

THE COUNCIL OF OECONOMI

During the 17th Arch/Diocesan Financial Administrators of the Philippines (ADFAP) National Convention, Archbishop John Du organized a group from among the financial administrators who shall be collaborators with the CBCP Pension Plan Committee in the promotion of the retirement welfare of the diocesan clergy of the Philippine Church. The group was later named Council of Oeconomi. The



Oeconomus of the seat of a Metropolitan See shall be an *ex-officio* member of the Council; however, if he is unable or indisposed, another oeconomus from the same Metropolitan See may be appointed by Chairman of the Pension Plan Committee as representative or assistant. After permission and support was granted to the current members by their respective arch/bishops to this special ministry, Archbishop Du formally announced the official establishment of the Council of Oeconomi in

the CBCP Plenary Assembly. In active collaboration with all the financial administrators of their Metropolitan See (including those territories temporarily entrusted to them), their responsibility shall be, to wit: to promote sacramental brotherhood among the Filipino Clergy through the instrumentality of the CBCP Pension Plan; to suggest programs, strategies, mechanisms, and the like, to the CBCP Pension Plan Committee that aims to increase the Pension Fund; to encourage the formal enrollment of priests in his archdiocese and its suffragan dioceses to the CBCP Pension Plan in collaboration with the diocesan finance administrator and the episcopal vicar for the clergy; to awaken among brother-priests a sense of responsibility in the payment of monthly premium or arrears; to conceptualize programs, strategies, and mechanisms that will support a priest from a poor diocese/vicariate/prelature with his membership in the Pension Plan; to coordinate and collaborate with the local Ordinary and the financial administrator that the "goods" of the CBCP Pension Plan may be experienced by all Filipino priests serving in the Philippines.



Since its establishment, the Council of Oeconomi has been convoked by Chairman of the CBCP



Pension Plan, Archbishop John Du, DD, three times. These were usually attended only by the initial group present in Dumaguete City. These meetings were held at the CBCP Pension Plan Office in Intramuros, Manila. During these meetings, he would request the members to report about their work - what they have done, are doing, and are planning to do in the promotion of the CBCP Pension Plan in collaboration with the oeconomi of the suffragan dioceses. Then he encourages them to share their experiences regarding

their assigned task, feedbacks from the bishops and clergy, and even regarding the plight of retired priests. These meetings have also been celebrations of sacramental brotherhood among themselves.

In one of these meetings, Archbishop Du, whose commitment for a better pension benefits is oozing, emphasized the need to increase capitalization of the CBCP Pension Fund. All were in consensus that significantly increasing the monthly premium contribution is not feasible. An increase based on sound actuarial study may be affordable to some priests or dioceses, but may be a

discouraging burden to many priests or poorer dioceses. To inspire active membership, the premium has to be affordable to all diocesan priests in the Philippines. So the chairman challenged the members

of the council to come up with feasible ways and means to increase capitalization of the pension fund. All were in consensus that before asking help from others, priests have to fraternally help each other first. Thus the fundamental orientation of "priests-help-priests" and "diocese-help-diocese" was promoted. Such a mindset invites priests and bishops to live-out the grace of sacramental brotherhood. And as



they were candidly sharing their experiences on the matter, some council members revealed that brother-priests in their presbyterium have expressed the desire to help brother-priests, even those from beyond their ecclesiastical boundaries, regarding their monthly premium contribution. True enough, the Pension Plan Office has received notice that some priests of the Archdiocese of San Fernando have committed, as of yet, to assume the monthly premium contribution of selected priests from the Diocese of Catarman. It was Bishop of Catarman who recommended the names of priests he deemed in need of support. Meanwhile, Archbishop Arguelles and the clergy of the Archdiocese of Lipa initially intended to support the priests of the Prelature of Marawi by assuming their monthly premium contributions. However, when the matter was presented and discussed during their presbyterium meeting, they gladly decided to pay all the arrears and assumed the monthly premium contribution (beginning January 2016 and henceforth) of all the diocesan priests in the Prelature of Marawi.

It is noteworthy that the CBCP Pension Plan is not a commercial enterprise. The Plan was established as an avenue where bishops and priests can fraternally help each other prepare for their retirement.



An exorbitantly high premium contribution, which may be beyond the means of most of the members, will ultimately run counter-productive to the rationale of the CBCP Pension Plan. So, bishops and priests can only help each other to a definite extent. It is with this in mind that the suggestion to ask support from the lay faithful with regards with their retirement welfare cropped-up. This is the background of the conceptualization of the sponsorship campaign. The sponsorship

campaign shall start in the diocesan level. Through the arch/diocesan financial administrators (oeconomi), each arch/diocese/apostolic vicariate/prelature shall submit an initial five names (which may be of individuals, families, organizations, or corporations) to the Pension Plan Office who are willing to: 1) regularly give P250.00 to the Pension Fund or sponsor the monthly premium contribution (P750.00) of one, two, or more priests; 2) give a one-time donation to the CBCP Pension Plan Fund; or, 3) give a regular donation to the CBCP Pension Plan Fund. Then at an opportune time later, each priest-member will be asked to submit at least three names to the Plan Office as his expression of fraternal solidarity with the Sponsorship Campaign. Having these names, the Pension Plan Office shall then facilitate the communications and monitoring these donations or pledges.

