

PARISH ASSEMBLY MEETING - PART II

St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church - Chicago

March 25, 1990

The meeting was called to order at 1:50 p.m. by Mr. Jack Cholakian, Chairman of the Parish Assembly meeting.

He then called upon Mr. Garo Evran, Parish Council Treasurer, to conduct the verification of the dues-paying members. Out of a total of 109 paid members, there were 62 members present, representing a quorum.

Mr. Cholakian asked that unless there was any disapproval, we would skip the reading of the minutes from the February 4, 1990, meeting as this is a continuation of that meeting. Everyone agreed.

AUDITING COMMITTEE REPORT

Mr. Arnold Koresian and Mr. Armen Zakarian were called upon to present the report of the Auditing Committee. Copies of their report were distributed to all members present. A few questions were asked with reference to their report, which were answered by the committee. Mr. Haig Pedian moved to accept the Auditing Committee report as presented. This was seconded by Mrs. Alice George and the motion passed.

1990 BUDGET

Mr. Cholakian asked that the 1990 Budget be set at a later date, as it was not possible to determine this today.

He then proceeded with the next item on the agenda, that of the motion regarding the Parish clergy. He said that he had asked Father Vahram Hazarian prior to the meeting if he wanted to be present, and he had said that he did.

Mr. Cholakian stated that this would be conducted as an open forum, followed by comments/presentation by Father Vahram. He asked that everyone limit their comments to 3 minutes each. He said that only dues-paying members could vote, but anyone could voice their opinion.

The motion was then re-read by Ms. Michelle Babikian---"to terminate the services of our Parish Priest effective March 31, 1990."

Mr. George Nahabedian then suggested that the committee which was formed at the last meeting be allowed to make their presentation at this time, with Mr. Haig Pedian acting as the moderator.

Mr. Nahabedian distributed a sheet to all the congregation entitled "The Clergy". Mr. Pedian reported that the committee formed at the last Parish Assembly meeting met once and discussed the items on this hand-out sheet, which listed the Duties of the Pastor. Mr. Pedian then called upon Mr. Nahabedian to present the findings of the committee. Mr. Nahabedian asked everyone to refer to the hand-out sheet with regard to the Duties of the Pastor, numbers 35A through G, all the way through to number 37.

The committees comments were as follows with reference to each point:-

"35. The duties of the Pastor shall be:"

- "A. To conduct liturgical services and administer the sacraments in accordance with the canons and traditions of the Armenian Church."

-- The committee felt that Father Vahram performs these duties.

- "B. To visit his parishioners; to comfort the sick and bereaved; to assist the needy; and to provide pastoral counsel and direction."

-- The opinion of the committee is that with the exception of comforting the sick, he does not fulfill all these duties. The committee felt he did some of these items, but not all.

- "C. To be responsible for the advancement of spiritual life and good order in the Parish."

-- The opinion of the committee was no.

- "D. To ensure the increase of the membership of the parish and to strengthen all parish institutions, organizations and committees."

-- The opinion of the committee was no.

- "E. To supervise the various schools of the parish."

-- The opinion of the committee was no.

- "F. To ensure, by careful supervision, the proper observance of the provisions of these Bylaws, and the proper execution of the decisions of the Parish Assembly, and the instructions of the Primate and Diocesan Council."

-- The opinion of the committee was no.

- "G. To present annually a report of his activities to the Parish Assembly and to the Primate and Diocesan Council."

-- The opinion of the committee was yes.

"36. The pastor shall preside over all meetings of the Parish Assembly and Parish Council and shall be the president of all parish institutions, organizations and committees."

-- The opinion of the committee was although Father Vahram does attend all the Parish Assembly meetings, he does not always attend all other meetings.

Mr. Nahabedian continued stating that item number 37 goes into the Clergy's role and his responsibilities to the Diocese. He reiterated that these were the points discussed by the committee. However, he stated there was another point that we should all be aware of---that the Diocese, Primate and Diocesan Council have not assigned Father Vahram to this Church. He is not an assigned Parish Priest of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America. He has not been approved by the Diocesan Council and he is considered a spiritual administrator and at Diocesan Assemblies, he does not have the right to vote.

