

PASTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT - 1994

By the grace of God, with thankful spirit, we have completed another year of growth at St. Hagop Church and have already started another active year which should prove to be a banner year for our congregation.

Fifteen years ago, we just moved into our present property after having been without a place of our own for worship, and now we own not one, but two beautiful pieces of property. It is our hope and prayer that in a little over two years we will begin to worship in our new church.

In addition to their regular responsibilities, the Parish Council members, along with the Building Committee and its sub-committees, (a total of 20 people, elected representatives of our parish) have had to spend countless hours up to late night deliberations (at times with expressed emotions of concern), to develop and fine tune our building project in order to present the best possible church facilities for our parish. In our eagerness, we have been so pre-occupied to attend to the "church business", that once in a while we have had to remind ourselves and re-focus on the spiritual aspect of "the business of the church".

As the pastor of the church, it has been my duty and privilege to have my active part in planning and attending various meetings, functions and programs, sponsored by organizations and committees, designed for the enjoyment, edification and growth of our congregation. We have been constrained and limited by adequate space in having more social and cultural programs that would otherwise contribute further to strengthen our parish. As you know, it has been an uncomfortable hassle, to say the least, to have to convert our place of worship to facilities for communal dinners, cultural programs, social functions and rug and attic treasure sales.

This condition has made many of us more anxious and eager to expedite the realization of our construction project. It is that restless anxiousness that has led some of us to actions and expressions which have at times caused conflict and contention among members. Yet we have continued to pursue the project, attempting to give it our best, basically in the spirit of fraternal cordiality, Christian love and unity of common purpose.

It has been my responsibility to minister to the communal and personal needs of our parish in dimensions of spiritual, educational, cultural, social and service activities.

Spiritually speaking, it has been noticed that for the most part, the numbers of church attendants and receivers of holy communion have increased. We have taken special care in conducting properly our worship services, enhancing the understanding of the meaning of Badarak through periodic narrational explanations, and preparing with care and relevance the spiritual messages, taking topics from the Bible, liturgical celebrations, human needs and conditions. Subjects not covered in sermons have been dealt with in periodic "question and answer" sessions when issues and concerns have been solicited from the congregation.

It has been a source of satisfaction for us to witness the improved attendance of our Sunday School pupils at portions of Badarak, regular monthly reception of holy communion and the special educational audio-visual programs which brought some children to church on summer Sundays. It is a source of joy to know that from the ranks of these angels that the future participants and leaders of our parish will come.

Educationally speaking, we have had a full year of quality educational and cultural programs, including the Lenten Friday talks, Gomidas-Toumanian function, Sunday Badarak presentations and others. Of special significance has been our adult educational program with classes in Armenian language instruction and sessions for the study of the modern meaning of the Bible. Other occasions of educational instructions have been the sacraments of the church. The basic teachings of the church have been imparted to participants in baptismal and funeral services. Weddings have not only been occasions to reiterate the meaning of Christian matrimony, but also a time when prospective spouses have taken a closer look at the essential ingredients of happy Christian family and the theological tenets of the church in series of instructional group discussions. It has been my pastoral privilege to meet in counseling sessions with people carrying various emotional and physical burdens, bringing to them the guidance of the Holy Bible and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

In our communal activities, we will long remember the unprecedented visit of the first president of the new Republic of Armenia, who participated with us in New York in the Third Anniversary Celebration of Armenia's independence.

Speaking of Armenia, it has been very encouraging to see the warm response of our parishioners to our appeal to adopt a needy family in Armenia by donating \$120 per family. As you know, your donations of \$13,000 were taken to Armenia and distributed to the families of fallen soldiers in Artzakh and Armenia by George Leylegian and Avadis Sakalian. Our parish's enthusiastic response of "Aid to Armenia" has been gratifying.

The other two community events that have been joyous for us, were the St. James Award Banquet when we honored Michael Guroian for his unselfish service to our church and the Interfaith Memorial Concert held at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, when our own Michelle Ekizian premiered a musical creation which was met with standing ovation by thousands of people.

Several times in the year, the community was invited to monthly Friday evening socials and informative talks, which proved to be quite enjoyable. We have also re-instituted the practice of families taking turn to host the Sunday fellowship hours. Our appreciation to all participating families as well as Parish Council member, Alice Basmajian for coordinating the program.

Our parish registry shows that we have had one adult and twelve infant baptisms, 4 weddings, two additional ones where I have participated with other clergymen and nine funerals, plus one, where I have assisted another priest. It should be noted that the majority of the wedding ceremonies, while performed by me, yet are held in other churches, because ours does not lend itself for the festive or size accomodation of the special occasion.

