allows for an awareness of the vast array of potential that church mergers bring to the evangelical landscape.<sup>59</sup>

## Lifeless Churches

Ed Stetzer quips in *Viral Churches*, “Lots of churches died 30 years ago, but no one turned out the lights. The building serves as the respirator for

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57 For example, see models of adoptive church planting in Ott and Wilson, *Global*, 127-154. Also Tomberlin and Bird, *Better*, 21 list four models of healthy mergers: 1. Rebirth mergers – “a struggling or dying church that gets a second life by being restarted under a stronger, vibrant and typically larger church, 2. Adoption mergers – “a stable or stuck church that is integrated under the vision of a stronger, vibrant, and typically larger church, 3. Marriage mergers – two churches, both strong or growing, that realign with each other under a united vision and new leadership configuration, and 4. ICU mergers – “two churches that know they’re in trouble and try to turn around their critical situation but are more survival driven and often fail.”

58 Stetzer, *Finding*, n.p.

59 Ken Walker, “Missional Church Mergers,” *Christianity Today*, n.p. [cited 16 August 2013]. Online: [christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/september/missionalchurchmergers.html](http://christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/september/missionalchurchmergers.html)

churches on life support.”<sup>60</sup>

Lifeless churches necessitate a holistic change in which the church “hands the keys to the car” to another church. Often this process is mediated through denominational entities or larger churches in the city, who are given the facilities of churches that have died. What amazing things could happen if such churches were given to a future church planter who had been trained and assessed or to a church plant already existing in the city!

The facility can then be rebranded, upgraded and relaunched as a new church plant through the existing facility. The success of this model hinges on a number of factors. For one, the financial circumstances of the lifeless church can complicate the transition. If the building is in debt or disrepair, the cost of mortgage payments and facility repairs may hinder the mission of the church plant or place undue financial strain on a planter.

Second, if the church is given to another existing church or local association, that church or association must have a heart for church planting and place qualified and contextualized planters in appropriate facilities. Often larger churches in the city that inherit facilities are not passionate about church planting or knowledgeable of young and capable leaders who can plant churches out of them.

Finally, the rapid death rate of many mainline and liberal denominations poses great potential for reuse of facilities, but these properties are often owned by hierarchical leadership structures that are neither positioned for utilizing the facilities in planting nor open to giving the facility to an evangelical church.

## Hopeless Churches

Hopeless churches are not lifeless yet, but they soon will be unless something drastic changes. Hopeless churches are more common than lifeless churches. Their downward descent has passed the point of no

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<sup>60</sup> Stetzer and Bird, *Viral*, 191.

return, and they have a limited window of time to make a decision as to what to do with the ship before it sinks. The desired outcome would be that these churches harvest their influence and resources before it's too late. A merger would allow the members of the existing church to make necessary decisions for leaving a vibrant legacy by merging with a church plant.<sup>61</sup>

This model poses challenges on numerous fronts. It is often the case that those churches that are on the brink of death do not rightly interpret their impending demise, which would prompt swift action to ensure a smooth transition. Second, hopeless churches are often dying for want of leadership, making the negotiations and transitions needed for such a merger haphazard. Third, churches that do become aware of their impending death often do so from some form of external pressure, such as insoluble financials. These financial pressures may continue to be constricting on the church plant following the merger.

Unfortunately, hopeless churches are often plagued by a negative reputation in the city due to years of neglected mission. This negative stereotype in the community can continue to have implications for the missionary effectiveness of the church plant, even under a new name and new leadership.

### Mission-less Churches

Granted there is no such thing as church without a mission; but the reality is that many churches that thrived decades ago have long since lost their vision for mission, and, as Guder describes, “Maintenance replaces missions as the guiding principle of the community’s life.”<sup>62</sup>

Churches that are aware they lack missionary fervor often desire a method of infusing centrifugal movement in the body but lack the necessary manpower to transition the church.

Often churches have failed to engage the surrounding shifting culture.

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61 J.W. Wallis, “Models for Separate Churches to Transition Their Ministries Together,” *Review and Expositor* 109 (Winter 2012): 25–30. In this article Wallis describes a hopeless church who entered into a dual usage agreement with another church until the existing church permanently died, at which point the additional church received the facility.

62 Guder, *Missional*, 240.

City centers in particular present amazing opportunity for church partnerships. The gentrification of city centers means that many churches are located in communities surrounded by a quite different demographic than they had 50 years ago.

Partnership with a church plant in the city can provide the necessary leadership, structure, systems and contextualization necessary to prompt a church to engage these city centers.<sup>63</sup>

Mergers with mission-less churches can include a strategy for the two churches to occupy the same facility for a season to allow the established church to observe the missionary DNA of the church plant. Over time they could join together as one church. This would involve combining the people of both churches into a new, united church. Should the churches choose to unite permanently, a number of challenges are inherent to such a move.

The remnant of people currently residing in the established church can have as much negative impact on the mission of the church plant as the church plant has on their mission.

There's also the question about whether the people from the established church are willing to make the changes necessary to engage in mission or whether they will always remain a fringe, disjointed group. For such a merger to happen it must be seen as a marriage in which there is agreement on essential philosophical decisions.<sup>64</sup> The united church must agree on its biblical foundation and missional task and, from this unity, work to develop appropriate ministry forms.<sup>65</sup>

And a final challenge is that most mission-less churches have a pastor who is chief catalyst for the lack of health in the established church. Such a leader can be an impediment to the health of the new church if he is left on the leadership team, yet he often depends on the finances of the church to survive.

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63 Lincoln Bingham, "When Two Churches Became One", *Review and Expositor* 108 (Fall 2011): 545-556.

64 Alan W. Black, "A Marriage Model for Church Mergers" *Sociological Analysis* 49.3 (1988): 281-292.

65 See Tim Keller's discussion on hardware, software and middleware in *Center Church*, 13-28.

## Pastor-less Churches

Pastoral transitions are all too common, leaving churches with a void regarding clear, biblical leadership. These churches are often led by interim pastors or bivocational workers seeking to aid the church in some type of transition. The church then forms a search committee in hopes of hiring a pastor, when it may be that the pastor they need is already planting a church in their city.

A merger could streamline the search process and missionary effectiveness of the church. However, the lack of leadership can make it challenging to navigate exactly who makes the decisions to partner with a church plant. Without a pastoral leader, this decision is often left to lay leaders or search committees that lack a thorough understanding of church planting.

This model seems viable, but there are not many documented examples of success.<sup>66</sup> The primary appeal of this is that it can happen between two healthy churches and need not require one church to be on the brink of death for a merger to be successful.

## Multisite Churches

Multisite campuses exist as a distinct gathering of an already existing church in a new location. Ecclesiological discussion aside, these churches are viable candidates for church mergers.

These churches have a sizable group of people looking to start a new campus in a desired geographical location. Second, these churches are tethered to an existing and sizable main church campus that can provide financial assistance to the merged church. Third, multisite churches have a known reputation in the city and, due to common theology, church name and ministry philosophy, will often grow quickly. Finally, multisite churches are often open to meeting at non-traditional gathering times. For example, a multisite church may be open to having a video campus in a new location that meets on Saturday or Sunday nights, making it a viable alternative for the multisite campus and the existing church to meet in the same location, just at different times.

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66 By God's grace, the story of The Church at Cherrydale is an example of this type of church merger.

## Ethnic Churches

Established churches often partner with ethnic churches, allowing them to rent space in their facility and conduct an indigenous service. This may be most needed in context where city gentrification and suburban sprawl have led to a dominant ethnic group in a facility surrounded by a minority ethnic group.

Sadly, this is often motivated by the reality that the ethnic church will not “take people” from the already-established church. Imagine the rich beauty of multicultural involvement under a singular pastoral leadership team and church vision. A better model may be for ethnic churches to merge with established churches, even if they still hold separate services in the language and cultural style of their people group.

