

ST. JOHN'S ARMENIAN CHURCH OF GREATER DETROIT
Southfield, Michigan 48075

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY

Friday, February 26, 1971
at
Armenian Cultural Building

The 1971 Annual Parish Assembly of St. John's Armenian Church of Greater Detroit was called to order at 8:30 P.M., by Parish Council Chairman, Mr. Michael Megregian.

The meeting was opened with a prayer by the Very Rev. Paren Vartabed Avedikian.

After brief welcoming remarks Mr. Michael Megregian proceeded with the election of the Parish Assembly Officers, namely, chairman and secretary. Mr. Garo Yeghissian was elected chairman of the day and assumed his duties as chairman. He then called for nominations for assembly secretary. After all nominees for secretary had declined nomination, Mr. Edward B. Korkoian volunteered his services as secretary. Chairman Garo Yeghissian asked for the Assemblies approval and Mr. Edward B. Korkoian was elected as secretary.

The minutes of the 1969 Annual Parish Assembly were read by secretary Edward B. Korkoian. Minor corrections were made. Mr. Ashod Torosian moved that the minutes be accepted as corrected. Mr. George Mutevelian seconded the motion, which was passed without dissent.

Chairman Garo Yeghissian called on the Rev. Fr. Diran Papazian, Pastor, to give his message to the Assembly. Der Hayr noted that his report was in the Annual Report and that he wished to give his message in English which he stated was, quote "for the benefit of the majority of those present who better understood English," unquote.

Der Hayr noted that we were living in times of crisis, which tends to cloud ones spiritual life and distort our views on the role of the church and of the clergy. We are inclined to measure the value of life by the standards of big business, and in so doing we sacrifice the virtues of love, respect etc. which should characterize our spiritual life.

The role of the laity is being distorted and the clergy is being relegated to a minimal status. Clergymen are bewildered because lay leaders, elected to work with them, think of themselves as employers and the clergy as employees. Lay leaders think in terms of corporate profit - if the establishment is not running profitably, the employee (the priest) must be held responsible and consequently discharged for his failure.

Fr. Diran stated that according to the Diocesan By-Laws, the Parish Priest only, has the authority to hire and discharge church employees, with the consent of the Parish Council.

Der Hayr stated that much is expected of the Parish Priest, but that the Priest is relegated to a minor role of authority. A Priest is a spiritual leader and not a plant manager, he has been called by God to spread the Gospel and to serve man by serving God. The church must find its place in this modern world and our views on the clergy must be changed. Clergy and laity must govern democratically and in cooperation.

Der Hayr made several recommendations which are incorporated in his message, which follows:

"In our modern, technological society unprecedented forces are pressing us on all sides: social upheavels, racial tensions, economic disorders and international chaos. These forces are so great and unnerving that we are often afraid to face and speak about them; and, as a result, they tend to cloud our ability to think clearly about our religious role. We have become bewildered as to the mission of the church and the function of the priesthood.

It is an undeniable fact that our churches are alive and active today: our newly-built, ultra-modern houses of worship and modern facilities are ample proof of this. But it is sad to see that our church people are inclined to measure our successes by the yardstick of industry, institutionalized impersonal big-business. We are too interested in "success", ambition and prestige. We confuse respectability with righteousness, quantity and statistics with quality and spirituality. Love, sacrifice, faith, discipline, discipleship, and sanctity are gradually becoming "other-worldly" virtues rather than "this worldly" realities. For this reason, prophetic vision and charismatic energy are missing from our Christian lay leadership. It follows that the church raises its voice only hesitantly when it comes to important issues of our day.

Since the church and the Ministry are so interrelated, it is natural that the concept of priesthood has also become cloudy. If there is one person in the twentieth century society whose role is misunderstood, it is the priest; and this situation, in turn, bewilders him. He finds himself caught between passive virtue of obedience to an ancient order and the active necessity of creative response to a turbulent world. This dilemma becomes even worse when we add to it the resistance, subtle or open, of those who have been elected to work with him.

