

PASTOR'S REPORT
~~ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY~~
1998

Once again, I thank God for giving us this special opportunity to reflect on the year 1997.

The year 1997 was a year of mission and outreach in the Armenian Church of America. In order to introduce ourselves as one of the ancient churches in the world, St. James Armenian Church joined Virginia Council of Churches in 1996, and one of our cabinet meetings was held here at St. James in order to present them the Orthodox faith and the Armenian culture. Last month, St. James also hosted a dinner for 40 clergy from different counties and denominations. Union Theological Seminary sponsored Reform and Oriental Orthodox Dialogue. There were two Armenian bishop represented in this dialogue.

Unfortunately, in 1997, we did not have Bible Study sessions. When Ginna and myself tried in 1996, there was a lack in attendance. Last year, I was busy with my papers and a seminar. This year, I have designed a special Divine Liturgy course for those who are interested to understand the worship service. I am hopeful that this course will enhance your knowledge to understand and follow the Badarak on Sundays.

I am very glad to report you that we have a new secretary, Roxie Krikorian, who works hours in the office and at home. She is very instrumental in helping me, our church, and publishing our Sevan Newsletter. There is one thing that we both love: eating different kinds of chocolates.

We continued our choir rehearsals during the year. They learned many new songs and hymns. They were always available when there was a wedding or a funeral. Thanks to all choir members for coming to church on Sundays. We need more people involved in the choir. We do not have enough people to sing our beautiful ancient hymns. Last year, our organist Sussanna Arnold had a baby girl. For a time being, she is unable to play the organ. We have new organists: Karina and Anton, who are diligently coming to Church every Sunday to play the organ. Thanks to David Livingstone for preparing the Sunday bulletin.

I cannot forget the dedication of our altar servers, who diligently come to church every Sunday to sing on the altar. Presently, we have 8 altar servers. During the year 1997, two of our altar servers were sent to St. Nersses Armenian Seminary Summer Conference. We were able to send them by using the Vranian Youth Fund and the Educational Fund. In August 1997, the whole group went to New York and resided at St. Nersses Seminary. They sang at St. Vartan Cathedral in NYC. They sang at St. Mary's Church in Washington D.C. Because of friendly bond between our altar servers and the Seminarians, St. Nersses Seminarians visited Richmond in November. In December, our altar servers sang the Liturgy at St. Hagop Armenian Church in St. Petersburg, FL. We should be proud to have dedicated young men who serve on the table of the Lord.

Last year, the ACYOA Jrs. had many activities. I assigned Lusene Garabedian as the chairperson of the ACYOA. She did a great job in organizing events and making them successful.

The Armenian School is continuing its program. There are many children who do not participate in this program. Teaching Armenian language is important. I know that

we cannot make them speak perfectly, but at least our children should have some idea about the Armenian language. Parents must take it seriously. For the Armenian School, I assigned Mrs. Surpouhi Voskanian as the superintendent. She is doing a great job. We are lucky to have Voskanian family as a part of our community. Besides the Armenian School for children, we have Armenian Language classes for adults. I have beginners and intermediate levels which we meet on Mondays and Thursdays. Most of them are young people who are eager to learn and speak Armenians.

Our Senior's Group is being reorganized again by Rose and Victoria. The end of last year, almost 20 seniors met in a restaurant for a social gathering. There is a hope that we will continue to meet regularly this year again.

My sincere gratitude is extended to the members of the Parish Council. They always support my ideas and they are a great asset in my ministry. We have dedicated and experienced members in our council. Last year we recognized John Baronian and Nebe Boyajian for their service of our Church.

The Women's Guild continued its program under the leadership of Mrs. Elizabeth Tootelian and had numerous activities. Mrs. Lilly Thomas was recognized by the Guild for her dedication and commitments. Recently, we have elected new board members. Elizabeth Tootelian, Carol Garabedian, and Sona Pomfrett completed their term. Thanks for doing a great job.

The Sunday School continues its classes. There are 20 students presently. I know that the children are enjoying coming to Sunday School. Thanks to all teachers for their dedication and commitments. Mrs. Isabel Vranian continues to support our Sunday School and I am thankful to her.

Last year, we commemorated again the Armenian martyr's day. We had an ecumenical service, TV interview, and the Blood Drive. The honorary chairman of the day was former Lt. Gov. Don Byer. Thanks to the committee chair Mr. Bedros Bandazian and for all those who assisted in organizing a successful events.

In December, our Primate made his annual parish visitation. On this day, I invited Bishop Walter Sullivan and Rev. Dr. Charles Brown.

Last year three important events happened in my life: 1) I completed my studies at Union Theological Seminary, and by the Will of God, I will be graduating on Sunday, May 31, 1998. 2) I became a citizen of the United States. 3) I became 30 years old. Thanks to all who made a memorable day for me.

Last year, St. James Armenian Church purchased a Cadillac for the Pastor. The car was purchased by the generous donation of our community members. Bedros Bandazian was assigned by the Council to raise fund for the car, which he completed successfully.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. & Mrs. Jack Tootelian for making the Church shine. Our Church was painted two weeks ago and it look bright and sunny. Dirt is the worst enemy of Jack. He likes to see spotless and clean in everywhere.


In 1997, we also lost a few dedicated members of our Church. Their memory will continue to stay in our hearts. Generally, the year 1997 was a good year for our Church. When I was checking my

last year annual report, I noticed a line which I said: "There are only few people who always give." I cannot say the same for the year 1997. Several new members have contributed to our church silently. The sense of responsibly and belonging in the Armenian community is increasing greatly. The future seems bright. We have embraced many new comers last year. The community is growing.

Special thanks to all those who always support St. James. Without your commitments, there is no future. Your support makes the Church accomplish its activities and empower the life of our community.

May God bless our community. May His Spirit help us to become stronger community in 1998. May His Divine presence always enables me to continue His mission.

V. Rev. Fr. Nareg Berberian, Pastor

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Fr. Nareg Berberian", written over a horizontal line.

St. James Armenian Church in Richmond, VA