## Homeless Churches

Clearly very few churches gather each week without a home. However, most church plants meet in temporary locations that may pose a number of missional impediments:

- A drain on the financial resources of a young church due to high rental costs. In most cases, church planters spend hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars every month to secure a gathering space for four hours every Sunday. This money could be spent in much more strategic ways toward the life of the church.
- A strain on the work force of the church that results from hours spent setting up and tearing down sound equipment, communication materials and children’s supplies each week.
- An inability to strategically execute ministries that are vital to the life of the church. Simply put, Sunday School classes, children’s ministry and the like are challenging to execute in temporary venues.
- A challenge in connecting with certain segments of the population of most cities. Particularly, older individuals in most

communities are unlikely to come to a church that seems to lack permanence. Is this a cult? Is it going to be here 10 years from now? These are valid questions that many ask about homeless church plants.

- A communication challenge regarding the name and mission of the church due to its lack of a consistent and permanent location. Some might think this trains a church to understand that “the church is not a building but a people.” While this may be true, it is also true that a permanent location aids in the ability of the church plant to clearly communicate to the community who the church is and how to connect.
- A necessity of securing an office location in a public space, such as a coffee shop, or renting additional space for an office. The public office model creates a steady stream of conversations with others in the city, yet poses a challenge for strategic meetings, counseling sessions and sermon preparation time. Renting an additional office space is often necessary but creates an additional expenditure for the young church.
- An awareness that the location is temporary and may change on any given week. For example, a church that has secured a meeting space in a local elementary school knows that it is only one change in a principal or court ruling away from being without a place to meet. The temporary gathering space used by most young church plants makes them a viable candidate for desiring a church merge.

However, it is not simply that church plants need a space to meet but that church plants may be a tremendously valuable tool for revitalizing existing churches. Why?

**Compelling vision** – Church plants are birthed through compelling vision. Someone had a vision for the birth of a new church and the necessary missionary philosophy required to reach the lost. This compelling vision resonated with a group of individuals who have committed their lives to the mission of the church. This means that church plant will be able to articulate and embody a vision to which others will rally.



**Clear leadership** – Their vision is not a hypothetical vision but an embodied vision—often embodied in the form of a team of apostolic, visionary leaders. The types of men who often plant churches have a spirit-giftedness that lends itself towards leadership, entrepreneurship and vision. This leadership is vital for any church to grow, both in width and in depth. A visionary leadership team provides a host of practical benefits to the life of any church in the form of accountability, support, delegation and member care.

**Contextual methodology** – Church plants have often found ways to engage culture in a biblically faithful and yet contextually relevant way. This methodology is often birthed out of the freedom that young churches have to experiment with various ways of “doing church” and to develop a model that results in disciple-making. Church plants don’t survive long unless they are able to reach people in culture. So if a church plant has been around for long (over two years) and is healthy and growing, there would be great evidence the church had an effective missionary philosophy of ministry.

**Critical mass** – Existing church plants have a number of people who have committed to the vision, leadership and methodology. This means they can provide a sufficient critical mass to shape the culture of a new church merge. If the church plant has a desirable theology and philosophy that their members have owned, then this can be transplanted to a merged church fairly easily.

Thus, homeless church plants seem to need existing church mergers and existing churches have much to gain from such a partnership. So how might one merge congregations such as those described above?

## CHAPTER 4

# THE SUGGESTED PROCESS

The question is not whether mergers are a good idea, but how they can become a reality. What does the process of uniting two existing churches for the sake of making disciples in a city look like? Clearly the answer varies based on the nuances of the church contexts; however, a successful merger requires a number of clear action steps. These need not be a series of sequential steps. Instead, there is a series of stages or gates one must unlock to move toward successful partnership.

## GATE 1

### Active Prayers

Established churches and church plants alike should begin the process by asking the Lord to sovereignly position their churches for the potential for merger. The process of merging churches is fully contingent on God bringing two unique churches to a perfect position for healthy partnership.

Church planters can begin to pray for opportunities to partner with existing churches long before the actual need for facilities becomes apparent. Pastoral teams should make this a matter of corporate prayer when they gather to consider the future of the churches they lead.

Similarly, existing churches seeking revitalization should prayerfully

ask God to provide a merger potential. Often these churches pray that God would send them “His man”—a new pastoral leader capable of bringing about the needed transition. While this may happen, churches can also pray that God would send them “His church”—a church capable of bringing about such change. Without diligent prayer, churches will naturally drift towards human-manufactured planning and scheming that will ultimately backfire and result in disunity rather than enhanced mission.

### Declared Interest

Churches must put themselves on the market by declaring their interest in such a merger. Church leaders should begin by disclosing this desire to their congregation. This should happen actively through sharing this desire in church meetings and membership classes and passively by partnering with existing churches and celebrating the work of church partnership. This stated goal can develop a culture of active prayer and deep anticipation of God’s provision in a church merger.

Church leaders should alert denominational leaders to their desire to merge. Often associational directors of missions have their ears to the ground and are aware of the decline of churches in the city and which could be positioned for merger. Existing churches can also seek out denominational support in times of plateau or decline, and these leaders can make them aware of existing church planters who are in need of space. This background information can protect a church from needlessly spending time on conversations with churches that have a contentious underbelly.

Another means of declaring interest are informal conversations with other established church pastors. The pastoral fraternity may prove to be a source of networking and connection for church mergers.

A church may find a means of exposing all the churches in the city to the desire for partnership. Church planters may deem it wise to compose a formal letter stating their desire to unite with an existing church and to send it to a large, cross-denominational list of churches in their target area.

## Biblical Honor

Church planters must seek to show proper honor to established churches in the city and also work to partner with associational, state and national denominational entities (see Proverbs 18:24). These partnerships are often the most vital tool to linking church plants with established churches.

This can happen in a number of ways. For one, young church planters can develop relationships with pastors in their area by pursuing relationships, showing genuine interest, asking numerous questions and, honestly and humbly, desiring to learn from the men who have gone before them. The stereotype of the prideful, young planter is all too common in the minds of most church pastors, and it is incumbent on church planters to seek to dismantle this stereotype.

Existing church leaders can also find ways of supporting and encouraging young church planters in the city. Simply setting up a meeting with these young leaders, listening to their questions and sharing honestly about the state of the church, can provide a conduit for partnership conversations to begin.

Planters must also seek to build relations with denominational entities. Sadly it is all too common for church planters to attempt to chart their own path without denominational partnership. In doing so, the planters undermine relationships and discount the catalyst God has put in many denominations for making such mergers happen.

## Faithful Presence

Churches should develop a missionary core that is “faithfully present” in the overall cultural milieu of the city.<sup>67</sup> Christians living out their sent nature in the city under the banner of the local church provides a reputation for the church in the city. It also positions members of the local church to build relationships with other believers in the context where they live, work and play.

This relational integrity may provide a tool the Lord uses to connect people in churches that need partnerships. If the church is aware of the

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67 James David Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

leader's desire, and they are praying for God to open these doors, it is much more likely they will engage in conversations with members of other congregations and bring the needs of these churches before their pastors.

Ideally, the church culture created is one in which church members are asking, "Pastor, what could we do to help \_\_\_\_\_ church plant get established in our city?" And conversely, members of church plants are asking, "Pastor, what could we do to help \_\_\_\_\_ church engage in healthy and vibrant missions to our city?"

### Leadership Focus

Young church planting leaders need to work to develop their leadership skills and systems strategy prior to a merger. Specifically, they must build a platform of love and trust from the church they pastor and establish "change in their pocket" for future decisions.<sup>68</sup> It is from this platform that the congregation will trust her leaders and take the risks necessary for a merger to be successful.

Also, church planting leaders must set a precedence for bold decision making and wise leadership throughout the life of the church and not simply when confronted with major decisions like church mergers. Finally, young leaders should work to develop unity among the church elders so they can jointly navigate the complexities of a merger conversation.

These matters may seem inconsequential and negligible in light of the host of seemingly more important matters that shape a church merger, and yet this foundational work is the essential tool God uses to create a climate of effective partnership. It provides the means by which God opens the first gate toward church mergers.