These good people, directly or indirectly, introduce a psychology of business in their attitude and behavior towards the religious leader. They begin to insist that they are the "employer" and the priest an "employee," they the boss and the priest the "worker." Or, using the analogy of a business enterprise, the church becomes a "plant" and the priest the "plant manager." Of course it is the Corporation Executive Board which "owns" the plant, and it is they who provide the priest with a job--who at best is a mere "manager." All they want is someone who will be so kind as to open "the plant" all week and on Sundays, run the business as a successful and profitable enterprise, and keep up good public relations. If at the end of the year, the business does not show a profit, even though through no fault of his own, the manager must be fired. Then the Corporation Board will hire a new plant manager who, in turn, may be fired the following year on the same premise. One wonders, in view of the By-Laws of our Church (Articles 23, 24 et passim) where it is stated that the pastor is the president and head of the church, how this distortion comes about. Actually, the Parish Council has no authority to hire or fire members of the church staff--deacons, choirmaster, sacristan, superintendent of Church School, and the office force. All of these should be appointed by, and are subject to, the Parish Priest with the consent of the Parish Council. Article 43 reads: "Deacons, choirmasters, sacristans, and office workers may be appointed by the Parish Priest, with the consent of the Parish Council, and shall be subject to the authority of the Parish Priest, and may be discharged by the latter with the consent of the Parish Council."

The qualifications of the "plant manager" are that he must be young, energetic, resourceful, brilliant, and with a pleasant personality. He must possess the wisdom of Solomon, the patience of Job, the strength of Samson--and know the secrets of good salesmanship and perfect public relations. He must be an effective and

creative administrator and yet careful not to offend anybody in any way whatsoever--even to the extent that at times he must silence the dictates of his own conscience--and he should be cheerful and calm at all times even in his utter frustration. He must always come up with a great sermon topic and draw large crowds with his unparalleled oratory.

Most important, he is to administer the sacraments and rites of the church--baptize, confirm, marry and bury--and officiate at church services with great zeal and an excellent voice. He must attend unlimited meetings, follow up the decisions, keep up with a heavy correspondence, and keep the unending desk work of the church office up-to-date without any help. If he cannot keep up the administrative work single-handedly or keep up with the other numerous phases of his enormous work, he is ineffective, inefficient and he cannot provide adequate leadership. And, furthermore, he doesn't know the priorities involved in his work. Quite obviously, top priority is public relations and gaining popularity--easily acquired by submissiveness and flattery which is conveniently interpreted as diplomacy.

He must regularly visit the elderly and disabled, make sick calls at home or in the hospital at any hour of the day or night, visit and bless the homes of all parishioners on a regular basis and meantime raise a good family at home. The ramifications of this phase alone are overwhelming in view of the fact that presently our parishioners are spread throughout the metropolitan Detroit area, which is a diocese within itself.

What an "expensive" luxury to have him on the church payroll even at archaic low standards.

Yet, only the priest himself knows that he is a spiritual leader, not a "plant manager," that he has been called by God to work for the redemption of people and entrusted with the awesome task of the salvation of souls, to redeem them from their prejudices, pretenses and pettiness, self-deception, self-seeking, and self-glorification. His desire is to serve God by serving man; but God, not man, must always be the ultimate end.

It is high time that we face these issues boldly and creatively. The church must find its place in the modern world, a world beset with great challenges and problems. The church must then come to an understanding of the role and function of the clergy. We presently have an unrealistic view of what they can and should do. The ultimate health of our churches depends on the realistic answers we find to these twin issues of the role of the church and of the priest. Both the clergy and elected officials of the parish must never lose sight of the fact that we are all servants of God and that we serve God by unselfishly serving man. The Armenian Church is a community of believers, a spiritual institution governed democratically in worldly affairs and hierarchically in church affairs. Our church enshrines also our national and cultural heritage along with our spiritual values, (Article 33, Section I). The church is not a cold business firm, though the church may learn much from the efficiency of the business world in conducting its administrative affairs. We should never confuse however the management of church affairs with its mission; and it is this mission that makes the church a divine institution and therefore different than any other establishment or institution.

The following recommendations are an outgrowth of the aforementioned remarks.

It is our earnest desire that these recommendations will be given due consideration at this Parish Assembly and proper follow-up by the Parish Council in the coming months. Naturally, proper procedures should be used in bringing about these changes whenever our By-Laws are affected.

