

File

MEMORANDUM

TO: VERY REVEREND FATHER KHAJAG BARSAMIAN, PRIMATE

FROM: GEORGE STEVOFF

DATE: JULY 23, 1990

RE: PARISH COUNCIL MEETING
HOLY RESURRECTION ARMENIAN CHURCH
SOUTH MILWAUKEE, WI.

At the request of the Primate, I attended the parish council meeting which started at 8:00 P.M. with all council members present including Deacon in Charge, Serop. Also in attendance were Chuck Kadamian and Elliott Kaishian, both members of the parish.

The meeting was called to order by Michael Hayalian, Chairman, at the request of Deacon Serop. The meeting was referred to as a special meeting called at the request of Deacon Serop to respond to statements made by parish council members and parishioners at large regarding Deacon Serop's future in the parish.

The Secretary, Armen Hadjinian did not have access to, nor did he read the minutes, apparently because he was not at the previous meeting. The minutes were read by Scott Uricek, a parish council member. The minutes were not in a good legible written format and he read more from his notes than he did from printed minutes. He attempted to recall from his notes all of the issues that were raised at the previous meeting which was not attended by Deacon Serop. He recited several issues in the minutes that other members of the parish council did not recall. Upon a lengthy discussion, it was determined some of the issues discussed were "after the meeting" and not a formal part of the meeting. Apparently some of the council members had left and others remained to carry on their conversations. Scott indicated a confusion as to whether those issues were during the formal meeting or if they were merely conversation after the meeting. It subsequently developed the most important issue, Deacon Serop's future in the parish, was discussed "after the meeting". In a subsequent conversation with Scott Uricek, Deacon Serop was told by Scott these issues were discussed in the formal meeting that Deacon Serop did not attend which caused Deacon Serop's consternation. Further clarification made it clear they were not a part of the official minutes.

Nevertheless, Deacon Serop questioned those who had discussed the issues as they were now being addressed by others in the parish. He wished to know if there was a

strong feeling one way or another about his continued assignment in the parish.

Michael Hayalian, Chairman, stated he did have a concern as to the parish's ability to afford the stipend of Deacon Serop. He proceeded to explain the amount of money they receive from their "bonds" along with the dues and other related income are not sufficient to offset the total expenses of the parish.

Chuck Kadamian at that point asked for permission to speak. He made the comment if the bonds are sold the parish could afford to continue the services of Deacon Serop and then proceeded to review in detail the terms of Deacon Serop's engagement by the parish as he understood them.

I asked if the parish council voted on Deacon Serop's appointment to which they responded ~~in the~~ yes with the vote being 6 to 1 in the affirmative. I asked if it was presented to the assembly. They indicated it had been presented to the assembly but there was quite a bit of confusion and a somewhat heated exchange between members of the parish council as to whether or not there was a fair presentation of the financial consequences of bringing in Deacon Serop. Others felt there were 18 members present who all voted in the affirmative and further, the ~~Primate~~ ^{VICAR} had suggested Serop would be there for a 6 month trial basis at which time the matter would be reviewed.

There was then a lengthy conversations surrounding an invoice for repairs to Serop's car which was in the amount of approximately \$500 and was being challenged by some of the parish council members. They felt Serop should not have authorized the repairs without further input from parish council members. Deacon Serop defended himself by stating he had attempted to contact many of them during the 3 day period he was without a vehicle and had not received any satisfaction, therefore he proceeded with the repairs. It appears much of the fault lies with the vehicle they selected, all of them admitting they made a mistake and Serop could not be held accountable for the repairs.

I was then asked what the purpose of church is, to which I responded, the spiritual needs of the community to be balanced with the assets available. I suggested they should spend their time more productively reviewing and recommending new programs for fund raising and releasing the Deacon would only be a short term quick fix and not solve the communities problem.

Chuck Kadamian then asked for a review of the finances for 1990 and determined on his own there would be an approximate \$10,000 deficit by year end and if the parish council did not come up with ways and means of raising funds that amount

would have to come out of the reserve balance. He did not object to the money coming out of the reserve balance, but merely wanted the parish council members to be aware of the consequences and realize they should assume the responsibility of raising more funds. He offered his services. He in some ways supported my position of not viewing Deacon Serop as the problem but in reality fund raising as the problem.

At that point, Armen Hadjinian lost control and started hollering and pounding the table and making personal accusations which were responded to by others. I then called for a 5 minute recess which allowed some of the individuals to gain their composure.

After the recess, we again discussed the amount of money in the reserve fund which is \$135,000.00. There was a strong feeling that if the principal were spent it would not be long before they had any excess funds remaining.

They then asked for an explanation of the process involved in removing a priest from their parish. I explained the different procedures outlined in the by-laws and suggested they move with caution in this particular area. If such a decision is reached, it should be done so on a mutual basis with all parties retaining their dignity and honor. I explained the Primate and Diocesan Council frowns on parish councils or assemblies taking harsh action assuming that is the only way changes can be accomplished. I suggested they do not present the issue to the parish assembly in the way it was being discussed because it would only further divide the parish.

At this point, each of the parish council members took a period of time to express their feelings on the issue, with the majority of them indicating the problem is not really Serop but one of budget constraints. Eventually, a proposal was made to review the actual income and expenses incurred to date, with a revised budget for the remainder of the year. This will give them an opportunity to analyze what their actual needs are and hopefully plan fund raising programs.

I indicated it would be up to the parish council to decide whether or not they would spend excess funds, but it is their responsibility and is a decision they would have to make.

My personal observations are the parish council is made up of young inexperienced individuals who are not sure what is the right thing to do and have had some outside influences. They all expressed a desire to think about the issue until after they have had their annual picnic and an opportunity

to review their financial status for the remainder of the year. I felt Chuck Kadamian who is a former delegate and ~~FORMER~~ council member was acting in the best interests of the parish by pointing out to them the need to raise funds while reluctantly agreeing reserve funds would have to be spent if that was the desire of the parish council. On several occasions, he indicated to the parish council they should stop looking at Deacon Serop as their problem but rather look for ways of raising money and involving more people as their prime goal.

The meeting ended on a cordial note with most of the members recognizing they must take control over their finances with further analysis and rational discussions.