## GATE 2

*Gate 2 opens when prayer and persistence result in a church recognizing another church that is ripe for merger. Once this happens, the real work begins in order to unlock the second gate.*

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<sup>68</sup> Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback*, 183.

### Due Diligence

Church leaders must begin to learn as much as possible about the other church. Often this starts with a series of background conversations with people who are secondarily connected to the established church or church plant. At this point, care should be taken to avoid talking directly to the church in question.

However, skilled leaders will find other ways to discover people who know about the church. This could be denominational leaders, other area churches or people in relationship with members of the church. A careful leader will invest in research to determine whether a merger is possible or advantageous.<sup>69</sup> Ideally a church leader would discern the following pieces of information prior to meeting with anyone from the potential partner church:

- The general history of the church
- The most recent pastoral leadership (What was this person(s) like? Why did he leave?)
- The nature of the actual leadership in the church (Who really calls the shots?)
- The reputation of the church in the city
- The circumstances surrounding the church's current health or lack thereof
- The state of the church facility (size, upkeep, indebtedness)
- The options the church has previously considered to get itself out of its current situation (If it is a church plant, what have they already done to try to secure a location? If it is an established church, what previous revitalization efforts have they attempted?)

Proper due diligence distinguishes churches that are viable for merger

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<sup>69</sup> Tomberlin and Bird direct their readers to ask the following questions concerning a potential merge: "Is the merge possible? Is it desirable? And is it feasible?" Tomberlin and Bird, *Better*, 68.

from those that are not. If this does not happen, the church leaders will rush into premature conversations with churches that will simply waste time, effort and energy.

### Person of Peace

This background research will often lead to a person of peace within the congregation in question. In missiological language, a person of peace refers to a believer who has significant relational influence on others within that city. In the context of this discussion, a person of peace is an influential person within the church who is open to unique ideas, such as a church merger, and who has enough influence to shape others' perception of the potential partnership.

You might start with recognized leaders of the congregation. If the church has a pastor, it is essential that the conversations begin with him, as any attempt to circumvent his leadership at this point could be seen as deceptive. If the church does not have a pastor, leaders must determine who is actually leading the church during this vacuum.

However, one must be careful not to quickly equate a recognized leader as a person of peace. Don't assume because someone has been given the mantle of leadership, he will be capable of executing the degree of visionary leadership required to make a merge possible. In such a case, it is vital the merger be approached by honoring those in leadership positions while targeting those with actual leadership ability and influence.

In many cases this person of peace will be a long-term member of the church who has a passion for change but lacks the leadership ability to bring it about. This person may or may not be in a recognized leadership position in the church.

### Informal Conversation

The first meeting should be with the recognized person of peace. Ideally this meeting should happen between the most apostolic/visionary leader of the church plant and the person of peace in the established church context. This guarantees that the two people most likely to have the vision of a merger and execute its complexity are in the room together at the outset.

If these two individuals cannot find synergy behind the vision of the churches merging, then certainly no one else will be able to. In the event the person of peace and the leader of a church are not the same person, it may be wise to invite both of these men to the first meeting. This meeting should happen in an informal, casual setting where the two men can exchange stories of God's grace in their churches and discuss their current situations without the formal dynamics of a meeting. During this conversation both men should listen for:

- The degree of theological and philosophical uniformity between the churches and the openness of the church to change.
- The facts of the current situation of the church. Leaders should take care to listen for how leaders' assessments compare with the due-diligence research they have already completed.
- Any perceived impediments that may hinder the feasibility of the merger, such as debt or cantankerous members.
- The nature of leadership and decision making in the church context. It is vital that a leader understands both how decisions are supposed to be made and how they are actually made in the church context.

The best approach is to allow each man to paint a compelling picture of the church's vision. For church planters this should be a relatively easy process, as many of them have recently spent an extended period of time casting vision and raising support for their church plant.

For established churches, this vision will often develop in the form of an "if only" conversation. Leaders will say, "If only we had a way to engage our neighborhood," "If only we had a passion for the lost," "If only we had the pastor we had two decades ago," and the like. Ideally the church planter can see himself and the church as an answer to the "if-onlys" posed by the existing church. These conversations will allow each man a chance to hear what the other envisions as a proper metric for the success of the church.



### Off-the-Record Talks

Vision either finds fertile soil or it doesn't. The way to determine buy-in to a vision is to monitor the "off-the-record" conversations that follow. How does the person of peace respond in the days following an initial conversation? Does he call, text, email or provide a clear next step quickly?

Does he talk to his friends about the conversation and share it with the passion and energy one would if he had just discovered a new, exciting business opportunity? If so, then it is likely he is open to moving the conversation forward.

These off-the-record conversations should happen with a very select group of people at the outset. This may be a few (two to three) trusted friends or an existing staff member of either church. The church planter should share the potential with the same type group—his pastoral team, a trusted leader or an outside pastoral confidante. While the church may know of the general desire for partnership, there should be a very small circle of leaders who know the name of the church with which they are thinking of partnering.

### Formal Meeting

These small inner circles form the invite list to the first meeting. The attendee list for the first meeting should be the narrow segment of each church that knows about the merger potential. It will most certainly include the pastoral staff of the church plant and the existing church and the recognized person of peace. In this meeting these leaders should recount the process up until this point, share a formal update on the church and its mission and vision and pray. Ideally this happens at the established church facility and with little fanfare. The smaller the meeting the better, as it is vital this meeting go well if the process is to continue.

The initial two visionary leaders should take care to plan the meeting so that the right people tell the right story in order to cast compelling vision. The meeting should be crafted so as to accomplish the goal of learning and sharing information and should not devolve into a host of "but what about" questions at this point. The time will come for that. At this point the essential facts need to be established and a vision needs to

be painted. Intentional time for joint prayer should be the focus of this meeting.

### Third-Party Advocate

An oft asked question is the role in which an outsider should play in these meetings. Should a denominational leader or an outside pastor be in the room during this first, formal conversation? Ideally the answer is no—at least not yet. There are a number of reasons for this:

- The dynamics of the meeting shift by necessity when a third party is introduced and the meeting feels more formal and professional.
- Church planters often receive funding from denominational leaders and, therefore, will be hesitant to be honest and open.
- Established church leaders desire to “save face” before their peers. Since most denominational leaders are the age of established church pastors, it can be shameful for established church leaders to have these conversations in front of them.
- Leaders and consultants often have different visions for the process by which church mergers should happen. Consultants can fall into the trap of mapping out a strategy they have used with success in the past but that does not fit the current circumstances or churches.
- Leadership shifts when a third party is in the room. This first conversation gives both churches the opportunity to see the other leader lead. Particularly in a context where the church planter is the only pastoral leader in the room, this meeting provides a wonderful opportunity for him to lead and demonstrate what the ethos of the church leadership will be under his leadership.

If the leadership dynamics demand a third-party advocate, it would be better to use another pastor who is connected to both churches or wait and introduce a consultant at a later place in the merger conversation. This person should play the role of advocate for the churches and not a

negotiator.

This formal meeting will be the key to unlocking the third gate. If the meeting goes well, people affirm the vision, and there is a sense of openness to continue the conversation then the leaders can enter the next stage.

## GATE 3

*Unlocking gate 3 rests almost exclusively on healthy relationships. Much like the process of finding a suitable spouse, churches begin a process of dating at this point.*

### Dating

This process should begin with a series of more informal “dating” type conversations with those involved in the first formal meeting. This could include a joint date night in a fun, informal and relaxed setting with the people from that meeting. This will provide a casual atmosphere and allow friendships and relationships to form that will make conversations more fluid in the future.

In general, people are more apt to talk freely in these types of settings; therefore a discerning listener will be able to learn more about the state of the church, the quality of the leadership, the relational shrapnel that may exist, deep hurt or divisiveness between team members and the like.