1. In view of the fact that the Parish Council members, as well as other official bodies, are usually elected only by a small segment of our church membership, the voting procedures of our parish should be changed to allow absentee voting by a normal procedure. Members should be allowed to vote by mail for as many candidates as there are positions to be filled.
2. Similarly, the procedure of nominating people as candidates for the Parish Council and other official bodies of the church should be revised. The nominees should state their views concerning the role of the church and priest and their aspirations for the church if they are elected. Let the people know the candidates before voting for them. This will certainly insure intelligent participation. It is an outstanding privilege to serve one's church and only those who are sincere in their intention should be given the opportunity.
3. The candidates should publicly acknowledge their true function and role, according to the By-Laws of the Church.
4. The Parish Council should go a step further in recognizing the fact that they have to cover different aspects of a metropolitan church. They should form committees outside the Parish Council to work diligently under the chairmanship of individuals from the Parish Council membership. These sub-committees or standing committees are to be:
 - a. Pledge, Membership and Visitation Committee or Committees.
 - b. Budget and Finance.
 - c. Policy steering for the rental of the Cultural Building and for the entire church complex.
 - d. Cultural-Educational.
 - e. Building Administration and Maintenance.
 - f. Public Relations, Publicity, Torch Bearer and other Church publications
 - g. Church Inventory.
 - h. Bequest and Wills.
 - i. Church care (candles, books, liturgical necessities etc.)
 - j. Calendar Committee to coordinate all church functions.
 - k. Hospitality.
5. An Executive Secretary should be sought immediately to systematize in a professional manner (chronofile, documents, filing correspondence, etc.) and to fill the need of office manager under the pastor. This will relieve the pastor of detail work so that he can give his professional time to the people, and to his studies.
6. Instead of having liaison officers go from the Parish Council to different church auxiliary organizations, liaison members from the auxiliary organizations should attend the Parish Council meetings.
7. Parishioners should be encouraged to engage in work which was hitherto considered priestly functions; this movement is known as a "lay apostolate" in the Roman Catholic Church.
8. Women in our parish should be considered for elective office, and there should be no monopoly by the male members of the church.
9. The priest should be encouraged by the Parish Council by providing for him time and money to go to seminars, lectures, dialogue sessions, study conferences, consultation programs, studies for continuing education, retreats and so on.

10. Committees should be organized for special projects and jubilee anniversary celebrations.
11. Long and short-term programs, projects and goals for the church should be set up; and work towards gradual realization of them should begin.
12. Thought should be given towards the acquisition of a sacristan for the church who can act also as a deacon during the performance of sacraments and rites and, thereby help the priest.

In conclusion, our idea of the church must be founded on tradition, but adapted to the modern times: and our view of the role of the clergy must also be adapted to the realities of today's world and balanced with an understanding of what it is humanly possible to do. We must never forget that both the church and the clergy are established and ordained to serve God, and to serve man to the Glory of God.

May God preserve and keep unshaken the ancient and venerable Armenian Apostolic Church for ages to come."

Assembly chairman, Mr. Garo Yeghissian then proceeded to the election of Parish Council, Diocesan Delegates, Auditors and Nominating Committee for 1972 Parish Assembly.

At this point Mr. Kegham Agegian received permission to speak. Mr. Agegian stated no parish works as effectively as St. John's Armenian Church of Greater Detroit and that the Parish Assembly is the most important body of the Parish, and each parishioner is a delegate to the Annual Assembly. Mr. Agegian stated that we must use our conscience in our approach to the election - without succumbing to the blandishment of cliques or participating in divisive actions, which could split our parish. Mr. Agegian demanded to know why he was not nominated for Parish Council after the Nominating Committee had approached him about his availability as a candidate. He then asked that his name be placed in nomination for Parish Council and he asked for support. Chairman Garo Yeghissian then invited the Chairman of the Nominating Committee, Mr. Nerses Nersesian to conduct the elections and to answer Mr. Kegham Agegian's question and complaint.

Mr. Nerses Nersesian stated that his committee prepared a list of 30 candidates for Parish Council. Many parishioners were approached, some refused and others expressed willingness to be candidates. After a list of 30 names had been compiled the nominating committee then selected a slate of 10 names, which were presented to the Assembly.

Mr. Harry Zartarian nominated Mr. Kegham Agegian for Parish Council. Mr. Dicron Tafrahan seconded the nomination. There being no further nominations for Parish Council, Mrs. Alice Kouzoujian moved nominations be closed. Mrs. Alice Chavdarian seconded. Motion passed.

