

ST. MARY'S ARMENIAN CHURCH
ELBERON, NEW JERSEY

A special meeting was held at the Elberon Armenian Church hall on August 10, 1975 at 3:15 pm. Present were seven members of the Parish Council, one Diocesan Delegate, and the two representatives of the Diocesan Council, Rev. Zaven Arzoumanian and Mr. Crosby Goshgarian. Two members of the Parish Council were absent. The Diocesan Council representatives had arranged to meet with the Parish Council and with the Parish Priest separately.

The special meeting was chaired by the Parish Council chairman Mr. Barkave Elian. Fr. Zaven presided over the meeting. The reason to convene such a meeting was to re-evaluate the unhealthy situation which exists within the parish.

The representatives of the Diocesan Council were first informed of the two previous attempts that were made towards establishing a better and healthier relationship between the Parish Council and the Pastor Rev. Vertanes Kalayjian. Those two attempts were:

- (a) Mr. Jack Antreassian's meeting with the Parish Council at Elberon.
- (b) The Parish Council's meeting with the Primate at the Diocese.

After some lengthy discussions it became known to the representatives of the Diocesan Council that the lack of communication and cooperation between the Pastor and the Parish Council had resulted in a serious dissension and division within the membership of the church. This fact was substantiated by the presentation of two different petitions, signed by members of the church, one in favor of and the other against the Pastor's stay within the parish as their pastor. Such petitions, however, have to be qualified, whether they are signed by dues-paying members or by other Armenians. The suggestion of the two representatives was to not

consider such petitions at this time. Rather, they made their point clear that the Primate and the Diocesan Council are seeking a possible way to solve the problem rather than take a drastic step about it.

The whole problem seemed to revolve around three main questions:

1. The attitude of the parish priest toward his obligations which has gradually resulted in lack of leadership on his part. It was stressed that lack of visitations and not putting enough time in the administration of the office work had not justified the full-time tenure of the Pastor at least for the past one year and half. The representatives of the Diocesan Council felt that this being of prime importance can be corrected by talking into the Pastor, a task which shall be handled by the Primate.

2. The financial situation of the parish is at stake. Until recently the parish, which now has 120 dues-paying membership, was able to raise funds and pay the stipend of the Pastor. According to the treasurer, as of Sunday August 10, 1975, the parish had \$450.00 in the checking account. A total of \$3,000.00 is in the savings, of which \$2,000 as saving certificates and \$1,000 by the Ladies Aid earmarked for the Build. Fund. Such financial balance, we understand, is due to the deliberate efforts of the membership who are unwilling to pay their dues and various donations because of the existing situation. Ironically, both segments are withholding their monetary contributions for one reason or another.

3. A new element known to us as people from the "separated brethren" are reportedly infiltrating within the parish membership. The Parish Council is concerned about this infiltration and is blaming the Pastor for paying them more attention and encouragement. The Diocesan Council representatives explained the Parish Council that all Armenians who reside within the geographical area are entitled to become dues-paying members, provided they abide by the provisions of the Diocesan By-Laws.

It is unfortunate that the majority of the Parish Council (five against two) felt strongly that reconciliation between the Pastor and the Parish Council is useless at this point and that the transfer of the Pastor is necessary. It was explained to them that such a drastic change will hurt the parish indefinitely, since a new assignment of a parish priest will be almost impossible in the foreseeable future, thus taking the parish back to the poor conditions of the previous years. The suggestion of the two representatives to the Parish Council was that an attempt should be made to heal the situation, at least on a trial basis, the response of which was that they rather resign and others take over.

Later in the evening the Diocesan Council representatives met with the Pastor, Rev. Vertanes Kalayjian at his residence. Present were Mr. John Chakamian (with no official capacity) and Mr. Armen Bulbulian (Parish Council member). Rev. Kalayjian stressed the fact that it has been extremely hard for him to work with the present Parish Council and that a new body will see no difficulty to carry on the various activities that the Parish is enjoying for the past three years. He is willing to continue his duties for the sake of the parish which is growing with the Armenian and Sunday schools. Mr. Chakamian reminded that a petition with sizable signatures is being circulated in the parish in favor of the resident parish priest and his stay within the community.

In conclusion, the two members of the Diocesan Council would like to make the following recommendation to the Diocesan Council.

1. The Primate and the Diocesan Council should carefully examine and

consider the reports of the two previous meetings taken place at Elberon and at the Diocese, and get the respective recommendations.

2. A trial period of six months, until the date of the Parish Assembly in January, 1976, be designated for the Pastor and the Parish Council to try to solve the various problems that have risen in the past. This can be worked out in two ways, each supplementing the other:

- (a) Personal interview of the Pastor by His Grace the Primate who shall spell out the pastor's duties and obligations, including the change of his attitude and behavior. It is suggested that the Pastor devote more working time in the actual premises of the church where he must have an office and regular office hours.
- (b) Assign a special representative (preferably Mr. Jack Antreassian who lives in the area) who shall attend the Parish Council meeting regularly, which is held once a month, until the end of the trial period. Rev. Kalayjian has requested to be excused from attending the Council meetings for the time being because of the existing antagonism. It is recommended that the Pastor should attend the meetings along with the special representative.

3. If agreed, the above recommendation must be implimented by the Primate and the Chairman of the Diocesan Council personally. It is requested that the Surpazan Hyre and Judge Najarian meet with the Parish Council and the Pastor and pass on the decision of the Council as soon as possible.

4. If the trial period proves useless the Primate and the Diocesan Council may take the necessary steps then.

August 12, 1975

Rev. Zaven Arzoumanian
Crosby Goshgarian
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
DIOCESAN COUNCIL