### Vision Drips

Formal, churchwide conversations are not important at this point. It is too early. Rather, vision begins to seep to other secondary leaders in the body to determine their subjective and preferential responses to the idea. Questions like, “What do you know about \_\_\_\_ church?” or “How would you feel about the idea of joining with another church?” serve to provide leaders a sense of how the vision will resonate with the congregation. Will it fall on hard soil, deaf ears or willing servants?

At this point the leaders from the respective churches can allow their leaders to inform their relational next steps. In many ways, simply by tracing the flow of conversation, one can discern who the main power

brokers in any church are. Who does the leadership talk to first? Whose opinion carries the most weight? This trail of relationships allows wise leaders to map the informal leadership structure of the church.

Leaders from each church should find informal ways to exchange stories about how this vision was received. Ideally, by this point key leaders from the churches are regularly exchanging messages via email or text message, which provides these updates.

### Leadership Meeting

A larger, formal vision-casting meeting should be scheduled after the vision has steeped for a couple of weeks. This meeting should have a wider invite list comprised of those in leadership positions in the respective churches.

Remember, the first formal meeting only included those who were actual leaders (true influencers) in the church. This second meeting is made up of those in positions of leadership. This could be an existing deacon board, a search committee, a board of directors and certainly the pastors and staff of each church.

During this meeting the most charismatic and visionary leader (often the lead church planter) should once again map out the potential for the merger. These conversations should revolve around hope and potential and not devolve into a host of secondary matters. This formal meeting should include a time of interaction around the nature of each church and a formal time of prayer. The goal of this meeting is information transmission. As the old telephone game proves, information gets distorted as it is shared. So, as people begin to hear about the merger conversion through “vision seepage” it is essential for leaders to quickly gather the leaders from both churches to paint a true and reliable picture.

Do not be surprised if people share unreliable information during the vision drip phase. Even if people have heard less-than-reliable information at the outset, they have heard it from a person within their church who they trust and not from the leader of another church making a sales pitch. A skillful leader can take the conversations that have happened up to this point and redirect them toward the true story of the church merger. The public vision-casting during this meeting is the most vital

moment in the merge process up to this point. It is here that the leader will have to unite people around a shared vision, even if all of the details and questions remain unanswered.

Following this meeting it may also be wise to gather the spouses of those same leaders for a time when they can all hear the vision. This can happen by hosting a backyard picnic at the home of one of the leaders where each couple can come, meet others, engage in casual conversation, hear from key leaders and pray together.

### Church Visits

Those leaders who attended the second formal meeting should be encouraged to visit the other church in following weeks. This need not be a large team each week, as this may put the spotlight on the merge in an unhelpful way. Rather, a small number of couples can go as visitors to the other church over a series of weeks simply to observe.

Such visits can inform the leadership of the current reality and of their similarities or not. Wise pastoral leaders will be aware of the times when these individuals visit the church and will take the time to invite them to lunch after the service and debrief on their experience.

## GATE 4

*If these meetings are profitable and seem to warrant further conversation, leaders are confronted with a number of big, behind-the-scenes decisions at this point, which will serve to unlock gate number 4.*

### Current Leadership

During this time of dating (roughly one to three months) the leadership of each church should consider vital decisions that will need to be made for the merger to actually happen. The most important decision regards the current leadership of each church. Even if there is not a current pastor in the established church, there is always a person or group who is functioning in a pastoral manner. What will happen to the church leadership if the merge were to happen? There are two realistic options to consider:

**Integration** – The churches could integrate the leadership structure of both churches by forming a pastoral team made up of pastors from each church. Or, if the church does not have a pastor, the currently recognized leadership may be able to continue serving faithfully as staff members, deacons or lay leaders in the new, merged church. **WARNING:** This decision is rife with landmines. Any degree of theological or philosophical disunity at this level poses great danger to the health of the merger.

**Off-Ramps** – Another option is to provide a healthy, generous off-ramp for one or more of the leaders. Often this will be the pastor of the established church, and in many cases this may be a great blessing and a welcomed answer to prayer. Many pastors are stuck in roles they know do not match their giftedness or desire at the current time but can't make a transition without harming their families and their churches. Thus, they stay locked in an ever-descending spiral. Churches should think through how they can help the pastor find a new ministry context or transition to retirement in a manner that encourages him to see his next step in light of his legacy. This will likely involve the church providing a financial package that allows the pastor time to transition to a new ministry context or retirement without great financial risk.

However, this may also be the case for the church planter. Many planters begin with a sense of calling to church planting only to find it is not what they thought it would be. They now have a commitment, financial giving and a core group, but are aware of their clear deficiencies in pastoral ministry. In a similar way, they can be encouraged to hand their church off to a more capable and healthy leadership team.

The answers to these questions will be informed by the two formal meetings that have recently taken place. They will often point a spotlight on the clear and recognized leader(s) of the new, merged church. Simply observing who rises to the top as leader of this group can be helpful in determining leadership roles for the new church. The person or team who is acting like the leader in the merge needs to be leading the church

following the merge if it is going to be successful.

### Theology and Philosophy

Churches cannot merge and remain the same. Regardless of the degree of complexity in the merge, both churches will change. Leaders must determine which areas are vital to the nature of the church (and thus non negotiable) and which are tools for the function of the church (and thus negotiable).

Think of the merged church in terms of a picture. Every picture has three features. The first is the focal object of the picture. What is the picture of? What is essential in making the picture the picture?

A church functions like a picture and the object of focus must be clearly defined. The central object of the picture must be one's theology of the mission of the church. This must not be compromised because it is what makes the church. Without this a church ceases to exist.

Secondarily, every picture has a background. This is not essential to the picture but nevertheless gives focus and prominence to the main object of the image. For the church, these background objects do not define the church but they do define *that* church.

In other words, these are the unique, contextualized ministry philosophies that aid the church in its disciple-making mission. These background matters may include biblical community through small groups or plural elder leadership. These matters give shape to the church's mission and make it a unique manifestation of the Body of Christ.

And finally, all good pictures have a frame. Frames support the picture but are in many ways inconsequential to the object of the picture. Frames may change because they get broken, are out of date or no longer match the taste of the owner.

In a similar way, all churches have frames. This is not what makes the church, not what make that church, but rather, what makes that church right now. Things like the worship service time, the order of the liturgy of the church, musical style and other elements could be considered frame issues. These types of factors are not irrelevant to the life of the church, but they must be held loosely for a merger to happen.

Church frames change consistently over time and the greater the degree of sociological, historical or economic dissimilarity between the two churches considering a merger the greater the differences in preferences around the frame.

The most vital decisions for the viability of the merge are for each church to define the objects of the picture. What is the focus? What's in the background? And what is the frame?

For example, one leader may say that the name of the church is a "frame decision," meaning that it is open to flexibility and change, while another believes it is at the very heart of the local church's identity and thus central to the picture.

Care should be given to the signature ministries of the church. For example, many churches pride themselves on Sunday School. Is Sunday School a focus, background or frame matter? It seems that peeling back the layers of the purpose of Sunday School would reveal that theological education is more central than the frame of Sunday School. Thus, the frame may be able to change without losing the value of theological education.

These decisions may look different in different contexts but are essential for the mission of both churches. If agreement on the elements that serve as the focus, background, and frame cannot be found internally to each church and between the churches, then the merger will not be possible. Agreement must be found on which matters constitute which element of the church before the leaders can undertake the massive challenge of addressing how these changes will take place.

### Church Name

This issue demands its own category due to the complexity of this decision. On one hand, established churches have a name that has historical precedent and serves to establish them in the community. A change of this name may create the perception of "hostile takeover" that the process outlined in this book has worked hard to avoid. On the other hand, the church may have a negative or stale reputation in the community and for a church plant to simply take on the name may give the congregation of the church plant the sense that they are "giving up." Church planting



leaders may also be reluctant to sacrifice the efforts they have made to engage a city under the banner of their church's name.

