

Report of the Deacon in Charge
June 1992- December 1992

I would like to begin my report with a special word of gratitude to those who made my welcome to Cleveland such a memorable event. The presence of His Eminence the Primate to introduce me to the community was especially meaningful for me as Cleveland is the first parish that I have been granted the authority to serve. My thanks to the Parish Council and to the Committee who made that day some six months ago such a special event.

During the first six months of my ministry in Cleveland I have attempted as much as possible to operate within the parameters of my understanding of the role of the Armenian Church. The Armenian Church is the national and official church of the Armenian people. She was begun under Divine inspiration and she continues and is sustained by the grace of God and by the cooperation of those who faithfully participate in her life. I am convinced that the Armenian Orthodox and Apostolic Church stands on equal footing with the other Christian churches around us. She contains a unique spiritual tradition which in some aspects surpasses other churches because of her venerable history. Thus I find as my greatest challenge to make the faith real, meaningful and attractive to people of our time, young and old alike. The Armenian Church is not a social club, but is a community of Christians bonded together by a unique and beautiful tradition.

In order to work on this goal I have placed a lot of emphasis on the Sunday experience. Most of our parishioners live far from the church. Therefore, I have been cautious about over scheduling. Sunday is the one day most can and should gather together as it is the day of worship. I am happy that attendance is increasing, though tardiness has become the norm for the majority, I have labored to make the worship meaningful and sermons informative, instructive as well as challenging. Growth is all essential and thus the sermon must encourage this.

The deacons and choir have been a great source of joy for me. Special thanks go to Serop Demirjian, Haig Arpajian, Thelma Bagdasarian and Anita Arpajian as well as to the entire choir for their unselfish, disciplined and consistent devotion. I am especially glad that the choir is so enthusiastic about the quality of our liturgical music that it has instituted a fund drive which will result in the purchase of a new organ for our sanctuary.

The Sunday School staff, under the very able and devoted leadership of Anna Karayan has been a major factor in making the Sunday morning experience truly positive, in particular for our children. Promptness and regular attendance are essential and I am certain that once parents become convinced of the importance of learning the Christian faith, the Sunday School will grow. On the occasions when we have been blessed by the presence of a guest clergyman I have visited the children's assembly and presented a pertinent message.

Along these lines a major priority in the upcoming months will be the re-organization of an ACYOA juniors group. Though the numbers are limited, nevertheless the children need to be bonded in a positive and meaningful way through activities and responsibilities. After all they are our future. Our acolyte program is slowly taking shape. Though we have not yet reached the stage of meeting regularly, this will soon fall together as I realize that Sunday after services is the most realistic time to bring our young boys together. I am quite happy at the zeal that they demonstrate at the Altar. Two of our young girls have begun singing in the choir on a regular basis.

From July 2-8 I was on the staff of the Hye Camp in Wisconsin, which three of our children attended.

Fellowships following Sunday Service have become a very positive aspect of our community life. They serve as excellent opportunities for bringing people together in a warm and hospitable atmosphere. A negative aspect is that not enough people are volunteering to host the fellowships. Despite countless notices in the Paros, the response remains negative.

Our first Family Night held Friday evening, November 27 was a great success. Our New Years Eve Gala was also a major success. Those who organized these events are to be commended and I am thankful to the many parishioners, young and old who took part.

The auxiliary organizations continued to function according to their charters and by-laws although overall attendance and enthusiasm does not always seem constant. I have attempted to be present at all organizational meetings and activities. The organizations have as their ultimate goal the edification of their membership in the context of the faith community. During this year I plan to work more closely with each group to increase membership with the goal of instituting more meaningful, edifying and fulfilling activities. Special thanks are due to the following chairpersons for unselfishly giving of their leadership abilities: Mary Arslanian, Women's Guild; Sarkis Hamamjian, Social Club; Louise Demirjian, Church Choir; Russ Kashian, A.C.Y.O.A.

A word of thanks must go to all the organizations which raised funds for the operation of our Church, especially to the Women's Guild, under Mary Arslanian's lead, in making the Ramage Sale a success. Also thanks to John Davidian for running this year's Rug Sale and Haig Arpajian for chairing the Picnic. Those who volunteered demonstrated well their love for our Church.

My hope is that within the near future a new organization will be formed for our younger women. My hope is that they will relieve the Senior group of some of their responsibilities. Like the other organizations they will be asked to work on fund raising and will because of their makeup bring about new and creative programs. I would also emphasize the spiritual needs of this group, which will be developed through specially geared speakers and retreats.

Seniors Day. I am also considering setting aside one day a month for our seniors to come and enjoy the Cultural Hall. The hall could be set up so that they could play games and have refreshments. Maybe we could organize a warm meal or sandwiches. As the weather warms this may also include outings, etc.

