

Thursday, March 16, 2023

1. *Pension*: As I mentioned on Tuesday, one of the most important topics we are discussing at this Spring Session of the Metropolitan Council is the Pension Plan. I also informed the Metropolitan Council that, at the Autumn meeting of the Holy Synod, a Joint Committee was appointed with membership from all the principals involved in the pension discussions: the Holy Synod, the Metropolitan Council, and the Pension Board. We will be hearing today from the Special Pension Joint Committee, the Pension Committee of the Metropolitan Council, and the Pension Board.
2. As I said on Tuesday, the pension issues that we are wrestling with affect the entire Church: our bishops, our clergy, and our parishes. We are dealing with highly complex matters that, at the same time, hold a value in the millions of dollars. None of us should take these matters lightly and all of us need to work together to find common solutions and resolutions that will be acceptable to the Church.
3. I am keenly aware of the tensions that have surrounded these discussions. They are not new: we have seen those tensions erupt in various ways over the past two years and it is clear to me that they are continuing to erupt here and there. I mention this only to emphasize the following points as we prepare to hear the various reports and engage in the subsequent discussions:
 - a. First, as the Primate, I will not be satisfied until a solution is arrived at that is acceptable to all: the Holy Synod, the Metropolitan Council, and the Pension Board. The unity of our church, the reassurance of our clergy and lay employees, and the trust of our parishes depend on this effort to arrive at a common resolution. In other words, we are all seeking answers to the same questions and should never be drawn into polemic.
 - b. This should not be difficult to achieve since, and this is my second point, we know that these questions, at their core, are mathematical. I do not discount that there are broader questions of principle and interpretation but ultimately we need clarity on the actuarial questions so that the proper fiduciary approach can be taken by all the relevant bodies.

- c. My third point is precisely that we must be mindful of the bodies that each of us represents. I cannot have individuals within any of the affected bodies driving the process or acting unilaterally. Here I include bishops, members of the Metropolitan Council, and members of the Pension Board. Let me add here also that this makes it incumbent on all of us not to perceive that others are driving the process or acting unilaterally. I am not accusing any individual of either driving the process or of having mistaken perceptions about others. All I am doing is noting is our human tendency to do give in to either one of these temptations and asking that we strive to avoid them. This is why it was my desire to have a joint committee work on these issues.
 - d. As my final point, it seems to me that one of the chief sources of tension in these discussions is the question of transparency. I would ask that we all remember that transparency means the ability to ask questions without the other party feeling threatened or taking the question personally. We should all strive to arrive at the truth by following the Gospel commandments.
4. Finally, I would like to offer my gratitude to His Eminence Archbishop Daniel, the chair of the Synodal Joint Committee, to Archpriest Joseph Ciarciaglino, the chair of the Metropolitan Council Pension Committee, and to Matushka Mary Buletza-Breton, the chair of the Pension Board for their work on these highly complex issues. We will hear from all three committees today and I look forward to hearing their reports and the subsequent discussions.