May 8, 2018
Feast of
Saint John the
Theologian

PROTOCOL 18-02
Reverend Fathers of
the Metropolis of Denver,

CHRIST IS RISEN!

As you know from your seminary days, members of the Greek Orthodox Church have certain responsibilities regarding their being faithful to the sacraments. Anyone who has dealt with a divorce, including the priest who must deal with couples in crisis, can certainly testify to the sad truth that it is heartbreaking, especially in a spiritual sense. Many times, one or both persons in a couple feel as if, in the matter of divorce, they have been abandoned by the Church, and possibly even God, as a divorce is devastating to all concerned. This is where the matter of an ecclesiastical divorce is part of the path toward healing. As the clergy are certainly aware, an ecclesiastical divorce is considered an extension of the sacrament of Confession; however, many people do not realize this.

There are certain restrictions for those who have been civilly divorced:

1. Those who are only civilly divorced cannot be sponsors at Orthodox weddings, nor can they be godparents at Orthodox Baptisms.
2. They cannot have an ecclesiastical wedding without having first received a church divorce.
3. They cannot be members of a parish council.
4. Most importantly, they are not to receive Holy Communion because it could harm them spiritually. The bottom line is that divorced persons, indeed, all members of the Church, must be spiritually faithful to all of the sacraments of the Church.

It appears that there are a great many who are church members and yet do not know these things. Consequently, it has become rather common for a couple, one or both of them civilly divorced, who make plans to be married on a certain day for an ecclesiastical wedding, without even asking the priest of their parish if he is able to celebrate the sacrament of marriage. In the last several years, the Metropolis Office has received repeated submissions of affidavits for weddings where one or the other of the couple has no idea of what they must do before remarrying, and then they need the church divorce first. In many instances, the priest does not even know if a civil divorce has already been finalized, and there is no opportunity to speak with the couple and perhaps help them work through serious issues and possibly assist in a reconciliation.

When people understand this, and then are able to receive and participate in the sacraments, it is obvious that they understand that God still loves them. Comments such as “I did not realize how much better I would feel” or “I am so grateful to my priest for suggesting that I undertake
this, even though it did bring out painful memories” are acknowledgements that marriage is a spiritual lifestyle. Spiritual relationships, when broken, necessitate spiritual healing.

Therefore, in order to provide proper ecclesiastical permission and resolution for these requests for divorces, and to stress the seriousness of such petitions and, in addition, and to make this an easier process for the priests, the following directives are to be followed, effective immediately:

1. As of the date of this protocol, there will be three ecclesiastical Tribunals scheduled during the year. This year’s next Tribunal is scheduled for the first Thursday in October. Thereafter, the three Tribunals will take place on the first Thursdays of February, June and October.

2. All of the documents required for making the request must be presented at the same time, to be received at the Metropolis Office at least 60 days prior to the date of the next scheduled Tribunal.

3. The necessary documents include:
   a) A letter from the priest, including the reason for the civil divorce, and confirming that the petitioner has received the sacrament of reconciliation through holy confession or counseling.
   b) A letter from the petitioner.
   c) The original marriage certificate from the metropolis where the marriage took place, or an official transcript verified by the office of that metropolis.
   d) A copy of the civil divorce, including signatures and the date the civil divorce was finalized.
   e) The name and reliable current address of the former spouse. If there is a reason for not being able to supply this, the information must be included in the priest’s letter.
   f) In addition, if any of the documents are in a language other than English, they must be translated accurately and notarized by an official notary, with copies of both the original and the translations submitted.
   g) The fee must be in the form of either a bank check or a money order, payable to the Metropolis of Denver; if there is a reason why the petitioner cannot afford this amount, this should also be noted by the priest in his letter.
   h) The petitioner should be informed, when making a request for a new ecclesiastical divorce, that no arrangements, including the submission of an affidavit for a marriage, may be made until after the divorce decree issued by the Metropolis Office is received by the priest.

4. In addition to all prerequisites, please inform the petitioner that the final decree will be available not earlier than two months
from the date of the request for the divorce, keeping in mind the
next date of the scheduled Tribunal. This is so that the Metropolis
can verify that all necessary documentation, including a response
from the respondent, is on file in the Metropolis Office.

Furthermore, because of the great distances across this Metropolis, I do not insist that
either the petitioner or the respondent appear in person for the Spiritual Tribunal. However, I do
welcome letters from either person, marked CONFIDENTIAL, before the date of the Tribunal at
which the petition will be considered.

I believe that making this change to include scheduled Tribunals will be beneficial, not
only to the Metropolis Office, but also to the clergy who are tasked with assisting parishioners in
fulfilling their request. I recommend that you inform your parishioners, from the pulpit and in
your parish bulletins and newsletters, of the fact that there will be scheduled Tribunals
throughout the year. Possibly, you may wish to make copies of this directive to give to those who
have questions about the Metropolis procedures, which must conform with those of the
Archdiocese. As always, if you have questions or concerns about the procedures to follow,
please contact the Metropolis Office.

With Paternal Blessings,

Metropolitan Isaiah of Denver

This letter is to be disseminated to all parishioners and published in all parish bulletins of the
Metropolis of Denver