

What non-negotiables must be honored if the three presbyteries proceed with a merger?

1. Adherence to the Book of Order and Theological Integrity

- Multiple sessions emphasized that any new structure must comply with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Order and maintain theological integrity. This is foundational and non-negotiable for all participants.
 - Example: "Book of Order requirements" (Feb 10 Zoom, Feb 17 Hartford)
 - Example: "Theological integrity" (Feb 10 Zoom)

2. Respect for Local Autonomy and Diversity

- There is a strong insistence that local congregations and partnerships must retain autonomy in how they operate, worship, and organize. The merger should not impose standardized or prescriptive expectations that override local practices, especially for unique partnerships or rural congregations.
 - Example: "We don't want to have to conform to practices and policies that don't work for our way." (April 7 Lenox)
 - Example: "Let us have some flexibility." (April 7 Lenox)
 - Example: "Respect of everyone will be maintained." (March 5 WDM Covenant)

3. Maintaining Current Staff and Support Structures

- Several sessions identified keeping current staff as a non-negotiable, reflecting the value placed on existing relationships and support systems.
 - Example: "Current staffing of Presbytery, keeping the current staff as-is." (April 7 Lenox, Feb 17 Hartford)

4. Commitment to Youth Camps and Programs

- Maintaining both Wesley Woods and Lake Shore youth camps is repeatedly named as a non-negotiable. Participants do not want to lose these vital ministries in the merger process.
 - Example: "Keeping both Wesley Wood's and Lake Shore youth camps, operating is a must." (April 7 Lenox)
 - Example: "Don't want to lose our camping at Wesley Woods." (Feb 28 Allerton)

5. Focus on People in the Pews and Mission

- Decisions must always consider their impact on the people in the pews and the mission of the church, not just institutional needs.
 - Example: "Always go back to the effect on the people in the pews." (Feb 17 Hartford)
 - Example: "Provide help for churches to thrive – to help all congregations to thrive." (April 7 Lenox)

6. Transparent Communication and Equal Partnership

- Communication must be clear, consistent, and transparent to all. All presbyteries and congregations must have an equal say and be treated as equal partners in the process.
 - Example: "Communication, to all people and that what is communicated be the exact same to everyone." (April 7 Lenox)
 - Example: "Equal partners, and equal say in the future of the three Presbyteries." (March 10 Zoom)

Summary Table of Non-Negotiables:

Non-Negotiable	Example/Source
Book of Order & theological integrity	Feb 10 Zoom, Feb 17 Hartford
Local autonomy & flexibility	April 7 Lenox, Feb 28 Allerton
Maintain current staff	April 7 Lenox, Feb 17 Hartford
Youth camps (Wesley Woods, Lake Shore)	April 7 Lenox, Feb 28 Allerton
Focus on people in pews & mission	Feb 17 Hartford, April 7 Lenox
Transparent communication & equality	April 7 Lenox, March 10 Zoom

Conclusion: If the merger proceeds, it is essential to honor these non-negotiables: adherence to the Book of Order, respect for local autonomy, maintaining current staff and youth camps, focusing on the needs of congregations and mission, and ensuring transparent, equitable communication and decision-making. These priorities reflect the deeply held values and practical needs of the presbyteries involved.