

ST. GEORGE ARMENIAN CHURCH

HOUSTON, TEXAS

PASTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT

This year, we have assembled together as family members of St. George Armenian Church; an organized community sharing a common ethnic identity. The purpose of our gathering here today, is to review and re-evaluate the past year's accomplishments and to make new and better plans for the coming year. What has been done is to be judged by our faith and common standards and what is planned is to be judged by our ideals.

This past year has truly been quite an experience for all of us; individually, collectively, and especially as a whole Church Community. Putting aside our religious and cultural activities, our Church Community out-did herself in hosting an Armenian Festival held in Memorial Park. Houstonians from every corner of this huge city were introduced to the "Proud Armenians" on live television through Channel 13's "Good Morning Houston" Show as a kick-off for the first Annual Armenian Festival. Every moment spent in making this Festival possible will always be implanted within all of us as a memorable experience for the smashing success and attention we have brought to our Church. But, do we stop there? Before the year ended, our community came together as a whole to embark on a task that will remain with us forever. On Saturday, November 18, 1978, St. George Armenian Church took a giant step forward with a "Ground Breaking Ceremony" held at our future Church site. As the first shovel dove into the ground to un-earth the first part of soil, "Tears of Happiness" fell from every participant's eyes. God has truly smiled upon us once again, as this day will always be a cherished one in the history and life of our Church. The Ground Breaking Ceremony hosted the celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of our Church. For this occasion, we were honored and blessed with the presence of our Primate, His Eminence, Archbishop Torkom Manoogian. An elegant and outstanding Banquet was held at the Galleria Plaza Hotel as well as a Fifteenth Anniversary Banquet on Sunday after Church services with the participation of all the organizations within our Church. Through these activities, we have gained experience and uncovered leadership talents.

Our Armenian Church Community is an immensely growing community, unlike any other Armenian Church within the United States. From cities all around the world and the U.S., every week we receive the names of families who have arrived to start their new life in this very prosperous city. While our community is growing, our demands and expectations are growing with them. Our true mission; our ultimate endeavor, is first to build the physical church within each and every one of us and thereafter, the building of our Church. These steps will be accomplished in the name and spirit of Jesus Christ and of our Nation.

We are no longer considered to be a part-time Church Community. On the contrary, we are established and based on very strong sound foundations. We are considered to be one of the more healthy churches within our Diocese of America, promising a better and brighter future. In the City of Houston, we are no longer recognized like any other religious minority. However, I have come to know many who are considered learned Armenians amongst us who bear and confess

this thought within our public gatherings. On one hand, we are committed by our very nature to spread the Gospel of Christ, His Good News of Love and Salvation of all mankind, which became the faith of our forefathers who fought for this with the price of their lives and entrusted this faith to us to continue it with the same Spirit. Not too many of us are well informed that we are not only a Christian Institution and not only a simple Christian Church, our National Heritage is infused as such that the separation of these two; our Church and National Heritage is almost impossible. On the other hand, we have a Holy Task and responsibility to encourage our Armenian Heritage, language, culture, education and history, not only to preserve its values to those who will come after us, but also to expand its horizons and make it available and relevant for us and to our contemporaries.

The Armenian Church in the United States is in her true and entrusted Mission, serving her people as the Hand of God, besides finding shelter; finding jobs; encouraging people morally and spiritually to those who seek help. Yet, we find it very easy to criticize the Church, instead of helping it more. I consider the Armenian Church to be one of the most up-to-date churches in the United States as far as our dogma, doctrine, ethics and teachings are concerned. True democracy is a living factor in our church and within our community. But, the Armenian Church has kept hierarchical methods within our democratic church frame-work. All of us come from different environments bringing with us our particular customs and life-style. We should not forget the discipline of the Church. We should tolerate the discipline, the canons, by-laws, and traditions of this institution. We should not create personal grudges or animosities towards the people who are responsible for putting these disciplines into work. In the Gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ, He Himself did not approve all those who were mis-using and abusing the Temple of God. He uses strict measures by correcting them. (Luke 19:45-48). The success in our Church has a lot to do with us and how much we discipline ourselves.

The desire of meeting, learning and knowing each and every one of my parishioners was one of my main priorities. Personal visitations, friendly talks which I had with all of you, were done to know you better and to have a close understanding of each other. The distance and time spent traveling made no barrier whatsoever, I feel that in order to have a harmonious community, the importance of knowing you is of great significance.