*Two compromise alternatives are possible:*

**Create a blended name** – This is a name that retains a piece of each church's name. For example, Covenant Baptist Church could merge with Grace Church to become Covenant Grace Baptist Church. **WARNING:** In an effort find unity here, make sure you don't blend a name that sounds strange or forced. Good intentions to create unity could force you to live with a name that is less than the best.

**Create a new name** – Some may choose to take the opportunity to build on the unity that is seen in the merge by uniting around a new name.<sup>70</sup> This gives both churches ownership of the new name and demonstrates compromise on the part of each party.<sup>71</sup>

In walking through this process it is vital that pastors assist their congregations in viewing the church as a people and not as a building or a name. The church is the people of God living on mission to make disciples in the context where God has placed them. In this way, the merger process can become a valuable tool for the discipleship of your people.

## GATE 5

*If gate 4 opens, then be prepared—a number of challenging conversations await. Developing a clear concept of the picture opens the path for the most essential conversation in the process.*

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70 Often the best way to do this is to take on the name of the oldest congregation and then Do Business As (DBA) a new church name. This allows the merged church to assume the churches tax ID number and credit status, while still taking on a new name.

71 For example, in our context Covenant Grace Baptist Church merged with Renewal Church to become The Church at Cherrydale. We decided it was best to just refer to ourselves as "the church" and tie ourselves to the section of the city in which our facility was located (Cherrydale).

## The Hard Conversation

In this formal conversation the leadership from each church can map out their answers to the three main elements of making the merger work: leadership, theology and ministry philosophy, and church name. Ideally, this conversation occurs between those who attend the first formal meeting—the pastors and staff of both churches and the person of peace. If the invite list to this meeting is too large, the challenges of finding unity grow exponentially.

Decisions about leadership provide a necessary place to start. One leader must be willing to ask the other, “If this merge happens, what do you see as your role?” Each leader’s answer to this question will likely determine the potential for the merger. Perhaps one of the leaders says that he sees a united leadership team being possible, or perhaps he shares that he would likely transition out and let new leadership take over. If the leader from one church sees himself on a new, united team and the other church leadership does not feel that a united team will work, then it is likely the merge will not work. The critical factor is not which of these options is chosen, but that leaders from both churches agree on this decision.

Second, both churches should outline the ways they defined their picture. What was the object of the picture, what was in the background and what made up the frame? The churches must find agreement on the doctrinal and theological foundations of the church.

From there, they must begin to determine what is in the picture’s background and what is in the frame. This conversation will allow the leaders of both churches to see clear points of disunity that would make a merger challenging, such as a desire for age-graded Sunday School curriculum on the one hand and a passion for biblical community in small groups on the other hand. Here biblical community would be the background issue that serves to bring into focus the church’s essential mission. Biblical community is a nonnegotiable background issue. However, the frame is small groups or Sunday School. These are tools that are designed to foster biblical community, and they should be open to change.

Finally, the leaders should talk about the church’s name openly at

this point. This will ensure that each church does not get further into the process only to learn that the church name is a deal-breaker.

### Defining the Relationship

The outcome of the hard conversations outlined above will give each leader great clarity in determining the nature of the relationship moving forward. If unity is found, then the churches may move from dating to engagement.

*Three options seem viable at this point:*

#### **Option #1– Rent with no view of merger**

It may be determined that the best option is for the churches to continue a separate existence under the same roof for the foreseeable future. This will often happen when the upside of church partnership is clearly discerned, yet there are too many differences on the framing issues to consider long-term merger. It may be that the ethnic, economic or stylistic distinctions of the churches are too great to unite around the picture. In such a case, it may be advisable to allow the churches to continue to meet separately but to steward the same church facility.

Another reason for this consideration may be the vast difference in ministry philosophy that is often found within evangelical Christianity. It could be that one church desires to merge for the sake of having a multisite video campus that meets on Sunday nights, allowing the existing church to continue to meet on Sunday mornings.

#### **Option #2 – Rent as a step towards merger**

Another option could be to enter into a rental agreement as a way of allowing the churches an extended period of time to court one another and to discern the viability of merger. In many ways this serves as a means of slowing entering the waters of church mergers. It may provide the established church time to observe the church plant in action and make it easier for congregants of the established church to attend the new church's service. It can also provide a revenue stream to established churches that may be struggling to survive. All the

while, it provides a church plant with a space to meet and often protects them from the strain of temporary facilities.

Should the churches determine to move toward this course of action, it is wise to draw up a written rental agreement with an agreed-upon time commitment. Here the nature of the relationship can be spelled out, and an end date can be established. A couple of warnings are needed at this point. Renting as a step toward merging will almost always end in a loss of relationship between the churches if merger is not the ultimate result. It is hard for churches to enter into a friendship after they have begun to live together.

Also, dual usage of the same facility, particularly by churches of the same ethnicity, presents a confusing picture to the city. Every missions outreach of the church is met by awkward conversations of why two churches that profess to love Jesus hold two different services under two differing names while meeting in the same building. Even nonbelievers intuitively ask “Why don’t they just become one church?”

Finally, dual usage arrangements create a host of expected frustrations and turf issues. Invariably, one church does not meet the other church’s expectations for timeliness, cleanliness, or a host of other tertiary matters that provide sources of disagreement. The temporary commitment of a dual usage agreement means the churches often find it easier to just break up than to work through the complexity of relational unity amidst these frustrations.

These issues mean that renting as a gateway to merger should be considered only if there are clear reasons not to move straight toward a full merger.

### **Option #3 – Merge**

The churches may determine that moving toward a full merge is most advisable. Clearly stating this as the desired outcome allows the leaders of both churches to move toward the first conversation with the entire membership of each church.

*If gate 5 opens, then it is clear a merge is feasible. This does not mean it will happen. But it does mean it could happen. From here the leaders of each church (who now understand and buy into the vision of the merged church) begin by garnering support from their congregations.*

### One-on-Ones

At this point the leaders of both churches should develop a list of people who would be most negatively affected by the merger and meet with them. The following people populate this list:

- Those whose personality is least likely to lend itself to change
- Those who have been around the church for a long time
- Those with significant relational wounds
- Those who like to fight
- Those who have outspoken preferential issues with the way church should be done
- Those for whom the merge would create practical challenges—such as travel distance to the new facility

These informal conversations should seek to answer the objections the individual may have. For example, a leader may say “I know this move means the new location will be 15 minutes farther from your home. We love you and want you to know that we are thankful you have followed our leadership up until this point and would ask that you consider this merge as a God-honoring decision and follow us again even though it will be harder for you.” The simple fact that leaders care enough about people to know their potential objections and to meet with them to discuss the matter is enough to calm sources of potential disunity.

### Family Meeting

At this point, each church should hold a family meeting of the members of the respective churches to lay out the nature of merger. All of the prior

steps are vital to this meeting as it allows leaders to lead courageously and with vision rather than saying something like, “We might enter into a partnership with another church in the city, but we don’t really know what it will look like, who will lead it or what the nature of our relationship will be.” Instead, the pastors or leaders of each church can stand before their people and clearly outline:

- The process by which God brought about this conversation
- The nature of the church in question
- The desired outcome
- The plan for leadership
- The specifics of what will need to change and what will not change

This meeting should be led by the visionary leader of each church (or person with most visionary capacity in the church) and should simply outline the items above without soliciting public questions and answers. News of this magnitude is likely to fall onto various types of soil, and an outspoken opponent of the merger, if given a public voice in the congregation, can spoil the perception of the rest of the group. The meeting should end with an invitation by the leadership for those with questions to seek out one-on-one meetings with the leadership.

### Undecided Voices

These family meetings will alert the leaders to four groups of people: bold supporters, willing followers, undecided voices and dissenting voices. These final two groups should be addressed at this point. Leaders should begin by addressing undecided individuals. The best context for such conversations is informal.

Often there are some underlying fears affecting the perception of these individuals. These fears need to be heard and carefully addressed, even if they are unfounded. For others their personalities lead them to be more reluctant to risk-taking and change. And finally, some undecided individuals have experiences with churches and church mergers that cause them

hesitation. The very presence of an established church facility is enough to scare many people away from the idea of a merger. Or the established congregation may have a stereotype of the average church plant that shapes their perception of the merger.

