

Which non-negotiables that must be honored if the presbyteries proceed with a merger?

Key Non-Negotiables Identified:

1. Equitable Support and Voice for All Congregations

- It is essential that all congregations—especially small and rural ones—have a meaningful voice in the new presbytery and receive equitable support, care, and resources. There is strong resistance to any model where rural or smaller churches are "left behind" or overshadowed by larger, urban congregations.
- *Example (Feb 3 Denison, March 3 Sioux City):* "Be sure all concerned have a voice in a new entity." and "There is a need for equity for small churches."

2. Preservation of Lakeshore Camp

- The continued operation and support of Lakeshore Camp is explicitly named as a non-negotiable in the March 3 Sioux City session. The camp is seen as a vital resource for all presbyteries and must be maintained regardless of merger outcomes.
- *Example (March 3 Sioux City):* "Lakeshore Camp" listed as a non-negotiable.

3. Financial Transparency and Oversight

- Careful financial oversight and transparency are required, especially regarding pooled resources, per capita assessments, and the use of endowments. Participants insist that financial decisions must be clear, fair, and communicated to all.
- *Example (March 19 Zoom, April 18 Cherokee):* "Participants stressed the need for careful financial oversight in such a scenario."

4. Local Church Autonomy in Ministry Decisions

- The merger process must not prevent individual churches from making decisions about their own ministry, worship times, or direction. Local autonomy and flexibility are considered non-negotiable for congregational vitality.
- *Example (Feb 3 Denison):* "This process will not prevent an individual church from changing direction, including dissolution... or changing their worship time(s) to be better servants in their individual communities."

5. Effective Communication and Inclusion

- All churches and members must be kept well-informed and included in the process. Communication is repeatedly emphasized as a critical non-negotiable to ensure trust and engagement.
- *Example (Feb 3 Denison, March 19 Zoom):* "Communication is key with local church sessions/committees and congregations."

6. Commitment to Mission and Vision

- The merger must be guided by a clear, shared mission and vision that prioritizes spiritual growth, discipleship, and support for local ministry—not just institutional survival.
- *Example (Feb 3 Denison):* "Noted that PPH is currently financially solvent to then enable congregations make an informed decision that supports mission, not money."

Summary Table: Non-Negotiables for the Merger

Non-Negotiable	Description/Example
Equitable Support & Voice	All congregations must have a voice and fair support
Lakeshore Camp	Camp must be preserved and supported
Financial Transparency	Clear, fair, and open financial processes

Non-Negotiable	Description/Example
Local Church Autonomy	Churches retain control over ministry decisions
Effective Communication & Inclusion	All members/churches kept informed and included
Commitment to Mission & Vision	Merger guided by spiritual/mission priorities

In summary, while some participants stated "there really shouldn't be any non-negotiables," the listening sessions reveal clear priorities that must be honored for the merger to be accepted and successful.