Another suggested initiative in augmenting the Pension Fund was the establishment of a Mutual Fund. While it may afford a sound investment venue, it will so be an instrument to augment the Pension Fund. Since not all members are familiar with the financial concept, Fr. Miguel Samaniego initially met with people from FAMI (First Metro Asset Management Incorporated). Eventually Mr.

Agusto Cosio and Dr. Edwin Valeroso were invited to a meeting of the Council for presentation and discussion on the matter. As of yet, the matter is under feasibility study while the Chairman is personally promoting this planned initiative.

All these suggested initiatives, except the proposed establishment of a Mutual Fund, were approved by the CBCP Pension Plan Committee through Resolution 2017-2 dated January 25, 2017 and subsequently was presented in the Plenary Assembly.



The members of the Council of Oeconomi are taking their mandate seriously. Some have started visiting the oeconomi of their suffragan dioceses and even discussing pertinent Pension Plan issues with the bishops. Others have formalized regular gatherings so as to foster deeper fraternity and establish a work-network. These gatherings also serve as avenues for learning, sharing, and growth in their special ministry. Last November 28-29, 2016 the financial administrators of the Metropolitan See of Caceres (Naga) had their regular meeting in Legazpi City. Fr. Jose Victor Lobrigo was the host. The Pension Plan Committee Executive Secretary was invited to discuss issues and concerns relative to the Pension Plan Program. The oeconomi asked questions and clarifications regarding premium contributions, arrears, and a few matters regarding the Plan's revised rules and regulations. Considering that the current thrust in the hosting of ADFAP conventions is regional cooperation, Fr. Cirilo Edgar Eboña, the ADFAP 2017 President, deemed it opportune to present and discuss their plans for the 19th ADFAP convention in the presence of Fr. Edgar Macalalag, the Pension Plan Executive Secretary.

Fr. Michel Guadalupe, who hails from the Diocese of Bacolod, was appointed by the Chairman to coordinate, not only the Metropolitan See of Jaro, but also the Metropolitan See of Capiz. Both Metropolitan Sees (of Western Visayas) have been holding regular joint meetings and gatherings.



During their meeting last January 4-5, 2017, hosted by the Archdiocese of Capiz, they invited Fr. Edgar Macalalag and the oeconomus of the Archdiocese of Lipa, Fr. Miguel Samaniego. Fr. Samaniego was invited to share his experiences as financial administrator, the temporal management, and the financial system of the Archdiocese of Lipa. Issues and queries relative to Pension Plan were addressed to the Fr. Macalalag. The ambiance was informal and the sharing even extended over some bottles of beer and glasses of red wine. It was a fruitful experience not only for the hosts, but also for the invitees. These regional gatherings inspired the council members from Mindanao. Fr. Adrian Barcelo (Zamboanga) and Fr. Arnel Celis (Davao) in coordination with Msgr. Perseus Cabunoc (Cagayan de Oro) facilitated a meeting of all the financial administrators present

during their Diocesan Clergy of Mindanao (DCM) gathering. They requested the presence of the Pension Plan Executive Secretary in the meeting held in Ipil, Zamboanga-Sibugay. And with the support of the financial administrator of the Diocese of Ipil, Fr. Rotchel San Diego, who coordinated with the DCM organizers and acted as the host, the meeting was held last February 7, 2017. Even

though the financial administrators were not in perfect attendance, only one financial administrator of a Metropolitan See was not represented. Pertinent matters relative to the revised rules and regulations of the CBCP Pension Plan were discussed. They inquired about the monthly premium penalties and interests; and they were clarified. The oeconomi had a sharing their own arch/diocesan experiences on how they address the monthly premium contributions of their priests. It was also interesting to know how some manage their financial resources and encourage lay participation in addressing the retirement welfare of their clergy. During the same meeting the concept and dynamics of the Council of Oeconomi was presented and explained. After some questions and clarifications, the oeconomi from the Metropolitan See started to share and discuss matters related to their responsibilities. Dioceses with some issues with the CBCP Pension Plan were considered as priority in their plans. It is noteworthy that Fr. Marvin Osmeña, the oconomus of the Archdiocese of Ozamiz, candidly manifested his commitment to work with the financial administrators of the Dioceses of Iligan and Pagadian regarding concerns relative to their membership with the CBCP Pension Plan. The members of the council of oeconomi were also encouraged to establish avenues so priests can live-out the grace of sacramental brotherhood thru the Pension Plan. And as the share this commitment among themselves, they must likewise remain mindful of promoting initiatives to augment the Pension Fund.



During the recent CBCP Plenary Assembly Archbishop John Du presented these developments and the initiatives of the CBCP Pension Plan. The archbishops and bishops were optimistic about these initiatives of the Council of Oeconomi. It is our prayer that they continue to actively support these initiatives with their constant encouragement to their financial administrators. Finally, the Council of Oeconomi requests all priest-members and pensioners to include the intentions of the CBCP Pension Plan in their Eucharistic celebrations and prayers.