



from the office of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America

news:

DATE: March 14, 1983
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

D.R.E. VISITS CANADIAN AND NIAGARA FALLS PARISH SCHOOLS

The Director of the Department of Religious Education of the Diocese of the Armenian Church, Elise Antreassian, spent four fruitful days visiting parishes in Toronto, St. Catharines and Niagara Falls on February 24-27. Each of the four parishes has different needs, and her efforts were directed towards defining them and providing advice and encouragement for the Christian education of the youngsters of each community.

Her first stop was St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church in St. Catharines, Ontario. An all-day session was held with Superintendents Alice Torossian and Audrey Paroian, and the teachers of the school. Discussion centered on ways to improve the quality and number of programs available, as well as attendance. A recruitment program was worked out to be pursued on a month-by-month basis for both new students and new teachers, as well as a curriculum and program of special activities for the coming months. At the general parish gathering the same evening, a good number of children and young people appeared - a special effort had been made to have them and their families be present. The film, "The Growth of Our Children," was shown, preceded by a brief talk on religious education. Comments by many people after the program indicated several areas of concern that needed special attention: one, that it had been difficult getting the entire parish mobilized to attend and participate in community programs; two, the need for renewed energy of parish auxiliaries; and three, frustration over the lack of full Armenian community participation in church life, especially youth. The gracious host and Pastor, the Very Rev. Fr. Kegham Zakarian, concurred with these concerns.

On the positive side, St. Gregory is a well-established parish, and there is great interest in the religious education aspect as well as an active parish life. The difficulties it may have - that can arise in any parish family - will certainly be alleviated by a commitment on the part of the Armenian community to make their devotion to God and the church their number one priority, with all aspects of

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life flowing from that point. The film was very well received - one comment: "It's nice to know that there is a professionally done film about our church and our faith." The individual discussion that followed the film was energetic and sometimes impassioned. As one observer pointed out: "We have got to get back to Christianity and make it the center of our lives as Armenians."

The next stop was St. Sarkis Armenian Church on the New York side of Niagara Falls. Here is an example of a small church with an outstanding Sunday School. The two teachers - the mother and daughter team of Alice and Ani Avdoian - attended last summer's Mardigian Institute, sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Edward Mardigian, and held at Diocesan headquarters in New York. Adding the impetus provided by that training to their own talent and dedication, they invested the new year's classes with creativity, imagination and hard work. Their regular students are getting an extraordinary Christian-Armenian education. The D.R.E. film "The Growth of Our Children" was shown to the small group of parishioners, but the highlight of the visit was meeting with the teachers and seeing their fine work. Unfortunately, as is the case of some parishes, there are Armenian families in the vicinity that remain uninvolved in the Church. Arsen Avdoian, the Parish Council Chairman, communicated the hard work and long hours it takes to bring the "unchurched" into the community. Deacon Michael Ohanesian, the youthful and dedicated Visiting Deacon of the parish, lives in Detroit but regularly commutes to the church for a variety of duties. His efforts, among others, include a plan for creating a learning center for children and adults.

St. Sarkis has a great potential in that there is a good number of Armenian families in the area. As Mr. Avdoian says, "The Armenian Church is such a necessary part of any Armenian's life that it breaks my heart to see so many people uninvolved, people whose lives could be so much more rewarding if they would just reach out and become involved." The other great assets in Niagara Falls are the vitality and commitment of the Avdoian family.

The third stop was the Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Toronto, where the dedication and love of the teachers was very apparent. Unfortunately, parental apathy concerning church life is a problem (as it so often is). There are many families involved in cultural and social activities, but not with the church itself. As part of a larger solution, the Sunday School is considering a step, which the D.R.E. heartily approves: using a bus to bring children and young people to

church. In the past, this idea has been discouraged on the grounds that the church is for the entire family. However, at the prospect of losing a new generation because of their parents' lack of commitment, schools are beginning to think in terms of providing transportation.

The vital assets of this parish's Sunday School are the great dedication of Superintendents Kaspar Yardemian and Alis Kuyumjian, the teachers, and the many children whose parents are already active parish members and realize the importance of religious education in the children's lives.

A final stop at the budding parish of the Armenian Church of North York in Toronto provided the exciting opportunity of launching a brand-new Sunday School. Five potential teachers and acting Superintendent Luiz Kassabian had assembled to discuss D.R.E. materials, school procedure, and scheduling. After the meeting, was a special and lavish Vartanantz program during which a brief presentation was made on religious education. Over 200 persons were present. The parish is deeply intent on being a church in the true sense of the world and are genuinely interested in seeing a Sunday School take root. The very gracious Parish Council Chairman Onnig Torossian has worked very hard along with his Council and the entire community to originate "one beautiful church family - not just a social and cultural club - but a church."

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