

PASTOR'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR 1977

By Rev. Arten Ashjian

After my month-long illness and recuperation, I resumed working in the second week of January, 1977. I thank Almighty God for granting me good health to be able to complete the year and to accomplish some projects.

RELIGIOUS, SACRAMENTAL AND RITUAL ACTIVITIES

On January 8 and 9 the celebrant of the liturgies of Nativity Eve and Theophany was the Rev. Fr. Michael Buttero of the St. John Armenian Church of Greater Detroit. I assisted Father Buttero and helped the Choir on January 9.

Mr. Paul Chobanian, temporary director of the Choir, was forced by health problems to discontinue his service in mid-February. Since there was no qualified director volunteering to lead the Choir at that point, I had to request my wife to conduct the Choir and to participate in rehearsals, which were held almost every week during Lent and Holy Week. Upon being informed on May 5 by Mr. George Stevoff and Mr. Sarkis Cherkinian, chairman and treasurer respectively of the new Parish Council, that Mrs. Berjoughie Mikaelian was willing to direct the Choir, I had a conference with her and appointed her as the new Choir Director. Mrs. Mikaelian directed the Choir competently and with devotion until early in September when she needed to be hospitalized. After a long struggle, Berjoughie lost her battle against cancer in December. Her loss has deeply affected not only members of her family, but also many in St. Mesrob Church who worked with her and admired her as a leader. It is a providential coincidence that Berjoughie's talented niece Mrs. Diane Assarian returned to Racine about the same time when Berjoughie had to be admitted to the hospital. Since September Diane has served as director of the Choir punctually and with dedication.

Our organist, Miss Janet Cherkinian (married in our church to Mr. John Hahn on Oct. 29) has performed her duties faithfully. She has trained Miss Karen Garoukian of the Choir as an assistant organist. Karen served ably as organist during the month following Janet's wedding.

Deacon Charles Hardy conducted Jashou service on January 2, May 8, Oct. 2, and two Sundays during my annual vacation last summer. Once again the St. Mesrob annual picnic at Johnson Park on July 10 involved so many parishioners in preparatory labor that it was impossible to celebrate the Divine Liturgy on the morning of the picnic. Dr. Hagop Nersoyan, a full deacon who teaches in Dayton, Ohio, preached on May 1st upon my request. During Lent, weekly Peace and Rest hour service was held Friday evenings, with Deacon Hardy, Subdeacon Mikael Garoukian and a few Choir members participating. The attendance of the laity at this Lenten service has been very small.

As directed by the Primate, His Eminence Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, the annual Woman Saint's Day program was hosted by the St. John Armenian Church of Greenfield on March 2. I took part in the religious service on that occasion. Mrs. Berjoughie Mikaelian, chairman of the St. Mesrob Women's Guild, read the Epistle, and Mrs. Rose Akgulian of our parish gave an inspiring talk on St. Shooshan's life.

Upon the suggestion of Father Shnork Kasparian, the new pastor of St. John Armenian Church of Greenfield, the priests of the three Armenian churches of Wisconsin cooperated with each other by participating in three Maundy Thursday services in the following sequence: Noon Liturgy at St. John, early evening Washing of the Feet at St. Mesrob, and Vigils at Holy Resurrection Church in South Milwaukee.

On August 28, with the consent of our Parish Council I flew to St. Louis at my own expense and participated in the ordination to the priesthood of Deacon Manoog Kelegian, now Father Yeprem, pastor of Holy Shoghagat Armenian Church of East St. Louis.

There have been 8 funerals, 7 christenings and confirmations, and 1 wedding. I have attempted, without success, to arrange an appointment for a grown up child, baptised in a non-Armenian church, to receive chrismation in the Armenian Apostolic Church. During Fr. Arshag Khatchadourian's absence and upon his request I performed a funeral at the Holy Resurrection Church in May. I also took part in a wedding ceremony at the Holy Resurrection Church, with His Grace Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan presiding as guest preacher.

