

What are the explicit and implied challenges foreseen if the three Presbyteries decide to merge.

1. Risk of Loss of Local Voice and Identity

- Many participants, especially from smaller or rural congregations, fear that their voices will be diminished in a larger, merged presbytery. There is concern that urban areas (like Des Moines) could dominate decision-making, leaving rural churches "left behind." (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. Ensuring Equitable Support and Care

- There is apprehension about whether all congregations—regardless of size or location—will receive equitable support, resources, and care. Some worry that new support could be "swallowed up" by larger churches, and that the needs of small or aging congregations may be overlooked. (March 3 Sioux City, Feb 3 Denison)
- *Example:* "Will congregational 'care' be unequal? Areas of concern expressed included money, travel to presbytery meetings, care of each congregation."

3. Administrative and Logistical Complexity

- Merging presbytery committees, aligning administrative processes, and managing finances across a larger entity are seen as significant challenges. There are questions about the location of the presbytery office, the use of technology for meetings, and the need for clear communication and planning. (Feb 3 Denison, March 19 Zoom, March 3 Sioux City)
- *Example:* "Merging Presbytery committees" and "A need was expressed to enhance technology use, especially for meetings, in order to improve remote connections and facilitate collaboration."

4. Cultural Differences and Creating a Common Identity

- Overcoming cultural differences and creating a unified identity for the new presbytery is a concern. There is a risk that without intentional effort, the merger could fail to foster joint interests and shared mission. (March 3 Sioux City, April 18 Cherokee)
- *Example:* "There is a need to create a common identity. Overcoming cultural issues may be difficult."

5. Financial Uncertainty and Resource Allocation

- Participants questioned whether the merger would actually save money, how per capita assessments might change, and how financial priorities will be set. There is also concern about the use of endowments and reserves, and whether financial oversight will be sufficient. (April 18 Cherokee, March 19 Zoom, 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?"

6. Declining Participation and Membership

- There is uncertainty about whether the merger will address declining church participation and membership, or if it will simply combine existing challenges without providing new solutions. (Feb 3 Denison, April 18 Cherokee)
- *Example:* "Church participation appears to be decreasing. No 'good' answers from anyone currently."

7. Difficulty in Finding Pastors and Leadership

- The ongoing challenge of finding pastors and supporting teaching elders may not be resolved by the merger. There are hopes that a larger presbytery could attract more pastors, but also skepticism about whether this will happen. (Feb 3 Denison, April 18 Cherokee)
- *Example:* "The search for a full time pastor is very difficult. Currently using a part time staff."

8. Communication and Transparency

- Ensuring that all congregations are well-informed and have opportunities to participate in the process is a challenge. Some participants felt that church members were not adequately informed about the merger discussions. (Feb 3 Denison, March 19 Zoom)
- *Example:* "Didn't feel church members were well informed."

9. Timeline and Implementation Complexity

- The process will require careful planning, including civil and church actions, and may take several years to complete. Committees have been established to work on mission, vision, communication, and administration, but the timeline is long and complex. (Feb 3 Denison)
- *Example:* "If a merger is approved then many elements will need to be done: Civil and Church/Congregation actions will need to be scheduled and set out clearly."

Summary Table of Key Challenges

Challenge Area	Example Concern or Question
Local Voice & Identity	Will rural churches be left behind?
Equitable Support	Will care/resources be distributed fairly?
Administration & Logistics	How to merge committees, manage meetings, office location?
Cultural Differences	Can a common identity be created?
Financial Uncertainty	Will the merger save money? How will funds be allocated?
Declining Participation	Will the merger address or just combine existing challenges?
Leadership Shortages	Will it be easier to find pastors and leaders?
Communication	Are all members and churches well-informed and engaged?
Timeline & Implementation	How long will the process take and what steps are required?

These challenges highlight the need for intentional planning, transparent communication, and a focus on equity and shared identity to ensure a successful merger process.