These were the points that the committee had discussed and out of 8 points, they felt that Father Vahram did meet 6 of them, and felt that he did not meet 2 items.

Mr. Haig Pedian then invited anyone who had any comments to express them at this time.

Mrs. Azniv Frankian asked for a translation of the points in Armenian for those who did not understand English. Mrs. Silva Karachorlu was asked to read the items in Armenian. Father Vahram then translated each item again and added the committee's opinion.

Mr. Jack Cholakian then asked the members for their comments.

Dr Hampar Yazijian asked to speak on a subject related to the matter on the floor. He spoke of being Armenian, staying Armenian and teaching Armenian and Armenian subjects. He said the Armenian Church belongs to the Armenian people. He says we have forgotten the first letter of the Church, the Armenian Church. We have strayed from that truth which has kept us together all these centuries. We must remember that Armenians have always wanted to stay Armenian Christians, to belong to the Armenian Church. We must do things to keep the people together and not things to turn them away. He said that our best vote today would be to come to this Church and we will see how our children and others will follow us.

Mr. Sarkis Gircik was the next speaker. He said that we must be Armenian, stay Armenian and most importantly speak Armenian. He asked us what is the Church---and responded that we are the Church, and we must stay Armenian. This is an Armenian Church and we must speak Armenian.

Mr. Matthew Klujian Sr. was the next speaker. He spoke of the early days of our Church in Chicago. He said Armenian people of all factions came to our Church. He said he asked them to leave all of their differences outside of the Church and said that inside the Church we are all Armenians, we are all brothers and sisters. He said the clergy is our leader and we must all listen to him for guidance. Armenians were persecuted throughout the years, but managed to keep their identity through the Church.

Mrs. Georgette Mrofcza next spoke. She stated that leadership is missing here. She said that it was not all Father Vahram's fault, that we need someone to pull us all together and he lacks the educational and administrative skills to do so. We need proper leadership, someone to lead and guide us to become stronger and make our Church strong. The youth is missing, there are only a handful present. We need people to come, support and commit themselves to Church, to do great things here, however without proper leadership this is not going to happen.

Mr. George Nahabedian was the next to speak. He said that he was responsible for this, as he initiated this matter at the first Parish Assembly meeting for one primary reason, and that was basically financial. He said he made his statement for the good and benefit of the Church. There are about 25 people who raised in excess of \$40,000.00 for this Church last year. But this year there isn't going to be a 25th Anniversary this year, and perhaps the picnic will not net \$16,000.00 again. There are numerous occasions on Sundays, when the Choir outnumbers the parishioners. The matter is a financial one. The congregation is unaware of the fact that there were several weeks that the Parish Council could not afford to pay Father Vahram due to lack of finances. This is an embarrassing situation for 2 reasons--- a) the people are not at Church, and b) in this country we must financially support the Church. If we are not in a position to financially support this Church, then we do not deserve to have a Parish Priest. This is a matter of finances, and not one of personality.

Mr. Haig Pedian was the next speaker. He said he feels that the Church goes beyond the altar. It is a part of our history, our heritage. We must ask ourselves what is Armenianism and what is the Church. The Armenian Church is the head of the Armenian people and the people are the Church. This is our history. There is more than Christianity here, otherwise we could go to any Church.

Mrs. Dorothy Koresian was next to speak, and said that we are all Armenians here regardless of where we were born or whether or not we speak Armenian. The Church means something different to everyone, but to her it is like family, and she feels now her family is in trouble.

Ms. Terry Arabshian was the next speaker. She feels that the priest is our leader and should be given a chance to be able to do what he is to do. She said that we must look at ourselves and find out why we are not happy with Father Vahram. She asked if we would be more happy with another priest, and if another priest would bring more people to this Church.