Two teams of tellers, headed by Mr. Haigaz Yagoobian and Mr. Nerses Nersesian were designated by the nominating committee to handle the balloting.

It was moved by Mr. Vahe Papelian and seconded by Mrs. Anoush Papelian that voters be required to vote for all positions to be filled, or the ballots would be voided. Motion was defeated.

Mr. Edward Mardigian made a plea that discussions on the actions of the nominating committee and election procedures be ended, and that we proceed with the meeting - acting for the best interests of the Parish. Mr. Mardigian's plea was well received with a great round of applause.

Chairman Garo Yeghissian asked for nominations for the nominating committee. Mrs. Nellie Boyajian nominated Mr. John Noraian. The nomination was seconded by Mr. Arshavir Yeghissian. Dr. Dennis Papazian moved that nominations for nominating committee be closed. The motion was seconded by Mr. Jack Margosian. Motion passed.

There being no further nominations for Diocesan Delegates or Auditors the chairman announced that nominations were closed. The Nominating Committee passed ballots, with the names of candidates as listed in the Annual Report, plus those nominated from the floor.

The Nominating Committee conducted the balloting and after ballots were collected, the meeting proceeded with the remainder of the Agenda.

Mr. Stephen Boyajian, Parish Council Budget Committee Chairman, presented the proposed Budget, which was printed in the Annual Report. Mr. Boyajian asked for discussion. Miss Lucy Merzian requested that future reports should show, in the interest of clarity and comparison, the previous years budget figures, the actual income and expenditures, side by side with the proposed budget's figures.

Mr. Harry Zartarian asked information on salaries. Mr. Hrant Aginian moved that the proposed 1971 Budget be accepted. Mr. Dicron Tafraian seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Deacon Ara Haig reported on the 1970 Annual Diocesan Assembly. He stated that 2 important changes had been made in the Diocese.

1. Membership age lowered to 18, enabling them to vote and participate in Parish Assembly.
2. Hold office after one year's membership at the age of 21.

A discussion on Diocesan Assembly procedures was held. Mrs. Alice Chavdarian asked that important Diocesan Assembly proposals be discussed at the Annual Parish Assembly. Mrs. Alice Chavdarian moved that a special Parish Assembly be held prior to the 1971 Annual Diocesan Assembly to discuss diocesan issues and proposals with our Diocesan Delegates. The motion was seconded by Mr. Edward Jizmejian.

Deacon Ara Haig made the following amendment to Mrs. Chavdarian's motion: The special parish meeting be held only if proposals are received prior to the Diocesan Assembly. Amendment was seconded by Mr. Edward Mardigian. Amendment was approved. The motion as amended was passed.

Chairman Garo Yeghissian asked if there were questions on other reports.

Mr. Vahe Papelian asked for clarification of the report on improvements (page 6 of the Annual Report.) Mr. Papelian stated that most of the improvements were paid for by the AGBU. Mr. Albert Semonian, Parish Council Building Committee Chairman, stated that no reflection on any group or individuals was intended, and he verified that AGBU had made the improvements mentioned by Mr. Papelian.

A parishioner asked about gain or loss in membership. Mr. Simon Tashjian, Parish Council Membership Committee Chairman, reported that out of 900 membership 750 were pledge paying members and 150 members had been dropped from the rolls.

Mr. Edward Balian asked for clarification of the fees for Sacraments. Parish Council Chairman, Mr. Michael Megregian stated that the fee for the Marriage Sacrament was \$150.00 of which \$75.00 could be applied to Annual Parish Dues, if the newlyweds wished to become members of our Parish. Funeral and Baptism fees were applied to non-members of our Parish. No fees are assessed to dues paying pledge

members.

Mr. Edward Jizmejian asked about the decline in Sunday School attendance. Parish Council Chairman, Michael Megregian stated that new plans were being formulated to rejuvenate the Church School.

Mr. Edward Jizmejian asked about the \$5,000 item in the budget for the salary of a third clergyman. Mr. Edward B. Korkoian stated that this would provide a six month salary for a third clergyman if our Parish were blessed with the services of another priest during 1971.

Chairman Garo Yeghissian asked if there was any new business.