Within our active and dynamic community, we are full of talents. We have our own ideas of how things should be taken care of and what to start in order to make better accomplishments. Priorities. These priorities set by each one of us are not always necessarily the actual needs of our Parish. It is well taken that we want our proposed priority to succeed, but more important is the communities accomplishments rather than personal satisfaction. Priorities should be common and be decided collectively. More often, we put our personal satisfaction as a prime consideration, and if it is not done the way we expected, needless and unnecessary criticism begins. Criticism done in love and in the Spirit of Brotherhood has always given productive results. On the contrary, criticism done with cynicism, using unheard words to the given person who did not do things our way, only produces harm. Untrue criticism does more harm and discouragement towards people, especially newcomers and stopping those who are real believers in good work for the Church, and most of all hurting towards the advancement of our communities life. We should all feel responsible to advise these people to kindly stop this nonsense immediately! Let us remember what the letter of St. James has

said in the New Testament: "The tongue is a fire. The tongue is an unrighteous world among our members, staining the whole body". (Chp. 3:6).

God has always been very good to us and we should feel very privileged for having a place like St. Thomas High School's Chapel for our own use. It has now been more than a year and a half since we first began using this Chapel, the Auditorium, classrooms, lecture halls and most especially, using unlimited utilities. These are used for our own convenience for hardly any expectations in return. We should be thankful and always ready to show our gratitude to them, having in mind to be extremely careful of not abusing our privilege. It is our duty to see that everywhere we use is always kept clean and orderly.

Each religious, cultural, social and educational function is planned with more organized new people involving and attending and each activity participating more and more people. Chances are given to almost everyone for leadership, but it should be clear in our minds that we are not a money making business venture. The money that we profit from one function, enables us to plan for the next function for the betterment of our Church's cultural and educational programs. Money making is not our purpose, but only to allow us a means to reach towards our ultimate goal.

While our Church Membership has risen considerably from 78 to 110, in comparison to our Parish, Church attendance on Sunday mornings at this time is quite low. Why is it, at any social functions, we have perhaps triple more people than in the Church? Why is it, at any Saturday night social gathering, new faces arrive, yet the following morning, hardly the same people arrive to the Church? Why is it, that we have more people assembled around the "Coffee Pot" after the Church service than we do during the Church service around the Altar? Do we really think that every Sunday we hold services to distribute coffee, or coffee is served to all who have come to church, and coffee will make us socialize after the church? Have we misplaced our priorities? Have we forgotten that our first duty on Sunday morning is to Worship God in Church with our fellow parishioners? What example do we set for the others, especially to our children? Do we really try to give of ourselves to make our Church a truly spiritual reality, or are we satisfied with simply having bigger and better social activities? No! I believe our standards that we have inherited from our holy forefathers are worth much more than a cup of coffee and a cigarette!

It has been a very rewarding experience for me to work with our Parish Council Members. These are the people who were elected by you to carry on the leadership of our Church. It is important to be a part of the Executive Body of any of our Church organizations, but it is more important to be on the Parish Council. They are the Board of Directors of our Church. I consider them the heartbeat and pulse of our Church Body. It is not an easy task to be a Parish Council Member. It takes self-confidence, sacrifice, self-denial, maturity, a sense of responsibility and many other positive characters of leadership. During elections, we should not consider personal favoritism or merits on electing people just for the sake of electing them. Our Church's advancement is based on their leadership.

This past year, I have thoroughly enjoyed working with our present Parish Council Members. I personally would like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the Council, their Chairman, Mr. Yohannes Hekimian who is very well known in this community for his dedication, together with him, Mr. Peter Basralian's inspiring and enterprising personality, made our Festival an enormous success and a new frontier for our Community. I would like to thank their Vice-Chairman,

Mr. James Boyajian for his motivational leadership, his advice and encouragement has helped me a great deal. I extend my appreciation to Mr. Zaven Kirksharian, Secretary, with his hard work, our Pledge System became materialized. My gratitude to our Treasurer, Mr. Garabed Keramian who spends unlimited time for our financial arrangements. My appreciation is also extended to Mr. Stephen Saxenian and Mr. Jani Ohanian for their unlimited work and talents on our Building Committee. There is much to be said about our Deacon, Hovig Frankian, who besides his Sunday duties, serving and assisting me on the Altar, inspires all of us with his youth and flamboyant suggestions. Last, I should not forget my appreciation to Mr. Sooren Yeriazarian. His motivation and dedication to his Church in spite of his hectic and busy schedule, is in itself a very strong asset. During these past 12 months, their suggestions to me have been extremely helpful, their criticism constructive, their appreciation and respect for my office has been real and satisfying.

