

# Held in Common, Led into Something New

A Devotion to Discern the Future of Unified Mission Pledges  
in the Presbytery of East Iowa

P R E S B Y T E R Y  
OF EAST IOWA



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

Created by: The PEIA Financial Sustainability Task Force

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## A Devotion to Discern the Future of Unified Mission Pledges in the Presbytery of East Iowa

### Instructions for Sessions

Please read this document in its entirety together as a Session, pausing at the designated points for discussion.

As you move through the material, complete the survey questions as requested. Once finished, please submit your responses to Rev. Dr Kris Schondelmeyer, Moderator of the PEIA Financial Sustainability Task Force.

### Opening Scriptures

Acts 2:44–45

“All who believed were together and had all things in common... they would... distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

Isaiah 43:18-19

“Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?”

### Reflection

From the very beginning, the church has been connectional.

Not just in structure...but in spirit.

The early church didn't ask, “*What belongs to me?*”

They asked, “*What has God entrusted to us?*”

They shared their lives.

They shared their resources.

They trusted that what God had given them was meant for the sake of the whole body.

That same calling is still before us.

Because the presbytery is not just an administrative layer of the church.

At its heart, the presbytery exists, as our Book of Order says, to *“assist and support the witness of congregations to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that all congregations become communities of faith, hope, love, and witness.”* (G-3.0301)

Before we move further, it is important to name something with honesty and humility.

We recognize that the presbytery has not always provided the kind of healthy support and partnership that congregations need. For some, past experiences with the presbytery may carry frustration, disappointment, or even hurt.

That matters. And it is not something we want to ignore or move past too quickly.

At the same time, we believe God is not finished with us yet. This was affirmed through presbytery-wide discernment conversations over the past two years, where we committed to maintaining leadership and staff support to carry out our shared mission.

Under the leadership of our new Transitional Executive Presbyter, Rev. Bobby Outterson-Murphy, we are committed to cultivating healthier ways of living together...more transparent, more collaborative, more grounded in our shared covenant as the Body of Christ.

Because the truth is: the presbytery is not “out there” somewhere.

It is us.

And for us to become the kind of presbytery God is calling us to be, we need every congregation...not just financially, but fully.

Yes, we need shared financial resources.

But we also need the gifts of people.

We need Ruling Elders and Teaching Elders willing to serve, to lead, to discern, to build relationships, to serve on committees and commissions, and to help shape the future of our shared ministry in ways that are healthy and life-giving for all.

Because this is not just about sustaining a system.

It is about becoming a healthier, more faithful body of Christ, together.

And that work will take all of us in shared ministry.

**[PAUSE FOR DISCUSSION AS A SESSION – Approx. 10 minutes]**

To respond to these questions digitally, go to this URL:

<https://forms.gle/JPRFirka3kpBdgg68>

1. While we recognize that for some congregations, past experiences with the presbytery may include frustration or hurt (and we do not dismiss those experiences) we invite you, for the purpose of this conversation, to focus on life-giving moments of connection.

When is a time that you or your church experienced vitality or meaningful support through partnership with another Presbyterian congregation or with the presbytery as a whole? (If you are open to sharing, the Task Force would love to read responses shared by your Session. Feel free to record responses on another sheet of paper.)

2. What forms of assistance or support could the Presbytery provide that would strengthen both the mission and ministry of your congregation and the well-being and leadership of our pastors? (If you are open to sharing, the Task Force would love to read responses shared by your Session. Feel free to record responses on another sheet of paper.)

## [RESUME DEVOTIONAL]

When it is functioning well, shared ministry in the Presbytery becomes very real:

- It is walking with congregations through seasons of pastoral transition or conflict.
- It is nurturing those who are discerning a call to ministry.
- It is providing pastoral care to pastors who are carrying heavy burdens.
- It is offering training, workshops, and gatherings that equip leaders.
- It is connecting churches to resources, grants, and wider denominational support.
- It is creating spaces where relationships are built—where we remember we are not alone.

In other words...this is not abstract.

This is the kind of healthy ecosystem that sustains congregations in vitality, connection, and faithful ministry.

And one of the ways we sustain that shared ministry is through Unified Mission Pledges.

