

Here are positive and concerning conclusions drawn from the listening sessions in Prospect Hill regarding the potential merger of the three Presbyteries:

### **Positive Conclusions:**

#### 1. Opportunities for Shared Mission and Collaboration

- Multiple sessions highlighted that merging could expand shared mission work, allow for joint mission trips, and make annual gatherings more vibrant by bringing more people together. (March 3 Sioux City, March 19 Zoom)
- Example: "Mission trips, meetings, etc. held in one presbytery will be planned and available to all."

#### 2. Pooling Resources and Financial Stability

- Participants noted that combining presbyteries could address financial concerns by pooling resources, reducing reserve requirements, and providing more support for small churches. (March 19 Zoom, March 3 Sioux City)
- Example: "Combining presbyteries could address some financial concerns by pooling resources."

#### 3. Enhanced Support and Learning Across Congregations

- There is optimism about learning from each other's experiences, sharing knowledge, and supporting each other, especially in addressing the shortage of pastors and supporting small churches. (March 19 Zoom, March 3 Sioux City)
- Example: "There may be more ecumenical efforts that benefit our churches as a result."

#### 4. Potential for Innovation and Technology Use

- The merger is seen as a chance to invest in technology, improve remote collaboration, and innovate in ministry approaches, such as live streaming and virtual meetings. (March 19 Zoom, Feb 3 Denison)
- Example: "A need was expressed to enhance technology use, especially for meetings, in order to improve remote connections and facilitate collaboration."

## Conclusions of Concern:

1. Fear of Loss of Local Voice and Identity
  - There is significant concern that smaller or rural congregations will be overshadowed or lose their voice in a larger, merged presbytery, especially with the perceived dominance of urban areas like Des Moines. (Feb 3 Denison, March 3 Sioux City, April 18 Cherokee)
  - Example: "Concerned about not having a voice in the new model. Doesn't want rural congregations to be 'left behind.'"
2. Doubt About Impact on Church Vitality and Participation
  - Skepticism exists about whether merging will actually improve church vitality, attract youth, or increase participation, with some feeling that small churches will not benefit. (April 18 Cherokee, Feb 3 Denison)
  - Example: "Merging presbyteries probably won't move the needle in the vitality of small churches since they are unlikely to change what they're doing just because they belong to a different mid-council."
3. Concerns Over Increased Complexity and Administrative Challenges
  - Participants worry that a larger presbytery will mean more bureaucracy, more travel, and decreased access for members, making it harder to maintain close relationships and effective support. (Feb 3 Denison, March 3 Sioux City)
  - Example: "Expressed a fear that a bigger presbytery will get 'worse' due to increased size and decreased congregation and member access."
4. Uncertainty About Financial Implications
  - There are questions about whether the merger will actually save money, how per capita assessments will change, and whether financial priorities will shift away from local needs. (April 18 Cherokee, Feb 3 Denison)
  - Example: "Does this merger save us money? Is per Capita going to change/increase? What are we getting for our money that we aren't getting now?"
5. Challenges in Maintaining Equitable Support and Care

- Concerns were raised about whether care and resources will be distributed equitably, especially for small or aging congregations, and whether the merged entity can truly support all churches. (Feb 3 Denison, March 3 Sioux City)
- Example: "Will congregational 'care' be unequal? Areas of concern expressed included money, travel to presbytery meetings, care of each congregation."