

ST. GEORGE ARMENIAN CHURCH

HOUSTON, TEXAS

PASTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT

St. George Armenian Church of Houston is a community of people sharing a common ethnic identity, committed to Christ as Lord and Savior, attempting to realize in both personal and social life, the ideals of the Christian Gospel. Our Armenian Church is both hierarchical and democratic in organization. We have a constitution and tradition, a rule of order which applies to us all within this frame work, together with the Pastor for the good of the whole Church. Each year we will assemble together as a Parish to review the past year and make plans for our future. What has been done is to be judged by our common faith and what is planned is to be judged by our ideals.

This past year, by the request of you, the parishioners of St. George Armenian Church and by His Grace, Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, I was officially appointed to be the Pastor of St. George Armenian Church of Houston. I arrived in Houston on Thursday, September 8, 1977 and officially took the responsibility of Pastoral duties on Monday, September 12, 1977.

At this time, I would like to remind you that my Annual Report will include only the work completed between the dates from September 12, 1977 through December 31, 1977.

In the beginning, I found the task facing me to be a difficult one as the question arose in my mind, where do I start with the unlimited work set before me? It was very encouraging to see that the majority of the Parishioners were ready to work, were ready to move forward and especially ready and willing to accomplish something in their community life. But, there was this mysterious doubt troubling in everyone's minds; would we succeed in doing something that no one had ever experienced before.

I place a vast importance of knowing each and every one of you personally. By meeting and learning each of you, I hope to motivate our success and to especially erase the doubts in every one's minds. I made personal visitations to each and every one of you in order to know you better and to encourage our motivation together. The distance and time spent traveling made no difference whatsoever because, I feel that in order to work together, the importance of knowing you is of great significance.

It is true, that all of us together are living the infancy of a Church and going through a birth period. During this very important time, we should never forget that we are a Christian and Armenian Institution. On the one hand, we are committed by our very nature to campaign the Gospel of Christ, spreading His good news of love to all men. We are called to be a worshipping community, a teaching fellowship, a caring and loving family, serving men in their needs. All of us individually as well as collectively in our Church life are judged by the Word of God. On the other hand, we have an obligation to encourage our Armenian Heritage, not only to preserve its values to those who will come after us, but also to

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expand its horizons and make it ^{available} overtake and relevant to our contemporaries.

Today, here in Houston, all of us have one thing in common; we are all Christian Armenians. Many of us migrated from different countries, different states and cities and left behind us an environment and life-style that was so familiar to us all. No, it is not strange for us to feel the want and need for everything to remain and be done exactly as we were accustomed to once before. But, how can we expect to move forward and accomplish our successes if we still desire to see our past traditions and customs to remain the same and to be accepted by everyone around us. Where do we go from here? Not too many people have asked themselves the question of whether or not the new life-style and environment in the United States will have its own Armenian Church customs and traditions. We must leave behind our past and be ready, willing and able to accept and invite a new change into our Church life and to move forward to abide and follow the new beginnings of customs and traditions in the United States.

As a new community beginning to grow and exist, each of ^{us} you, with no exception, have ^{our} your own ideas of how and what to start in order to make accomplishments; priorities. These priorities set by us are not always necessarily the actual need of the Parish.

It is true and accepted that priorities are important, but more important is the communities accomplishments rather than personal satisfaction. Priorities should be common and be decided collectively.

God has been very good to us and we should feel very privileged for having a Chapel like St. Thomas High School's Chapel for our own use. Every Sunday, rain or shine, we gather together to worship and pray to God the way our Church fore-fathers have taught us to do so. In the Armenian History, it is proven where there is no Armenian Church, the Armenian Community has assembled and vanished. The Armenian Church is just like Moses' Firey Serpant set upon the pole in the wilderness, those who looked at it, lived and existed.

While Church attendance on Sunday mornings is better than before, in comparison to the size of this Parish, at this time it is poor. Why is it that, at any social functions, we have perhaps more people than in 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? Do we really desire to learn more of our faith and heritage? What example do we set to 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? Before anything else, we must judge ourselves.

These past 5 months, the Church Choir was an object of serious concern of mine. The Choir is a very important factor in our worship every Sunday. It has improved greatly and come a long way with the help of all the members who come for rehearsals every Wednesday. Our Choirmaster, Mr. James Boyajian and Choir Organist, Mrs. Sofie Boyajian are to be thanked for their unselfish work and devotion and for their dependability. But, in order to be even better than what we are now, the road is still going before us. This year, with the help and assistance of the Choir Chairman, Mr. Stepan Nazarian, the major work will be to encourage more people to join the

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membership of our Choir regardless of age and to improve our knowledge in Church and Armenian popular music.