1994 was a significant milestone in my pastoral life, as the 20th anniversary of my ordination as a priest was celebrated with a gala banquet and program, when our Primate, His Eminence Archbishop Khajag Barsamian presided and granted me the privilege of the title "Avak Kahana" (Archpriest), issued by the late Catholicos of All Armenians, just before he became seriously ill. My thanks and appreciation to all who planned the event and all who joined in the celebration. To me and my family, it was a joyous occasion and a humbling experience. My enthusiasm and dedication were further renewed.

In the interest of saving time, let me express my deep appreciation to each and every one, who one way or another, has contributed to the well being and success of our parish. In particular, I express my warmest appreciation and ask God's continued blessing upon all members of the Parish Council, the Building Committee, the three groups who offer their services week after week--the choir, the director and the altar servers, the staffs of the Armenian and Sunday Schools--the parish organizations, committees and coordinators of various fundraising projects, such as the annual picnic, (Mark Derderian and Michael Guroian, chair), the rug sales, (Doug Tashjian, coordinator), and the attic treasures sale, (Alyce Vakassian, coordinator). Special thanks to our efficient office staff, particularly to our volunteer secretary, Gale Perzigian, who has been serving in the church office for the last seven years, three days a week, all in the spirit of thankfulness to God and in loving memory of her beloved mother. May God bless them and all of you.

We anticipate at least two significant developments in the current year. In seven weeks, a successor will be elected to our beloved late Catholicos in Etchmiadzin. We are happy that three of the 24 representatives elected to participate in this historic election are from our parish: Rev. Fr. Arten Ashjian, Mr. Suren D. Fesjian, our church gnahayr and Judge Vincent Gurahian, our diocesan delegate, who has also served as the capable chairman of the Diocesan Council for the last ten years.

Some of the practices that will help our parish to be further strengthened are as follows, albeit they seem so basic and obvious: 1) Prompt and regular attendance and full participation in our Sunday worship services needs to be improved. Remember, the beautiful edifice we plan to build is solely for the purpose of worship. It behooves us to be more faithful in our duty and practice of participating in the worship experience of the church. If only few faithful members will attend services regularly and others irregularly and impromptly, then we need to ask ourselves the question, why build a new church edifice? We are determined to make our church services an uplifting and rewarding experience for all regular attendants.

2) We are grateful to all who continue faithfully to support the church with their annual stewardship donations. You will be glad to know that with steady growth the number of stewards has grown to 121. With it the anticipated total budgeted income of \$45,000 was also realized. We urge you all to consider increasing the amount of your donations this year as you fill out the pledge form you received recently and return it to the church office. Also those of you who are voting members of the church but have not yet made a commitment for regular annual donation as a steward, please do so at your earliest convenience. Membership in a parish involves regular, steady support and donation of a fair share of time, talent and treasure.

And if there are any among you who have not yet become voting members, please contact the church office for a membership form. Presently we have 183 voting members registered in our church, an increase of 21 member over last year. There are still a few members who choose not to pay their annual dues regularly. This practice causes an unrealistic fluctuation of our total membership and gives an incorrect picture of our parish. Remember, please, that dues in our parish are among the lowest compared with many other parishes.

3) In order for our children to become well informed and conscientious members of our church and community they need to attend Sunday School and Armenian School regularly. Children develop ethnic awareness and cultural knowledge as Armenians, and grow in the faith of our fathers as Christians at an early age. No parent can afford to be negligent in providing the opportunity for their children to receive good Armenian and Christian education. Here again, regular attendance and punctuality need to be exercised both to give children maximum time for learning and to set a good example of faithfulness and consistency.

4) While we are known as a warm and friendly community, we need to intermingle with each other more steadily and frequently in a Christian spirit of cordiality, especially with guests, in order to continue integrating as a parish and getting to know each other better. We need to make an effort to communicate with members we don't know that well in addition to the ones we already know. One way of getting to know people is to work with them on committees, projects and programs. Here again it is always good to volunteer our services in a spirit of stewardship to help with various functions.

5) Cultural, educational programs, especially the adult Bible study sessions are planned for the congregation. Yet if you do not attend these programs, who will, or why have them? 1994 was declared by our Primate as The Year of the Family and the current year as The Year of the Bible. Let us make a concerted effort to attend the Bible study sessions to learn more about the teachings of the church and how to make them and our faith relevant to our daily life in interesting group discussions. Remember the Bible is the source of our religion and faith. Every Christian needs to read and study it for enlightenment, strength and guidance.

In closing, I pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to inspire us all to become more active participants in making this parish even more dynamic and vibrant for the glory of God and for the strengthening of our spiritual, cultural and communal life.

With Prayers,

Fr. Karekin Kasparian
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