On Memorial Day I devoted a major part of the daytime to visiting Graceland Cemetery. Among the parishioners who came to the cemetery during that time, four families expressed a desire to have the priest offer prayers for their departed ones.

Blessing of homes: I mailed, at my own expense, 93 postcards to parishioners whose homes I was unable to bless in 1976. Of those who received the cards, 9 took the time to communicate with me requesting an appointment. Altogether I have blessed 19 homes and 1 place of business during the Eastertide season.

I administered Holy Communion to shut-ins on 8 occasions.

I assisted His Eminence the Primate in the cornerstone dedicating ceremony for the new Sts. Joachim and Anne Armenian Church of Palos Heights, Illinois.

VISITATIONS

A total of 579 visitations. This number includes visits to the sick, to families in mourning, to conduct religious services in the residence of shut-in parishioners. Also calls on administrative or educational, fraternal or public relations missions. Hospitals visited include three Milwaukee area hospitals, one hospital in Madison, and one nursing home in South Milwaukee.

EDUCATIONAL

1) Training of future deacons, with the use of the Deacon's Guidebook of the Divine Liturgy prepared by Archbishop Torkom Manoogian. Yeretzgin Mary Ashjian helped as organ accompanist. Of those who attended the practice sessions, Kai Kazarian, Nick Akgulian, and Brian Mikaelian have been serving in recent months as censors and reciters of certain litanies in the Divine Liturgy.

2) Weekly Choir practice during Lent, Holy Week and special occasions.

3) Preparation of periodic schedules for the Choir, indicating the variables of Sundays and feastsdays. St. Mesrob Choir is one of the few choirs now in the Diocese that pay attention to the requirements of the variables. The men in the Choir have assumed the responsibility of chanting the theme line for the day's Jashou hymn. Chanting the Introit and the Gradual psalm has been taken over by the Choir, this being the normal procedure in the Armenian liturgical tradition.

4) On various occasions I have devoted space in the Sunday bulletin to explaining the significance of the day's feast or items relevant to the service or to the Bible.

5) With the cooperation of the Church School staff, I performed the Instructed Divine Liturgy for the benefit of the English speaking segment of our congregation.

6) I have tried to create interest in public reading of the Bible lections of the Divine Liturgy by suggesting to laymen -including Parish Council members- to take turns in reading the designated passages after due preparation.

7) I have encouraged our Church School staff and grown up parishioners to attend the two-day workshop on communications initiated by the Council for Religious Education of the Diocese. According to Mrs. Valerie Zahirsky, who came from the Diocesan Center to conduct the workshop, the attendance at the St. Mesrob program was good.

8) I submitted the name of Mrs. Hourig Tcheurekdjian, a teacher at St. Mesrob Armenian School, to the Educational Council of the Diocese, as a candidate to participate in the weeklong teachers training program for Armenian schools, limited to 12 students. Fortunately for St. Mesrob Armenian School Mrs. Tcheurekdjian was accepted just before the completion of the quota. Mrs. Tcheurekdjian returned from the program held at the Armenian Language Lab of the Diocese with a wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm, and was instrumental in arranging a visit to St. Mesrob Church by Miss Sylva Der Stepanian, author of textbooks and Educational Director of Armenian Schools of the Diocese.

9) I conducted oral tests for the two 9th grade students of the Church School senior class before their graduation. At my suggestion the two students wrote and presented brief essays at the graduation program in church.

10) I have urged young parishioners to attend the summer religious study conference and deacons training program sponsored by the St. Nersess Armenian Theological School and held at Elkhorn, Wisconsin. I have also urged the Parish Council and the Women's Guild to make funds available from their treasuries for scholarships for this purpose. Four of the A.C.Y.O.A. boys who serve on the altar were recipients of these scholarships and attended the weeklong program. I gave two lectures upon request of Father Karekin Kasparian, dean of the Theological School.

11) I gave a short daily message to the children who attended the Vacation Bible School sponsored by the St. Mesrob Church School.

12) I gave a talk to the older group of campers at Hye Camp upon invitation of Father Shnork Kasparian, chaplain of the camp.