### **Unified Mission Pledges**

Historically, Unified Mission Pledges have been shared across three areas:

- General Assembly
- Synod of Lakes and Prairies
- Presbytery

The presbytery's portion has historically supported the following:

- Camp Bear Creek
- Mission & Social Justice Grants
- Youth participation in Triennium
- Other outside Mission Organizations

These are not just line items.

They are places where lives are shaped, faith is formed, and the gospel takes flesh.

But the reality we are facing now is this:

Giving has declined in both Per Capita and Unified Mission Pledges.

Reserves are being depleted.

And the model we have relied on is no longer sustainable.

At the same time, congregations are making difficult financial decisions to sustain their own ministries. The presbytery is no different. The presbytery is also facing hard decisions...decisions that may not look like the past, as we open ourselves to the new thing God is doing among us.

In order for our Presbytery to sustain healthy ways of being as we move into the future, we need each congregation's input, help, and support.

Alongside these realities, some congregations are asking whether they might give more directly to specific ministries, rather than through Unified Mission Pledges.

Which brings us to an important tension:

How do we balance local passion with shared responsibility?

How do we remain a healthy connectional church in a time that increasingly pulls toward independence?

There is no single “right” answer.

Presbyteries across the denomination approach shared mission giving in many different ways...some choose to emphasize support for the wider denomination, others focus on local grants and programming, and others prioritize their presbytery's operational needs.

Our task is not to copy another model.

Our task is to discern what is faithful for *our* presbytery, in *this* moment.

## **The Spiritual Question**

This is not just about percentages. It is about identity.

Because how we allocate resources reveals:

- what we value
- what we trust
- and how we understand our shared life together in Christ

The early church practiced *koinonia*—a deep sharing of life and resources.

And now the question before us is:

What does *koinonia* look like for us—here, now, in this season?

**We request that the Session of each congregation provide a response to the following questions: (for a digital version, go here: <https://forms.gle/JPRFirka3kpBdgg68>)**

1. Overall Allocation – What percentage of Unified Mission Pledges should we allocate to the General Assembly, the Synod, and to the Presbytery?

\_\_\_\_\_ % to General Assembly of the PC(USA) (currently 20%)

\_\_\_\_\_ % to Synod of Lakes and Prairies (currently 10%)

\_\_\_\_\_ % to Presbytery of East Iowa (currently 70%)

Total = 100%

2. Which of the following shared ministries should we prioritize right now? (Rank in order of importance from 1-8, with 1 being the highest priority.)

\_\_\_ Camp Bear Creek

\_\_\_ Global and External Mission Partners (e.g., Mission Starfish Haiti or similar partnerships)

\_\_\_ Grants and financial support to congregations and local mission initiatives to invest in new or emerging ministries within the presbytery

\_\_\_ Having Presbytery Support Staff (a full-time Executive Presbyter, a part-time Stated Clerk, and a part-time Communications Assistant)

\_\_\_ Presbytery-led Ministries (such as leadership development, trainings, workshops, and gatherings)

\_\_\_ Scholarships for Ruling Elders in the CRE program

\_\_\_ Youth and young adult ministry (e.g., Triennium participation)

\_\_\_ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Closing Prayer**

Gracious God, You have called us into one body...not isolated, but interconnected.

As we discern together, help us to be faithful stewards of all you have entrusted to us.

Give us wisdom to see clearly, courage to decide faithfully, and grace to release what no longer serves your purpose.

Heal what has been broken among us, and open our hearts to the new things you are doing in the Presbytery of East Iowa so that we might move forward together in ways that are healthy and life-giving for all.

Remind us that we belong to each other, and give us the courage to practice *koinonia*...a deep sharing of life and resources.

Guide us by your Spirit, who is still leading your church, so that what we decide may strengthen your people and serve your mission in the world.

In Christ's name, Amen.

**Please submit your responses to the questions to the Moderator of the Financial Sustainability Task Force: Rev. Dr. Kris Schondelmeyer at:**

[schondelmeyer@fpcdavenport.org](mailto:schondelmeyer@fpcdavenport.org)

A digital version of this devotional is also available and should have been emailed to your Clerk of Session. If you did not receive this, please email Rev. Bobby Outterson-Murphy at [bobby@peia.org](mailto:bobby@peia.org).

**The PEIA Financial Sustainability Task Force**

Rev. Dr. Kris Schondelmeyer, Task Force Moderator

Rev. Erin Kaye

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