Another helpful strategy for these individuals is to set up personal interaction with leaders from the other church. For example, a pastor may arrange a meeting between a hesitant member of his congregation and the church planter of the other church. This allows those with questions to get one-on-one face time with the other leader, build rapport, hear vision and truly be heard.

### Dissenting Voices

Unfortunately, leaders should expect there to be dissenting voices from the outset. Only in the case of a very small and lifeless church might there be little-to-no objections to the potential of the merge. The reality is that established churches and church plants alike can expect there to be those who are outspoken against the merger from the outset. Dissenting voices come from many places:

- People who have assumed a leadership position in the church that vastly outmatches their leadership capacity. This will often be the case in churches without leaders, as someone will always fill the leadership void. In exiting churches without pastors, this will often be men or deacon teams who lack the ability to make visionary leadership decisions and feel threatened when such decisions are made around them.
- The church matriarch and widows who have sentimental memories attached to their spouses and the church facility.
- Elderly congregants who have developed a longer history with a church facility and its transitions and, by nature of their age, are less open to change.
- Those who simply like to complain. Be it the color of the carpet or the volume of the music, some people simply like to gripe, and something of the level of a church merger will give them ample opportunity for complaint.

Rather than shaming them or writing them off, it is better for the leaders to address these individuals head on. Dissenting voices are often the most outspoken voices, and unless they are addressed there's increased potential for factions and division. Again, personal conversations are key. These conversations can aid the leader in uncovering the size and nature of the opposition. If they address it appropriately, leaders can make wise decisions about how to move forward in spite of opposition. Without conversation, these dissenting voices will quickly build a coalition among the undecided individuals and have the critical mass to derail the process.

### Spiritual Warfare

The reality of leading people in a fallen world means that leaders should expect a curveball at this point in the process. Satan will target the unity of the church by bringing about some means of unpredictable divisiveness. Be it a threatened lawsuit, a gossip-filled letter or a personal attack against key leadership, spiritual warfare will run amuck during this time.

The enemy will attack, and a skillful leader must not be caught off guard when those attacks come. Predictable manifestations of these attacks are disunity of the team, doubt and discouragement about the possibility of a healthy merger, challenges associated with caring for two churches moving toward uniting, personal sin habits among leadership and unrighteous decisions by dissenting voices or unregenerate church members.

Diligent prayer, united leadership and a supportive and loving church family will be necessary to sustain a leader through this season of doubt and discouragement.

### Joint Celebration

It is vital to celebrate all that God is doing because there will surely be people who are unconvinced or disagree with the merge and their will be oppressive spiritual warfare during this period. Finding a means of uniting the churches for a fun churchwide celebration is essential. Ideally this is not simply a church service at the church facility.



Instead church leaders could reserve a public park and invite both churches to an outdoor cookout. Here the kids can play, the adults can mingle, and people can garner of sense of excitement about the potential work of God in the uniting of the two churches.

## GATE 7

*Gate 6 opens if there is clearly enough support from both churches following the family meeting and the conversations with undecided and dissenting voices. Once again, the leaders will need to do a number of behind-the-scene-tasks for the next gate to open.*

### Legal Assistance

Church mergers have a business component to them due to the change of ownership of facilities and assets. Also, there is potential for dissenting voices to threaten legal action. Thus, it is advisable for the churches to secure legal council in assessing their current bylaws, the merger process up to this point and the needed documents for a final merger vote to take place. At this point the church leaders should ensure they understand their church polity and exactly how such a merger decision would be made. A bit of research in the city will likely lead church leaders to discover a Christian lawyer who has worked with churches in the past and will understand the complexity of church decisions in a congregational environment.

### Formal Documents

It will be helpful for the church to develop a Summary Plan of Merger. This should be a concise document that spells out with clarity and specificity all major facets of the life of the new church. This document should deal with any structures that are no longer going to exist, are going to change or will be created from scratch. There is no need for the churches to develop separate Summary Plans, rather the churches can unite to create a single document to put before both churches outlining the plan.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> The Summary Plan of Merger from The Church at Cherrydale is attached as Appendix 1.

Also, since it is almost uniformly true that mergers change certain things about the church, it is vital that both churches unite around a new Constitution and Bylaws. Ideally the two churches take one version of the previously existing bylaws and use them as a starting place for the rewrite. In most cases this will happen by taking the church's bylaws that most closely match the picture of the ministry philosophy the leaders agreed upon. However, it is often the case that the church agrees on the ministry philosophy of the younger church, but the younger church has never taken the time to develop clear bylaws. If this is the case, then leaders should take an existing copy of the bylaws of a church they respect and use them as a foundation for developing their own.<sup>73</sup>

Finally, the legal professionals will assist the church leaders in developing a formal merger document that will be filed with the Secretary of State's office and kept by the lawyer in the event of a lawsuit. The lawyer will have a document containing the legal language necessary for such a formal document. It is not essential that the entire church see this document as the salient points should be spelled out in the Summary Plan of Merger.

### Family Meeting Q&A

The development of these documents gives a baseline for a formal conversation with the churches where precise answers can be given to the questions everyone is asking. At this meeting of each church independently, formal documents can be distributed and discussed. By this time care has been taken to bring the congregation along in the process, thus even difficult or potential divisive decisions can be addressed in a spirit of unity.

During this meeting the Summary Plan of Merger should be distributed and the "but what about" questions should be answered. This document should not be distributed ahead of time. If it is, the congregations will form opinions about the decisions outlined in the document prior to hearing from the pastors themselves. The unity of the pastors' ability to

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73 For a copy of the Constitution and Bylaws of Covenant Grace Baptist Church or Renewal Church prior to the merger or of the united Constitution and Bylaws of The Church at Cherrydale, email the author at [matt@tccherrydale.com](mailto:matt@tccherrydale.com)

cast vision and the formality of the written document will help to provide the information most people will need to make an informed decision about the merge.

### Leadership Q&A

It is also vital for both churches to hear from the merger leadership team at this point, whether this is a blended team from both churches or the existing leadership of a singular church. The latter poses the greatest need for clear communication to the alternate congregation. For example, if an existing church is merging with a church plant and the pastoral leadership of the church plant will be the new pastoral leadership of the merged church, then it is vital the pastoral leadership of the church plant spend time publicly addressing questions or concerns from the existing church's congregation. Again, much of this should have already happened in smaller, informal, relational environments as the leaders have moved through the previous gates.

However, the need for clear, compelling and uniting leadership is necessary. This only happens when the new leadership steps to the front before the gathered congregation and clearly addresses the merge and their hopes and dreams for the new church. Ideally this happens in two ways: (1) Through a Q&A with the congregation and the new leadership and (2) through a vision-filled sermon preached by the new leadership to the existing congregation. Each of these contexts serves to fuel the fires of the merge and builds unity around the new leadership.

## Gate 8

### Joint Service

The entrance to the final gate should begin by holding a joint service to clearly show what the church will look like when it gathers as a merged congregation. This should only happen after the other steps have been taken. Rushing into a joint service will needlessly harm both bodies if the merge does not happen. In many ways, a joint service is like the rehearsal before a wedding. The plans have been made, the parties have been established, and the merge should be all but ensured by this point.

Leaders must take care to embrace two realities. First, they want to show honor and respect for those for whom the merger will be challenging. This is particularly true in areas of stylistic changes. If the new church is more progressive musically or has a liturgy that is different from the existing church, then care must be taken to lovingly and relationally introduce these new realities without being needlessly offensive.

For example, if the church typically is led by a full band that uses a drum set, it may be advisable to do an acoustic music set on the Sunday of the joint service.

Conversely, the picture of the church painted during the joint service needs to be a genuine reflection of what the new church will look like. The leaders need not abandon essential marks of their church in an effort to win approval. A genuine and honest representation of the shape and form of the new church is vital. At this point, the joint service should not be approached in a way that attempts to “win votes” but rather should be seen as a way of exposing people to the new church and allowing them to determine if this is the best place for them to remain as long-term members. If not, the leaders should be prepared to assist people in finding a new church home that more appropriately reflects their preferences.

