

REPORT TO THE PRIMATE, HIS EMINENCE, ARCHBISHOP TORKOM MANOOGIAN  
REGARDING THE HOLY SHOGHAGAT ARMENIAN CHURCH OF BELLEVILLE, ILLINOIS

Assuming that most of the problems of the Holy Shoghagat Parish are known to Your Eminence, I will not reiterate those problems in this report. Simply stated, I met with the Pastor and the Parish Council on Wednesday, February 13, both to familiarize myself with the situation within the Parish, and to make certain that the Parish Assembly scheduled for the next day, February 14, would be conducted according to the by-laws and without problems. My findings are the following:

- A. There is a complete break-down of communication between the Pastor and the Parish Council, and I wonder today as to how the business of the Parish is being conducted, as a result of the break-down of communication.

The Parish Council is ready to challenge the Pastor on every issue; and my impression is that the Council makes its decisions without consulting the Pastor, since the Parish Council claims, "The Pastor does not offer any opinion anyway". On the other hand, the Pastor doesn't feel that the Council is qualified to represent the parishioners, and according to his past experience with the Parish Council, whatever he says will either be rejected or not taken seriously.

- B. Regarding the Parish Assembly and the communication between the Parish Council and Your Eminence, I urged the Parish Council Chairman to include in his report, the action taken by the Parish Council regarding their Pastor, as a report only. I made this decision because it was brought to my attention that somehow certain parishioners had seen copies of the Parish Council's letter to Your Eminence. I also informed the Parish Council that during the Parish Assembly, I would make certain that the parishioners were given the opportunity to express their feelings regarding the Pastor.

- C. On Thursday, February 14, prior to the Parish Assembly, I did meet with parishioners, both dues paying and non-dues paying, which included those individuals who were opposed to the Pastor, as well as those who were in favor of the Pastor. My impression is that the Pastor does not have much support in the community. Those who seem to support him, are not necessarily staunch supporters, but rather they are opposed to the people who are presently on the Council.

- D. During the Parish Assembly everything proceeded as planned. I allowed dues paying members only to participate in the Assembly; although, there were a certain number of non-dues paying parishioners present. An interesting development during the Assembly was the vote taken on the Pastor's Report, which in the minds of the parishioners represented approval or disapproval of the performance of the Pastor. The majority vote was for disapproval of the Pastor's Report.

There were two other issues brought up during the Assembly: One dealing with the Church School; the other dealing with the Armenian School. On both issues, either confusion was created or the wrong information was given. I urged the Pastor to end the confusion and to give the correct information; however, the Pastor chose to remain silent.

This in brief constitutes my report covering my visit to Holy Shoghagat Parish. Following are a few possible solutions which come to my mind:

1. To remove the Parish Council and to assign a new Parish Council to work with the Pastor. From my own observation, this cannot work, at least not at the present time, because the majority of the dues paying members are in support of the present Parish Council and will make the functioning of an appointed Parish Council extremely difficult.
2. To remove the Pastor and permit the Parish Council to conduct the business of the Parish. This solution probably will be welcome both by the Pastor and the Parish Council. However, it will further alienate the few dues paying members and some non-dues paying parishioners whose participation in the Parish is vital, if the Parish is to survive.
3. The third alternative is to ask the Parish Council retrieve the letter which they had sent to Your Eminence regarding their Pastor, or for the Parish Council to pass a decision to inform Your Eminence that their previous decision to remove the Pastor be disregarded, and then inform the community of this decision. I know that as a result of this decision those who are unhappy with the Pastor will be disenchanted with the situation. However, if the Parish Council and the Pastor are charged with the responsibility of working together for the good of the total community, the community might still be saved as a viable Parish.

If a six month period of reconciliation is offered to the community, I believe that in spite of the new difficulties, it will be in the best interest of the Parish in the long-run.

After the eventual re-assignment of the Pastor, I believe the Holy Shoghagat Parish needs a very strong and mature Pastor. Because of past experiences, there is a general attitude within the Parish to act independently of the Pastor or to challenge the Pastor, even on ritual matters which are and should be strictly within his realm of authority.

As far as the Pastor is concerned, I would hesitate to recommend that he be assigned to a new Parish as Pastor. He seems to be unwilling to take complete charge of a situation and tends to create problems by leaning on outsiders rather than working with the established authorities and bodies within the Church.

Respectfully submitted,

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