One of the more positive aspects of my ministry has been the once a month Adult Christian Education Programs. The average attendance has been 10 and I believe it will go up as we continue. During Lent these sessions will take place weekly and in a different format, in the context of Lenten Services.

During the week, besides time spent preparing the Sunday bulletin, Paros and keeping up with office work, i.e. correspondence..., I have been making visitations to the homes and work places of our parishioners. Priority is always given to those who are hospitalized and in nursing homes. Up until now I have visited the homes of the majority of our members, but a number still remain.

A good deal of my time during the last few months has been spent helping our refugee brothers and sisters. In this context a special word of thanks must be given to Archie Andonian for his genuine Christian zeal in responding to the need to help Armenian refugees from Baku. I also appreciate the willingness of our volunteers who came forward to lend a helping hand. Dikran Auslanian, esq. and Ara Bagdasarian have been especially helpful to the cause. My thanks to the members of our community for always making the refugees feel welcome.

As part of my responsibilities I have organized the visiting clergy schedule and in the cases of baptisms or funerals I have made sure that a visiting priest was present. Though our situation is less than ideal, nevertheless the Diocese has been most cooperative in making clergy available to us.

Since the commencement of my ministry the following clergy have visited our Church and celebrated the Divine Liturgy:

Bishop Khajag Barsamian - June 28

Fr. Diran Papazian - July 19

Fr. Haigazoun Najarian - August 16, Feast of the Assumption

Fr. Garabed Kochakian - September 13, Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross
Fr. Vahan Hovhannessian - October 11
Fr. Garabed Kochakian - November 15
Archbishop Khajag Barsamian - December 20, Consecration of Icon in memory of
Gregory Arpajian
Fr. Garen Gdanian - December 27

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to the following:

5 members of the Hovhannessian Family (from Baku) - July 19, Fr. Diran Papazian
Ira Ohanian - August 16, Fr. Haigazoun Najarian
William Ohanian - September 13, Fr. Garabed Kochakian
Valerie Gideon - October 10, Fr. Vahan Hovhannessian
Ziazan Davidian - December 26, Fr. Garen Gdanian

On Saturday, July 18 our Church rejoiced at the joining of Cindy Aurslianian and Todd Russell in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. Officiant, Fr. Diran Papazian,

The following members of our community have fallen asleep in Christ, for whom one or more parts of the Rite of Christian Burial was performed according to the tradition of the Armenian Church:

Lucy Nigosian - June 28
Martha Hacherian - August 13
Elmas Meketarian - September 8

May God grant eternal rest to their souls.

I have also made ecumenism a priority and have fully participated in the monthly meetings of the Hillcrest Ministerium. Through this I have come to know several area clergy and in the near future I hope to host a meeting at our Church facility. With Florence Goekjian, I represented our Church at the Eastern Churches' Traditions and Celebrations Seminar at Notre Dame College, October 16-17. Since then I have been attending the monthly meetings of the planning board. Responding to an invitation of our Primate I attended as an observer the Quadrennium Meetings of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, USA held in Cleveland, November 11-13. On this occasion Rev. Frs. Arten Ashjian and Garabed Kochakian visited our Church.

Together with Erica Ohanian and a number of our ACYOA members I represented our Church at the National ACYOA General Assembly and Sports Weekend at the Armenian Church of the Holy Martyrs, September 2-6.

With Thelma Bagdasarian I represented our Church at the Association of Armenian Church Choirs of America Assembly at Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Cambridge, MA, October 29-November 1. On that occasion I was elected to the Central Council of the AACCA. This position entails 5 meetings during the calendar year at the Diocese and at the site of the upcoming Assembly.

I am very pleased with the work and cooperation of our Paros Staff. I truly appreciate the tireless dedication of Anita Arpajian and Mona Karoghlanian to the timely and well produced publication of the Paros. The Paros promises to grow from its news reporting format to one which offers informative and interesting articles, which will contribute to the growth of community. The Paros is a perfect medium by which we reach out to Armenians at large and offer a sense of unity. The Paros is something which I for one am proud of.

I appreciate the work and dedication of all the members of the Parish Council during the past six months. Each of the members has been a source of encouragement and help. I especially want to single out our chairperson, Florence Karoghlanian, who since my first day in Cleveland has been a constant source of support and encouragement. She truly takes her responsibility serious and fulfills it as a labor of love. Special thanks must also go to our treasurer Jack Hacherian, who constantly keeps the books right on track, also as a labor of love to his Church.

My closing thoughts are that we should be encouraged for what we are doing is good, God-pleasing and worthy of praise. None of us is perfect, but we are mandated by our Lord to be perfect, that is to work harder and harder for his praise. And I assure you that you will see the rewards. Thank you to all who have made my first six months such a pleasant and fulfilling experience.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Norman Odabashian".

Deacon Norman Odabashian
Deacon In Charge