The saying goes that behind every successful man there lies a good strong woman; I say that behind an active and strong Church, there lies a dynamic, active and strong Women's Organization. They are the main back-bone behind all the Armenian Churches in America as well as in Houston. They are bigger, better and stronger than ever and their membership is growing more each year. Under the Chairmanship of Mrs. Beatrice Keramian, all the members have worked diligently and unselfishly. At this time, they have a new Chairman, Mrs. Khatoon Ohanian whose guidance has already shown annual plans for a very active and challenging year. I myself attend to every one of their membership meetings to work with them and for them harmoniously. We have new plans to offer to our Parish which we hope will be well appreciated. We hope and especially encourage all the women of our Church to participate in the good work they have started.

All those who come to Church more often will unanimously agree with me the great improvement of our Choir's singing. They have come a long way with the help of all the members who come regularly for rehearsal on Wednesday, in spite of heat, cold or rain. We have 16 well trained choir members averaging 10 members every Sunday for our Church Services. Our Choirmaster, Mr. James Boyajian, Choir Organists, Mrs. Sophia Boyajian, Miss Zorina Ohanian are to be thanked for their unselfish work and devotion and most especially for their dependability. Special appreciation is due to our Choir Chairman, Mr. Stepan Nazarian, Secretary, Mrs. Shoghig Frankian and Treasurer, Mrs. Sonia Kirksharian for their untiring efforts and assistance. Not only is our Choir involved mainly in singing during the Divine Liturgy every Sunday, they have taken the leadership of sponsoring cultural and educational programs in our Parish. This year, one of their main projects will be to encourage many new people to join the membership of our Choir to learn popular Armenian folk music as well as the Divine Liturgy to present to various functions and on television.

The Choir could not be fulfilled without the leadership of our Deacons. Our Deacons participate every Sunday by serving and assisting the Pastor during the Divine Liturgy. I extend my personal thanks and appreciation to all our Deacons, Mr. Hovig Frankian, Mr. Vartkes Takhtajian and Mr. Parsegh Horasanian whose spiritual inspiration has been a tremendous asset to myself and the Church. Hopefully this year, we will be joined with Mr. Antranig Mavoulian and Mr. Antranig Kymoujian as Deacons in our Church.

An Armenian Church is not at all complete without its Armenian and Sunday School. Both of our schools became a living reality this past year with two devoted and dedicated people, Mrs. Shake Guzel and Mrs. Pat Ohanian as Superin-

tendents. Their teaching staff; Miss Houry Sarkissian, Mr. Vazrig Grigorian, Miss Pepik Hambarsoomian, Mrs. Yeproohi Dancer, Mrs. Christine Kondralian, Mr. Assadour Kevranian and Mr. Pascal Guzel, availed themselves to assist and help us at any given time that we call upon them. At this time, I am happy to announce the foundation and organization of a P.T.A. (Parents - Teachers- Association) Board under the Chairmanship of Mr. Heros DerGregorian. We look forward to his suggestions and assistance for the betterment and advancement of the Schools. In years to come, our Schools will become one of the most organized programs within our Parish.

Needless to say, our Church Community is just like any other Church Community; an organization with basic financial needs. Our Community needs make demands upon our financial resources. For this we must share the giving, and in order to give we need each other not because we must, but because it is our duty. For this reason, our focus has been on the construction of a Pledge System which has been in existence for the last 8 months. Under the Chairmanship of Mr. Zaven Kirksharian, this system is working. This year, our goal will be to introduce to you an Envelope System. Although we insure some financial security for income from our annual activities, the Pledge System still remains the main resource for our financial needs. All Armenian Churches within the United States have organized this Pledge System with goals set for accomplishment.

Last year, we gathered together for our first Parish Assembly with 78 dues paying members registered. Our goal for 1978 was to reach an estimated 100 dues paying members. Today, this goal has been accomplished with 109 registered members in good standing. However, all goals must and should be topped, as our potential for 1979 will be to raise our membership to 150.