### Vote Sunday

The joint service should prompt great excitement about the merge and thus it is vital that the vote be taken as soon after the joint service as possible. Leaders would be wise to invite their congregations to pursue a meeting with the pastors if they would like to discuss anything from the joint service that they deemed inappropriate. However, at this point, nothing should come as a surprise to the church. Issues like music and sermon style should have been discussed long before. This service should simply serve to reinforce what people already know to be true about the new church.

This then prepares the church to take a vote on the merger. This should happen at both churches on the same Sunday and the decision should involve voting on the Summary Plan of Merger, which includes an affirmation of the new church Constitution and Bylaws. Once the vote has

been taken, ideally the churches can communicate immediately the results of the vote and use the remaining time to celebrate God's provision rather than leaving their people in suspense until the following week. Once the vote is taken it is critical that it be seen as the final step in the union. Much like a marriage, the churches are declared one on the vote Sunday. There should not be an opt-out clause or the perception of a trial run. Rather the merger should work like a marriage, and divorce should not be an option.

From there the churches should seek to unite their gatherings as soon as feasible. Wise teams will have begun to make preparations for the uniting of the churches before the vote is taken. This will allow for an effective and speedy transition that minimizes the lull created between the vote Sunday and the first Sunday the churches meet together as one church. Once the voting is made official the churches should unite quickly and begin the hard work of uniting in mission.

### Summary

As you can see, a number of vital threads run throughout this process. For one, patience is critical and rushing the process will derail the potential merge. Second, relationships reign supreme as people will follow those they trust. And finally, communication fuels the mission as people want to be led and will often follow those who can paint a compelling picture of the future. Church mergers, if pursued with humility, patience and diligence are a hopeful catalyst for God's work through His church. And yet, they are filled with potential sources of frustration or disunity. It is to these challenges that we turn in the final chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

# THE EXPECTED CHALLENGES

Mergers are not without their challenges. Anytime you seek to combine sinful and frail humans into the same church, under the same leadership and vision, you are destined for at least some difficulties. Knowing typical reactions to successful church mergers can prevent leaders from both overreacting and overcorrecting. A number of questions are typical and predictable.

### What did we do?

Merging churches requires hard work, particularly in the weeks immediately following the merger vote. These weeks pose a host of difficulties when dealing with issues such as the integration of:

- Small groups
- Staffs
- Meeting schedules
- Big events and calendaring
- Bank accounts
- Membership rosters
- Church discipline issues
- Mission projects

- Publicity materials

And these are just the major issues. There are innumerable minor details that immediately confront leaders. These details will make the job of overseeing the church much more difficult for a time. The danger is that leaders grow discouraged, thinking they have made a mistake, or grow exhausted, working overtime to try to make headway into a task list that will seemingly never end. Leaders must remain focused on the mission and take heart in the fruit of their labors in order to not grow weary through the journey.

### What do we do?

Difficulty and complexity are related, yet distinct. Complexity happens as the result of the merged church skipping several stages of growth without the aid of a progressive learning curve. Leaders immediately are forced to integrate a larger-than-normal volume of people into the ministries of the church, are faced with the decisions that go along with owning a facility and suddenly find themselves dealing with the sin struggles and personal tragedies that are associated with a much larger congregation.

This is akin to driving around town on a rural dirt road and immediately getting on the interstate with no on-ramp. Typical church-growth curves and the balance of suffering and pain in an average church do little to prepare one for the leadership required in a merged church. Leaders will face fear and uncertainty and should expect often to hear themselves say, “I have no clue how to do this.” A team-leadership model and intentional prioritization of the scope and sequence of the work will be necessary for the new church leaders to thrive in the months following the merge.

### What happened to me?

Changing churches results in changes in the hearts of leaders. The complexity and responsibility one feels through the process often leads to leaders limping to the finish line of the merger, thankful that God has provided for His church, yet weary from the journey.

Often these processes take an exorbitant amount of time, which means the pastors are diverted from other needed pastoral functions during that

time. The distraction of a merger also means that the leader may have been functioning in areas outside his passions for some time. (Few pastoral leaders are going to say they feel called to the ministry of mergers.)

However, they should feel called to the ministry of making disciples and recognize that the merger was a needed tool to accomplish that goal. Leaders should expect it to take some time for them to get back on their feet personally and emotionally and attempt to allocate time for healing and refreshment soon after the merger is completed.

### Why did we change?

Churches change constantly, yet the change is often so incremental no one notices. However, church mergers make change prominent for everyone to see. All churches involved in a merger will change. Even if the leadership stays in place, the church will change. The established church will experience a surge in attendance, parking problems, new programs and a new style of leadership. The church plant will also change. The facility will cause people to view the church differently. There is simply no avoiding the fact that gathering in an elementary school cafeteria creates a different ethos than does gathering in an established auditorium adorned with stained glass windows and chandeliers. In addition, churches will inherit a number of programs, some of which are very good and need to be left in place. Minimizing the change will not help. Reminding people of the mission will.

### Who are they?

Size will alter the accessibility people have to one another and to the pastoral staff. In a small church plant, it may be possible for everyone in the church to be personally connected to one of the pastors and his family. The increased size will mean that the pastors are not as connected to each member of the congregation as they once were. Also, people are not as connected to one another. On the one hand, there is a whole new segment of the congregation who can provide a rich source of biblical community. On the other hand, there are simply more people making it increasingly challenging for them to stay connected to those they saw on a regular basis when the church was smaller. Such churches often grow



accustomed to seeing and knowing everyone in attendance each Sunday and often will not adjust well to their inability to continue to do so.

Finally the growth in the church will result in challenges for the relationships among the staff. Increasingly the staff will have to work independently or delegate work they all once did together. Team morale and camaraderie should be central to the task of the leaders following the merge.

### Where are they?

People will leave as a result of a church merger. A leader should expect at least two waves of departure from the church in the year following the merger. One will come immediately after the merger vote from some of those who voted against it. (Not everyone who voted against the merger will leave.) Hopefully, if the leaders have moved through the process faithfully and effectively, these people will just leave quietly and without fanfare. Leaders should offer to help them connect to another healthy church in the city but not attempt to force them to stay or shame them for leaving.

The second wave of departure will be more challenging. This will come several months after the merger and will represent people who leave for a number of reasons. Some were never committed to the church's mission in the first place. Perhaps they simply liked being a "small church" and did not like being a church that makes disciples. Thus, decisions that compromise the former to make room for the latter will push them out. Perhaps they simply grew up in the church and the merger gave them an easy off-ramp.

A second group to leave will be those not committed to the church merger. They may have followed the leadership out of loyalty and yet have some reservations about the decisions that were made and their implications. They will often "give it a shot" but decide it is not for them in the long run.

A final group will be those people who have practical challenges that make the merger challenging for their family. For example, a family that

lives farther from the merged church may leave to find a church closer to home. Pastors should assist those leaving the church to do so honorably by avoiding disunity and quickly connecting them to a new church. While these departures may hurt, rest assured that, when done well, new disciple-making disciples will come.

### What did that cost?

Mergers have a cost: Not simply in terms of time, but also in terms of money. Leaders should anticipate the financial cost of a merger. In 2012, Jim Tomberlin and Warren Bird wrote that the average costs of mergers ranged from \$18,000 for churches with under 200 people in attendance to \$469,000 for churches with more than 2,000 in attendance.<sup>74</sup> Expenses would include things such as building payments, renovations, new technology and equipment, legal fees and publicity and branding for the new church. Many established church facilities are in a state of disrepair, and the members of the church have not had the time, effort or energy to make needed changes. Some of these needed improvements may be disclosed prior to the merger, and some may be uncovered as the facility is being used with increasing frequency and an increasing volume of people. Rooms that have been vacant for years, when used, will uncover broken doors, water leaks, broken AC units and the like. Quickly build-ings can become burdensome.

