

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

## **1. Communication and Connection**

- Communication is repeatedly cited as a major challenge. Ensuring that all congregations—especially those in rural or smaller communities—are heard and receive consistent information is a concern. There is also worry about losing personal contact and the sense of connection that comes from smaller, more localized gatherings. (April 7 Lenox, Feb 24 Atlantic, Feb 28 Allerton, March 5 WDM Covenant)
- Example: "Communication is always the most difficult piece." "Don't want to lose personal contact."

## **2. Geographic and Logistical Barriers**

- The larger geographic area could make it harder for people to attend meetings in person, potentially increasing feelings of isolation. There are concerns about travel distances, the need for hybrid or electronic meetings, and whether these can truly replace face-to-face interaction. (Feb 24 Atlantic, March 5 WDM Covenant, March 10 Zoom)
- Example: "Are we going to drive hundreds of miles to go to a Presbytery meeting?" "Zoom does not make a meeting."

## **3. Loss of Local Identity and Autonomy**

- There is apprehension that a larger, more centralized presbytery might impose standardized practices that do not fit every congregation, especially those with unique traditions or structures. Many want to maintain flexibility and local autonomy. (April 7 Lenox, Feb 28 Allerton)
- Example: "We don't want to have to conform to practices and policies that don't work for our way."

## **4. Financial and Staffing Concerns**

- Questions about how finances and reserves will be managed, whether consolidation will actually save money, and how staffing will be handled are common. There is anxiety about losing valued staff or having resources spread too thin. (Feb 10 Zoom, Feb 17 Hartford, Feb 24 Atlantic, March 5 WDM Covenant)
- Example: "How is being larger saving us money?" "Concerns about the overall staffing being spread too thin."

## **5. Cultural Differences and Resistance to Change**

- The three presbyteries have different cultures, traditions, and ways of operating. Merging these could be challenging, and there is resistance to change, especially if it feels imposed rather than collaborative. (Feb 17 Hartford, Feb 28 Allerton, March 10 Zoom)
- Example: "There are cultural differences between the presbyteries." "We want change without making change."

## **6. Ensuring Support for Small and Rural Churches**

- There is a strong concern that small and rural churches may become even more isolated or overlooked in a larger presbytery. Ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are met is a key challenge. (Feb 24 Atlantic, Feb 28 Allerton, March 5 WDM Covenant)
- Example: "Don't want the small churches to get lost in southern Iowa."

## **7. Decision-Making and Trust**

- Some fear that decisions will be made by a few leaders without broad input, leading to distrust and disengagement. Transparent, inclusive decision-making is seen as essential. (April 7 Lenox, Feb 17 Hartford)

- Example: "Not being heard by Presbytery."

## **8. Defining Purpose and Measuring Success**

- There is a challenge in clarifying the purpose of the new presbytery and determining how to measure success, both spiritually and missionally. (Feb 10 Zoom, March 5 WDM Covenant)
- Example: "Focus on purpose first and then build strategies and structures."

**Summary:** The main challenges anticipated in merging the three presbyteries include communication and connection, geographic and logistical barriers, loss of local identity, financial and staffing concerns, cultural differences, ensuring support for small churches, decision-making and trust, and defining purpose. Addressing these challenges will require intentional planning, transparent communication, and a commitment to honoring the diversity and needs of all congregations.