13) I took part in the mission to the Waukegan parish of St. George, conducted by the three Armenian priests in Wisconsin. This was done with the approval of the Primate and the knowledge of the Parish Councils involved. The month being October, I gave a talk on the meaning of Armenian Culture.

14) In support of the workshop on Armenians sponsored by the Multi-Cultural Studies Center of the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, I assisted Mr. Harry Boranian in selecting liturgical items for an exhibit set up in our church library room. Mrs. Rose Akgulian served as the resource person for the two-day workshop, which brought Armenian scholars to Racine from Washington, D.C., California and Ohio. The St. Mesrob Armenian School prepared and served an Armenian lunch in St. Mesrob Annex during the workshop. At the conclusion of the program a well-attended public dinner was held by the Racine chapter of the Armenian General Benevolent Union at the U.W.-Parkside, with Mrs. Rose Akgulian serving as program chairman.

15) Upon my request, Mr. Harold Sahakian agreed to serve as director of the religious study Pilot Project to be held soon for the benefit of adults in St. Mesrob parish. The four lessons, taken out of a textbook written by St. Nersess Seminary graduate Deacon Michael Chevian, are under the general title, THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY.

PROJECTS:

INVENTORY. With Deacon Charles Hardy and Subdeacon Mikael Garoukian I took inventory of all objects kept and/or used in the altar area, in the chancel, the priest's vesting room, and the baptismal room.

INDEX. Reading the earliest available minutes of the Board of Trustees of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Racine, I have prepared on cards an index of all Armenians whose names are recorded as involved in activities relative to the Armenian community of Racine, covering the years 1918-1923.

ORDINATION. On the occasion of the forthcoming visit to St. Mesrob Church of His Eminence Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, I have recommended to His Grace in writing that he confer the four minor ranks of the Armenian Church upon the following altar

servers: Gary Akgulian, Nick Akgulian, Nishan Akgulian, Avak Grigorian, Tom Janikian, Nick Kadamian, Kai Kazarian, Brian Mikaelian, Mike Minasian, Charles Roy, Alex Sahagian, David Stevoff.

STAINED GLASS FOR CHURCH WINDOWS. I have visited for discussing this project the Enterprise Art Glass Company in Milwaukee (once) and the Conrad Scmitt Studio in New Berlin (twice). I have submitted to both companies a list of theological and historical themes on which an artist at Conrad Scmitt has done some research and submitted sketches. A representative of Conrad Scmitt Studio has attended a meeting of the Parish Council, answering numerous questions.

ACQUISITIONS

Through the initiative of the Parish Council under the leadership of Mr. George Stevoff, the following were received:

- 1) A set of priest's vestments, sewn to our specifications by an Armenian seamstress in New York. The crown, which was not included, was fitted by Yeretzgin Mary Ashjian by using matching material on an older crown that did not belong to any set.
- 2) A shipment of hard cover Divine Liturgy books was ordered from the Diocesan bookstore for the use of worshipers.
- 3) The graduating class of the Church School presented an Armenian liturgical book to St. Mesrob Church.

MISCELLANEOUS

GRADUATES RECOGNITION. On June 19, 1977 high school and college graduates of the parish were invited by me to worship at St. Mesrob Church. On behalf of the Parish Council Mr. George Stevoff presented individual gifts to the graduates, following an appropriate message by him.

GOLD PLATED GOSPELS BOOK. The children of Mr. and Mrs. John and Alice Keishian donated an ornate goldplated Armenian Gospels Book for the altar, in memory of their grandparents Haji Mugurditch and Margaret Hajinian.

DONATION OF LITURGICAL ITEMS. Mrs. Anna Barootian donated a Divine Liturgy hardback book. Mr. Paul Chobanian donated two liturgical books in Armenian. Gene and Marie Chardukian donated a white linen embroidered cover for the table in the vesting room. Mrs. Marie Chardukian sewed a pair of maniples to complete one of the sets of priest's vestments. Mrs. Aghavnie Jansouzian donated five handmade towels and a Divine Liturgy book.