Our Church should be considered very fortunate to have well trained Deacons, who serve and assist the Pastor during the Divine Liturgy. Deacon Hovig Frankian who has taken the responsibility of Deaconship in our Church every Sunday without exceptions, attends Church. He has to be thanked not only for his dependability and faithfulness, but also for the quality that he lends to the music of our Church. In the future, we hope to have more young men trained in our Parish to serve on the Altar. This year one of my responsibilities will be to train and to have special classes for Candle Bearers or Acolytes, so that they may begin serving in the Church while they are still young.

Our Women's Auxillary Organization is better than ever with much improvement. Under the Chairmanship of Mrs. Beatrice Keramian, all the members work diligently. I myself attend to every membership meetings to work with them harmoniously. Their main concern and accomplishment will be to increase their membership and to set an organized program for the rest of the year and for years to come.

The group of people that I admire and respect the most is our Church's Parish Council. These are the people who were appointed by our Primate, Archbishop Torkom Manoogian to carry on the leadership of our Church. These people, putting aside their families, putting aside the luxury life like other church members, have taken every possible burden onto their shoulders. They carry out the Church work in spite of criticism that many people comment on behind them and especially before them. They are belittled for almost everything that they do in spite of every possible self-sacrifice that they do without anyone's knowledge, they still carry the work that was entrusted to them. I personally would like to thank the members of our Parish Council and its Chairman, Mr. Yohannes Hekimian for their self-denied and tremendous work. During these past 5 months, their suggestions to me have been extremely helpful, their criticism constructive, their appreciation and respect for my office has been real and satisfying.

1978 is a New Year and a fresh start for our Church Community with its newly elected officers, we have a tremendous amount of work to accomplish. The year 1978 marks the 15th Anniversary of our Church's Name. The existing Parish Council has already completed the ground work for this very outstanding celebration during the weekend of October 27th, 28th, and 29th with the presence of our Primate, Archbishop Torkom Manoogian.

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. As the amount that we give, that is secondary. For this reason, one of the Parish Council's major focus will be towards the construction and planning of a well established Annual Pledge System in every detail to secure the Church's financial need. This would be introduced to you in the very near future privately.

Besides the Annual Pledge System, it is unanimous within our Parish to increase the number of our Church members. For this purpose, a special membership committee will be formed to work on increasing our Church members. It is necessary to have

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more members who care about the Church's welfare. Five months ago we had only 32 dues paying members. Today, we have 78 dues paying members. We hope and plan to work towards more than 100 members during this year.

This year plans have already begun working to have our own monthly newsletter in order to keep our parishioners informed and up to date with the accomplishments in our parish and outside of our parish and to nourish cultural feelings.

In our Church Community we have a Ladies Auxillary, however we feel that the men are important too. In order to come together to meet and know each other better with our community, so that they may work together for our Church life. For this purpose, we have given considerable thought to organize a Men's Club in the near future.

There is great need of Armenian Language and Sunday School for our children, but these are not simple words, they require a very important factor, the proper place, proper material prepared for our standards, proper guidance, proper atmosphere and at this time we have almost none of these. Not everyone who knows English can teach the English Language. It is the same with any subject being Armenian or religious education. This matter will be considered by the Parish Council.

For the record, I present the following: During the year of 1977, we had Divine Liturgy celebrated on 16 Sundays, while 3 other Sundays we had Divine Liturgy celebrated by Archbishop Torkom Manoogian and Father Artoon Sumpadian.

73 visits were made for Pastoral or Church purposes, 23 visits to Old Age Homes and 18 hospital visitations; personal counsel or assistance was given on 43 occasions; 54 meetings were attended with individuals and for administrative and educational purposes. We held 16 Choir rehearsals; I have given 32 sermons in Armenian and English together. We had 3 Baptisms performed by myself. 14 public functions, as well as receptions of personal nature we attended. I have also organized the system of Altar Flowers where parishioners on 52 Sundays during the year will be donating Altar Flowers. Above all, the literature, circulars, letters, and office work is done and prepared and sent by myself along with the assistance of a few faithful parishioners.

As we end one year and begin another, I thank all those who have worked for our Church, our Parish Council, Committees, Organizations, and their Executive 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 1978 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 good of His People.

Thank you,

Rev. Terenig Kondralian

Rev. Terenig Kondralian,
Pastor