Miss Lucy Merzian moved that a proposal, by St. John's Armenian Church of Greater Detroit, be sent to the next Diocesan Assembly to authorize the use of Absentee Ballots, for parish elections if a parish so wished. Motion was seconded by Mrs. Alice Chavdarian. After a lengthy pro and con discussion Mrs. Varsenick Apkarian moved to amend Miss Merzian's motion as follows--that the proposal include specific language, as to time limits, eligibility for absentee ballots and method of handling such ballots. Mrs. Alice Kouzoujian seconded the amendment, which was passed. The motion as amended was passed.

Deacon John Semizian asked for information on retirement plan for clergymen. Deacon Ara Haig answered that a Diocesan Council Committee was working on the problem of retired Primates and other inactive Bishops. Parish Council Chairman, Mr. Michael Megregian stated that Archbishop Sion Manoogian was accorded the status of a visiting clergyman and His Grace received a honorium, or "ach hampour" accordingly.

Deacon John Semizian moved that a proposal be sent to the Diocesan Assembly asking that provision be made for the retirement needs of former primates and bishops; and that the retirement fund for clergyman be improved. Seconded by Mr. Vahe Papelian. Motion passed.

Fr. Paren stated that a program for clergy retirement had been started and it was hoped to build the plan into an effective retirement program.

Mr. Artin Artinian moved that a tabulation of ballots, showing the number of candidates voted for on each position, be made in order that a true picture of the voting pattern may be established. No names of candidates to be used in such reports. Mr. Rick Apkarian seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Mr. Arthur Mardigian moved that a primary election be held for Parish elections. Parish Council Chairman, Mr. Michael Megregian noted that this motion was out of order, according to the Diocesan By-Laws (page 13), which outlines the nomination procedure to be followed.

Mr. Stephen Boyajian moved that the nominating committee be denied the right to nominate the candidates for the nominating committee for the next years election. Mr. Garo Yeghissian seconded the motion. Motion was defeated.

Mr. Vahe Papelian moved that the 1971 Parish Assembly direct future nominating committee, beginning with 1972 election, to submit the name of at least one woman candidate for Parish Council, Auditing Committee, Nominating Committee and Diocesan Delegates. Mrs. Alice Chavdarian seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Fr. Diran recommended that the Parish Assembly authorize the hiring of an executive secretary for the Church. He stated that an executive secretary would organize church work on an efficient basis, thus making it possible for the clergy to devote themselves more fully to their spiritual calling.

Mr. Andre Gregory moved that an executive secretary be hired. Mr. Hrant Aginian seconded the motion.

After some discussion Deacon Ara Haig moved that this matter be referred to the new Parish Council for consideration. Mr. Arshavir Yeghissian seconded Deacon Ara Haig's motion to refer. Motion to refer to Parish Council was passed.

Chairman of the election committee, Mr. Nerses Nersesian announced the results of the elections as follows:

Parish Council

Mr. Martin Apkarian
Mr. Jack Kazanjian
Mr. Jack Margosian

Mr. Michael Megregian
Mr. Albert Semonian
Alternate - Mr. John Semizian

Diocesan Delegates

Mr. Martin Apkarian
Deacon Harry Ekizian
Deacon Ara Haig
Mr. Mihran Hoplamazian

Mr. Edward B. Korkoian
Mr. Edward Mardigian
Deacon Daniel Shahan
Alternate - Dr. Dennis Papazian) Tie
Mr. Vahe Papelian)

Nominating Committee

Mr. George Keurajian
Mr. Haigaz Yagoobian
Mr. Harry Zartarian

Auditor

Mr. Richard Vahratian

Chairman Garo Yeghissian thanked the Nominating Committee for their services. Mr. Edward B. Korkoian expressed the feelings of the parishioners when he thanked Assembly Chairman, Mr. Garo Yeghissian for conducting the meeting under trying conditions.

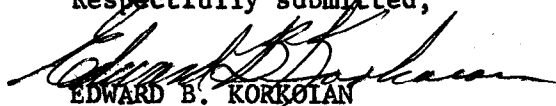
There being no further business the chair asked for a motion to adjourn. Mrs. Alice Kouzoujian moved to adjourn the meeting. Motion was seconded by Mr. Arshavir Yeghissian. Motion was passed without dissent.

Fr. Diran closed the session with thanks to those who participated and gave the Benediction.

Meeting was adjourned at 1:00 A.M., February 27, 1971.

After the meeting refreshments were served by the Women's Guild.

Respectfully submitted,


EDWARD B. KORKOIAN
Secretary