RELATIONS WITH AREA ARMENIAN CLERGY

In December of 1976 the number of Armenian priests in the Illinois-Wisconsin area was raised from 3 to 4 upon the appointment of the Very Rev. Fr. Shnork Kasparian as pastor of the Greenfield (Wis.) parish. Following some informal discussions, the four clergy agreed to meet periodically on a rotation basis, break bread together and discuss matters relative to the religious and spiritual welfare of the parishes in the Midwest. The first of these gatherings was held at my home during Lent. All four clergy have served in the role of host. During the post-ordination retreat of Fr. Yeprem Kelegian the Wisconsin clergy visited him and his mentor Fr. Varoujan Kabaradjian. Since the departure of Fr. Arshag Khatchadourian from South Milwaukee in late November, these periodic meetings have been temporarily suspended. (However, I telephoned Fr. Jirayr Tashjian, new pastor of the St. Gregory the Illuminator Church of Chicago to welcome him to the Midwest, and with Yeretzgin paid him a visit in Chicago on 1/9/78).

RELATIONS WITH THE DIOCESE.

At the time of the annual Parish Assembly last winter, I took care to see that questionnaires and report forms sent by the Primate be answered and filled on time, and all required reports and minutes be submitted to His Eminence, before responsibility could be transferred by the outgoing Parish Council to the new one.

I devoted time in the winter to do research in response to the Primate's directive to make photocopies of official correspondence from the Diocese pertaining to the period 1925-1944. Unfortunately, no letters dating from those years are in existence in the St. Mesrob Church files. What I could find was about a dozen handwritten copies entered into the minutes ledgers (one typed letter was pasted on a page). These were graciously photocopied by Mr. Perry Paragamian before I could submit them to the Primate.

During the first week of May I attended the two-day annual conference of the diocesan clergy in Warwick, R.I., and together with our four lay representatives, the 75th Annual Diocesan Assembly at Sts. Sahag-Mesrob Church in Providence, R.I. At this meeting Mr. George Stevoff was elected to serve for a four-year term on the Diocesan Council. I was, along with Mr. Stevoff, elected to serve on the Nominating Committee for the 76th Annual Diocesan Assembly.

APPRECIATION AND THANKS

The memory of the late Mrs. Berjoughie Mikaelian will be blessed by me and many parishioners, for she was a courageous leader -in spite of her health problems- of both the Women's Guild and the Choir.

I thank Deacon Charles Hardy, Subdeacon Mikael Garoukian, all the altar servers, the acolytes and their coach Yerezgin Mary. I thank all the volunteers who directed the Choir last year, and all those Choir members who have conducted themselves with reverence, humility and respectful attitude.

I thank Mr. George Stevoff, chairman of the Parish Council, for his punctual and methodical way of working, for actively expressing his concern for fairness in solving parish administrative problems, and for his frequent personal favors to me and my family.

I I thank Mrs. Helen Chordegian, flower donations coordinator, and her colleague Mrs. Sue Esayian, for their faithful and reliable service in maintaining the beauty of the altar with fresh flowers or plants.

I I thank Mrs. Anna Barootian and her regular and occasional helpers on the Altar Care Committee for their faithful devotion to the cleaning and decorating of the altar area.

I thank the donors of altar candles and flowers, and all those who contributed to the baking, packaging and distributing of mahs.

Appreciation is due to Mrs. Var Cherkinian, coordinator of the weekly cleaning of our house of prayer, including the sanctuary and the vesting rooms. Also to all couples or individuals who volunteered to do the cleaning.

I thank Church School Superintendent Mrs. Claire Kadamian and her staff, Armenian School board member and volunteer superintendent Mr. Noubar Tcheurekdjian, ACYOA Juniors' adult advisors Mike and Mary Janikian and Goldie Roy for their spirit of dedication and leadership.

In conclusion, I thank all members of the Parish Council for such policies adopted and actions taken which have contributed to the advancement of St. Mesrob Church in the realm of good will, spiritual, educational and cultural enrichment within the community.

January 12, 1978