Budgetary considerations should be made to address these issues and leaders must prioritize the repairs in a way that provides time for the new tithe base of the church to be established. Also, some people may stop giving. Those who vote against the merger, or leave as a result, may reduce the tithe base of the church for a season. While some people may stop giving, people may rally around the new compelling vision and the new church will be better positioned to allocate strategic funding to missions and catapult the church to new levels of disciple production. Leaders must consistently remind themselves that buildings are burdens, but they are also blessings.

### What do we do now?

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74 Tomberlin and Bird, *Better*, 105-116.

Growth can pose a practical challenge as the facility may quickly fill up. A missionary-minded church plant given a home in a strategic location will often grow. This will leave the leaders to face the inevitable questions of what to do next. Church leaders should work to ensure the meeting space of the merged church is sizable enough to contain the new church at the outset. There is nothing more challenging than trying to unite a church that meets in multiple services. And yet, the reality of the need for multiple services may happen quickly. Leaders should develop a plan for phase 2 of the merge quickly, which will likely include both multiple gathering times and aggressive church planting.

### Why aren't you like \_\_\_\_\_?

At times the “back-up quarterback syndrome” will confront the new church leaders. The crowd will want new leadership and then quickly not like the way he leads. The previous leader’s preaching and leadership style will often be a measure of success for the new leadership. At times these critiques will be wounding, as well-meaning people will say things that are poorly stated or unhelpful.

At other times, these critiques will be helpful in allowing the leader to see areas in which he needs to grow. The visionary leader can rest assured he will take some kidney punches through the process, but this need not knock him out of leading.

### Why did you do that?

Relational shrapnel is inevitable during this process, and people will consistently be confronted with leadership decisions they don’t understand. People will ask “Why did you do that?” about everything in the early days. For some this question will be asked out of ill will. But often it will be asked out of simple curiosity or misunderstanding.

Leaders should take this opportunity to teach and inform people about the decisions made, giving them grace to learn, grow and adjust to a new style of life. It’s crucial to provide healthy on-ramps for new structures like small groups. Uniting the groups at the church facility for a short season to teach on their purpose may provide a viable way of integrating new people into relational community.

## Where is the mission?

This question should serve as a “check-engine light” for the leaders of the merged church. People who have been living on mission in a young, agile church plant will be able to sense mission shifts in the church body. The drift toward institutionalism, complexity and overprogramming will bear down on leaders, and they must ensure that they propel the church to mission with the same fervor they had in the early days of the church plant.

Ideally the church will attempt to raise the mission temperature of the new church in numerous ways in the early months of merger. This may happen through joint mission efforts, missionary-minded big events, public baptisms, teaching on the mission of the church and celebration of members of the church living on mission.

## When are things going to fall apart?

The days following a healthy merger may feel like a honeymoon. Most people from both churches are encouraged and sense the presence of the Lord in their gathering. Those longing for leadership feel led and thrive under strong leadership. However, everyone knows that all good honeymoons come to an end. Thus in the early days, leaders should make changes quickly rather than progressively, knowing they have a vast array of relational capital to spend at this point. However, it is wise to consider how much change is too much in the early days. Pastors will need to determine which areas are the most important areas of change (such as ministry philosophy) and which areas can be left for a later time (like the aesthetics of the gathering space in the new facility). Rather than wondering when things are going to fall apart, leaders should leverage this wave of momentum and growth for greater disciple-making impact.

## Conclusion

These questions may seem overwhelming. And yet other essential questions loom on the horizon for those who fail to tackle such challenges. These questions aren’t from our congregations but from our God. He asks His church to be faithful to what He has entrusted. What will we do

with the vast resources at our disposal? Will we find difficult, yet effective ways to steward them for His glory? Or will we bury them in the sand and squander the legacy of the church in our day?

By God's grace and led by His Spirit, church mergers provide a means by which healthy, mission-fueled, disciple-making churches can fill every North American city.

APPENDIX

## SUMMARY OF PLAN OF MERGER

September 15, 2013

This is the summary of the plan of merger proposed by the pastors of Renewal Church and the staff and deacons of Covenant Grace Baptist Church. Prior notice of the proposed merger has been presented and a vote of the membership of each church to approve the merge will be taken on Sunday, September 15, 2013.

1. If approved Covenant Grace Baptist Church and Renewal Church will be merged effective September 29, 2013. Covenant Grace Baptist Church and Renewal Church will become, by name changes, The Church at Cherrydale (TCC).
2. TCC will remain a Southern Baptist church and will support the cooperative work of Baptists through our giving to the Cooperative Program, the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering.
3. TCC will continue its affiliation with the South Carolina Baptist Convention and will join the \_\_\_\_\_ (name of local Baptist association).
4. The Constitution and Bylaws of TCC will be the new Constitu-

tion and Bylaws attached as an appendix to this document. The Doctrinal Statement will be The Baptist Faith and Message, 2000 and the abridged statement included in the new Constitution and Bylaws.

5. The meeting place for TCC will be \_\_\_\_\_  
(physical address), which is Covenant Grace Baptist Church's current location.
  
6. The current Renewal Church pastors will serve as pastors of TCC:  
  
\_\_\_\_\_ (list pastoral staff)
  
7. The ministerial staff of TCC will be as follows:  
  
\_\_\_\_\_ (list ministerial staff)
  
8. The current Deacons of Covenant Grace Baptist Church and the current Directional Team of Renewal Church will be joined into one group to provide prayerful guidance and ensure relational harmony through the transition. This group will function to provide the TCC pastors insight into how best to lead through the merger. This team will be called The Church at Cherrydale Directional Team. This group will meet once a month for one year, at which time the pastors of TCC will reform a formal diaconate under the guidelines presented in the Bylaws.
  
9. Following a period of teaching on the core values of the church on Sunday mornings, those desiring covenant membership from Covenant Grace Baptist Church and Renewal Church will re-covenant together as a new church November 3, 2013 (six Sundays after first Sunday together). Those already a member in good standing of Renewal Church or Covenant Grace Baptist Church prior to the merge will be able to join on

this date without a membership class or elder interview. Those not already a member of either church will be asked to attend a membership class and have an elder interview prior to membership at TCC.

10. The Church at Cherrydale will operate under a small group ministry model. From September 29-October 27, the new church will meet corporately at the church building on Sunday nights to teach on biblical small groups and allow Covenant Grace members to join with a small group. Following the establishment of the formal membership on November 3, small groups will meet in homes throughout the city, and there will be no corporate activities at the church building on Sunday nights, except for Family Meetings, though individual small groups may choose to meet there at their discretion.
11. The new Directional Team will handle the work of the current formal committees until the pastors can form new servant teams.
12. The pastors will form a new financial team made up of \_\_\_\_\_ (names of a small group of members from each church who can assess the churches finances)
13. TCC will offer a time of biblical teaching and theological instruction on Sunday mornings prior to the larger, corporate gathering of the church (i.e., Sunday School/Core). The classes will be taught by members of TCC, open to all ages, and organized according to subject matter (Doctrinal studies, biblical books studies, or Baptist curriculum/quarterlies).
14. The staff and support staff of Covenant Grace Baptist Church and Renewal Church will continue at their same current salaries through the end of 2013.
15. No changes to the employment of the support staff will be con-



sidered until after January 1, 2014, to allow time for the new team to get to know one another and discern the best function of each individual for the health and ministry of TCC.

16. All assets of Renewal Church and Covenant Grace Baptist Church will be combined and owned by The Church at Cherrydale.
17. TCC retains the option to either sell the current houses owned by Covenant Grace Baptist Church or to utilize them as housing for further church ministries.
18. TCC will have Family Meetings on or around the first Sunday night of each month to build unity, pray and share about the ministry efforts of the new church.
19. TCC will seek to lovingly shepherd the senior adults (the current Forever Young Group) of the church through the ongoing care of each of the pastors.

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