Our monthly newsletter, "News Briefs" is sent to you on a bi-monthly regular basis. This newsletter is sent only only to Armenians within Houston, but also to Armenians within the State of Texas and surrounding states. We hope you find our newsletter refreshing with information about your parish keeping everyone up-to-date with all accomplishments and news and nourishing cultural, spiritual and educational articles to inform you of upcoming events.

With many new Armenian families constantly moving into Houston, considerable thought has been given towards organizing an Armenian Businessman's Group to assist newcomers. To find them jobs, to help them to situate in the city and to help existing Armenian Businessmen to succeed in their business every way possible.

At the present time, our Community in Houston is most heavily populated and concentrated city of Armenians in the State of Texas. Many Armenians are now residing within the cities of Dallas, San Antonio and Austin and we should especially concern ourselves towards reaching out to these cities to better organize each community for their advancement. I personally have made visitations to each of these cities, meeting Armenians and find that we here in Houston are the most productive city and community in the State of Texas.

This year, we are more than hopeful to start the construction of our new Church. However, in our present situation where we are guests, our activities, our plannings, our requirements and especially our expectations are limited. I believe strongly that we have a very unique advantage. This is a perfect opportunity for us to stop and organize ourselves to be ready, willing and able to place our belongings and move into our own quarters.

For the Annual Record, I present the following:

During the year 1978, we had Divine Liturgy celebrated on 49 Sundays while 2 other Sundays were on vacation and 1 by Archbishop Torkom Manoogian (Sunday, November 19, 1978). Amongst these Sundays, 1 was celebrated in Austin, Texas (Saturday, September 23, 1978), 1 in Dallas, Texas (Saturday, May 13, 1978) and 1 in San Antonio, Texas (Saturday, May 27, 1978). On 2 occasions, we have invited two clergymen to take part to our Divine Services. The first, Fr. Minas, Pastor and the whole parish of the Coptic Church for a Lenten Banquet afterwards on Sunday, February 26, 1978. Fr. Ansaem Walker, Professor of St. Thomas University joined us and gave the sermon on Sunday, March 12, 1978. Attorney George Knowell, speaker at Hrant Bardony's Funeral Memorial Day, Sunday, April 16, 1978. I have prepared and delivered 83 sermons in Armenian and English on the above given Sundays. During the week of May 1 through May 7, 1978, I attended the Annual Diocesan Assembly which took place in Detroit, Michigan participating to all clergy and delegate meetings and affairs. 140 visits were made for Pastoral or Church purposes, 62 visits to Old Age Homes and Hospital visitations, personal council or assistance was given on 86 occasions; 191 meetings were attended with individuals for administrative and educational purposes. We held 39 Choir rehearsals. We had 9 Baptisms performed by me. 2 deaths and 1 wedding. 25 public functions as well as receptions of personal nature were attended. I have also taken personal responsibility of preparing the Church on every Saturday for the next day's Divine Liturgy Service and for aother occasions. Letters and correspondence in every level were prepared within my office including pre-planning all the functions two months prior to its happening. Preparing the major informative circulations, flyers and other necessary designing, printing, folding and mailing.

Preparing our by-monthly News Brief, keeping the statistics of our functions. Above all, the literature, circulars, letters and office work is done and prepared and sent my me along with the assistance of a few faithful parishioners.

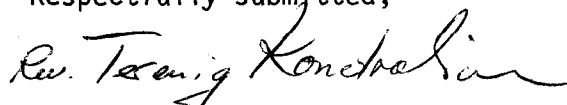
Before I come to the conclusion of my report, I would like to thank personally to Miss Houry Sarkissian, who spent many numerous hours donating her time for office work for our Church and at last to Yerezgin Christine Kondralian, for what could one say; I could not have done all this without her mental, physical and moral support. May God always keep her beside me.

As we end one year and begin another and more over a new decade, I thank all those who have worked for our Church, our Parish Council, organizations, committees and everyone who gave of themselves to St. George Armenian Church.

I ask for your continued prayers for my Ministry. The tasks are manifold, the burdens heavy, the frustrations frequent, but there is a satisfying reward of knowing appreciation of being loved, of working together in this productive parish.

May God Bless us all in this New Year of 1979 and keep our failures few and minor and our successes many and major. May God inspire us with the Gospel of Christ giving us sincerity in all our endeavors, and especially humility to work not for our own personal vanity, but for His Glory and the god of His People.

Respectfully submitted,



Rev. Terenig Kondralian,
Pastor