

What are the challenges foreseen if the three Presbyteries decide to become one?

1. Staff Capacity and Workload

- There is a widespread concern that staff are already stretched thin under the current shared staffing model. Combining into one Presbytery could further increase the workload, risking burnout and reducing the quality of support for individual churches. For example, participants noted, "Fear of fewer staff members and the workload involved to take care of everything," and "There are some concerns about having only three staff, not counting Jeannie, since they are overworked and overwhelmed now. More may need to be hired to care for all the churches."

2. Loss of Identity and Representation

- Smaller or rural churches fear losing their unique identity and influence within a larger, combined Presbytery. There is concern that their voices could be overshadowed by larger or more urban congregations, and 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).

3. Geographic and Logistical Challenges

- The increased geographic size of a single Presbytery raises concerns about accessibility. Churches on the geographic fringes may find it harder to participate in meetings and activities, leading to decreased engagement and a sense of isolation. There are also worries that meetings and events will be concentrated in larger cities, making it less accessible for rural members.

4. Differences in Vision, Mission, and Culture

- Each Presbytery currently has its own mission focus and culture (e.g., North Central Iowa focuses on mission, Des Moines on diversity and inclusion, Prospect Hill on small churches). Blending these different visions and personalities could lead to tension, misunderstandings, or a dilution of each Presbytery's strengths. As one participant asked, "Will Prospect Hill & North Central Iowa be overridden by Des Moines? All three Presbyteries have different personalities."

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 might dominate decision-making or receive a disproportionate share of resources. Equity in staffing and support is a non-negotiable for many.

6. Communication and Committee Structure

- Concerns were raised about the potential loss of camaraderie and effectiveness in committees, especially if they become too large or impersonal. There is also skepticism about whether communication and support from the Presbytery, especially from the Committee on Ministry (COM), will improve or worsen with consolidation.

7. Uncertainty and Change Management

- There is 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. Some participants questioned, "Are we really addressing the main problems, or are we just consolidating?"

8. Practical Implementation Questions

- Questions remain about how leadership will be structured (e.g., will there still be three executives?), how finances will be managed, and how to ensure all voices are heard and respected. There are also logistical questions about the location of the central office and the frequency and format of meetings (in-person vs. Zoom).

Example Implementation:

- One suggestion is to create peer groups or think tanks for small churches to share experiences and support each other, addressing fears of isolation and loss of voice.
- Another is to regularly re-evaluate the new structure (e.g., every five years) to ensure it meets the needs of all churches and does not exacerbate existing problems.

Summary Table of Key Challenges:

Challenge	Example/Concern from Documents
Staff capacity	Staff already overworked; fear of fewer staff
Loss of identity/representation	Small/rural churches losing voice; fewer votes at GA
Geographic/logistical barriers	Distance to meetings; rural churches feeling isolated
Differences in vision/culture	Blending missions; fear of one Presbytery dominating
Power dynamics/equity	Resource distribution; fair staffing
Communication/committee issues	Loss of camaraderie; less support from COM
Uncertainty/change management	Are we solving real problems?
Practical implementation	Leadership structure, finances, office location, meeting format

In summary, the process of merging three Presbyteries into one presents significant challenges related to staffing, identity, geography, culture, equity, communication, and practical logistics. Addressing these challenges will require intentional planning, transparent communication, and ongoing evaluation to ensure the needs of all congregations are met.