

Enews for 4/10/2024
Board of Pensions Changes

Just by Chance

Last week the Board of Pensions (BOP) announced the full details of how the medical coverage offered to minister members will change in 2025 ([click here for more information](#)). This announcement follows a year of meetings where the representative of the BOP shared some information about the challenge of providing care in the face of rising costs and the changing demographics of the church. While the BOP laid out the general shape of what was to come in meetings last spring, this week's announcements contained what the previous announcements did not: the numbers. Over this last week, I have seen leaders from across our denomination react to these numbers with shock, outrage, and despair. While these changes understandably induce anxiety in pastors and congregations, I invite everyone to take a deep breath and say a prayer before our anxiety leads us to do or say something hurtful that we will regret later. Here are a few reminders as we figure out the way forward...

Minimum Terms of Call Are Set by the Presbytery: The Committee on Ministry (COM) is meeting with the Rev. Luke Choi, the Board of Pensions' representative in this area, at its April meeting. That conversation will help them shape their recommendation for minimum terms of call in 2025. While the Board of Pensions sets the cost and options that they offer, it is up to the presbytery to decide how we will mutually live out the promises we make at the start of a pastorate "to pay [her/him] fairly and provide for [her/his] welfare as [she/he] works among us; to stand by [her/him/ in trouble and share [her/his] joys" (W-4.0404). COM will be working on that recommendation after that meeting so it can be approved by the presbytery later this year.

Seek what is True: Because these matters are complicated and not everyone is affected in the same way, there is already some misunderstanding and inaccurate information circulating about these changes. On May 29, you are invited to attend a meeting from 10a-12p at Canfield Presbyterian Church so that you can hear directly from and ask questions to a representative of the Board of Pensions.

All Councils May Err: The Westminster Confession of faith reminds us that all councils of the church since the time of the apostles may err and many of them have erred (6.175). Our theological conviction that we can and often have missed the mark is reflected in our polity which provides for a method to remedy our errors by reconsidering decisions and electing new leaders. While no overture or election of BOP board members can change the external pressures that affect the cost of health care, those outlets can be a way to change our priorities as we respond to them. I encourage you to have respectful conversations with BOP employees and board members about these matters and to share your concerns with our commissioners to the General Assembly (TE Kori Robins and RE Mike Shepherd) so that they can consider them when they attend the assembly this summer. Also, the Rev. Adam Rodgers and I will be attending a meeting with representatives of the BOP and other mid-council leaders April 30-May 1, I would be glad to hear your questions and concerns so that we can share them at that meeting.

Speak the Truth in Love: If you are a ruling elder, Clerk of Session, or Treasurer, I invite you to remember that these changes are causing high anxiety for many pastors. In the last week I have heard pastors ask if they need to leave ministry or pick up a second job to support their families. I know of at least one pastor who has withdrawn from interviews with Pastor Nominating Committees until these changes are better understood. This anxiety has been heightened by some congregational leaders who have not been sympathetic to their pastor or have gone out of their way to tell their pastor things like “We won’t be able to afford you if you have children” before these decisions are even fully understood or implemented! Yes, congregations and pastors will have to make some difficult decisions; however, the pain of those decisions can be reduced if we commit to talk about them with love.

May the Peace of Christ be with you,
Barry