

What are the fears, griefs, or resistances noticed in individuals or within the Presbytery regarding the creation of one Presbytery?

1. Loss of Identity and Voice

- There is a strong fear that smaller or rural churches may lose their unique personality and influence within a larger, combined Presbytery. Concerns were raised that the voices of these churches could be overshadowed by larger or more urban congregations, leading to a sense of marginalization.
- Some worry that their vote or input will carry less weight, both within the new Presbytery and at the national level (e.g., going from three votes to two at General Assembly).

2. Geographic and Logistical Challenges

- Many are concerned about the increased distances involved, making it harder for churches on the geographic fringes to participate in meetings and activities. This could lead to decreased engagement and a feeling of isolation.
- There is apprehension that meetings and events will be concentrated in larger cities, making it less accessible for rural members.

3. Staff Capacity and Support

- There is grief and resistance around the possibility of staff being stretched too thin, as current staff are already described as overworked and overwhelmed. Some fear that support for churches, especially those in crisis or with shrinking congregations, will diminish further if the Presbytery grows larger.
- Concerns were also raised about the continuity of staff and the need for more, not fewer, staff members to adequately serve all churches.

4. Loss of Tradition and Camaraderie

- Some express resistance due to the potential loss of established traditions, committee structures, and the camaraderie that exists within smaller groups or committees. There is a fear that blending different presbyteries could dilute or erase valued practices and relationships.

5. Power Dynamics and Equity

- There is anxiety about power and control, particularly regarding the distribution of resources, attention, and funding. Some fear that one presbytery (e.g., Des Moines) might dominate decision-making or receive a disproportionate share of resources.
- Equity in staffing and support is a non-negotiable for many, with calls for fair distribution of responsibilities and resources.

6. Communication and Connection

- Grief is expressed over the current lack of communication and support from the Presbytery, especially from the Committee on Ministry (COM). There is concern that this will worsen with consolidation, leading to even less contact and support.
- There is a longing for more connection and mutual support among churches, especially in times of crisis.

7. Uncertainty and Change Fatigue

- Some are resistant simply due to uncertainty about what the new structure will look like, how success will be measured, and whether the change is truly addressing the core problems or just rearranging existing challenges.

- There is also skepticism about whether the merger is being driven by mission and scripture or by institutional pressures.

Example Implementation:

- One participant suggested creating peer groups or think tanks for small churches to share experiences and support each other, addressing fears of isolation and loss of voice.
- Calls for regular re-evaluation (e.g., every five years) of the new structure to ensure it meets the needs of all churches and does not exacerbate existing problems.

In summary, the main fears, griefs, and resistances revolve around loss of identity, logistical challenges, staff capacity, power dynamics, diminished communication, and uncertainty about the future. These concerns highlight the importance of intentional planning, equitable resource distribution, and ongoing dialogue to address the needs of all congregations.