Mr. Peter Klujian was the next to speak. He said the main issue here is not our Parish Priest, as the same problems would be here for any other priest. It all comes down to finances. The finances have to be here or we cannot have any priest. We all must work together to get the finances in order so that we can keep a Parish Priest here. He suggested a Finance Committee be set up to work throughout the year.

Mr. Matthew Klujian Jr. was the next speaker. He said that he was the Parish Council Chairman at the time Father Vahram was hired. He said that when speaking to the Primate at the time, he said that a Parish Priest must have many qualities---theology, religion, of course, psychology, education and must be able to relate to the youth. We are here for Christian values and Christianity. The Parish Priest has to be the manager, he has to have all these qualities, and must be able to relate to all the people in both languages.

Ms. Violet Koresian next spoke. She asked how many people have ever asked Father Vahram if he needed any help in the past 7 years that he has been here. This is his fault also, because he has not made an attempt to learn the English language. It is also not his fault that he does not have the education--what it takes to be a Parish Priest in the United States. Psychology and communications are necessary. He must greet people and be able to talk to the English speaking people. We as a parish cannot do these things alone. Father Vahram has not succeeded, and it is not entirely his fault, it is all our fault. We all have a responsibility to this Church and we should abide by it.

At this time, Father Vahram was called upon to present his comments. He began by responding to the duties of the Pastor point by point. He felt that he performed his pastoral duties properly. He stated that he always has made visitations to the parishioners who were ill, day or night, as this is his responsibility, along with administering Holy Communion to the very ill. He has performed these duties even when he himself was ill. He also carries a beeper so that he can always be reached.

He stated that he has made visitations to many families to increase the Church membership. He cited examples of members lost which were not his fault. He has always tried to bring new members to the Church however is blamed for lack of membership. He mentioned committees which have been dormant and organizational meetings in which the attendance was poor. He reiterated that these things are not his fault.

He felt that there was not enough support from the various organizations of the Church to allow progress. With reference to the Sunday School, he said that he had wanted the children to come up to Church to learn some of the Church songs and to hear the sermons, however this never materialized.

He cited all the reports that he has done for the past 6 years. He said that he will also do one today for submission to the Diocese. The congregation had never said that there was anything lacking or incorrect. The Diocese receives copies of all these reports, and has never reported anything incorrect or missing.

The reason that he is not an assigned parish priest is the decision of the Primate, between the Primate and Father Vahram only. However, the Primate would not have allowed him to take a 5-year term in Chicago if he did not approve. He reiterated that his duties and responsibilities are the same as any other priest in the Diocese, with the exception of his ability to vote at the Diocesan Assembly.

He said that he always accepted the decisions made by the various Church organizations and never tried to force his ideas or comments on any individual or organization. With regard to English, he said that he has incorporated the prayers in English into the Divine Liturgy as much as possible.

He has done his best with regard to all his responsibilities. He asked that we vote for the Church and not for him. Whatever we do should be for the Church and for the progress and betterment of the Church. He said that opening the doors of the Church is difficult, but closing the doors is easy. We must work for the Church.

Mr. Jack Cholakian then asked for the vote to be taken at this time on Mrs. Georgette Mrofcza's motion.

Mr. Haig Pedian then asked for her amendment to be amended to allow for some extra time. Mrs. Mrofcza replied that she planned to do so, and amended her motion to change the date from March 31, 1990, to August 31, 1990, pending the approval of the Diocesan Council. Mr. Garo Dadian seconded the motion.

Father Vahram said that the vote should be taken to either keep him or release him, and this must be sent to the Diocese where it must be approved by the Primate. He felt that the date cannot be decided here. However, Mr. George Nahabedian clarified by saying that the Diocesan Council decides whether or not to approve our request, and the date is only the request of the Parish Assembly.

Then the vote was taken. Out of a total of 61 dues-paying voters, the results were as follows:-

\*\*In favor of terminating the services of Father Vahram - 31 votes  
\*\*In favor of retaining the services of Father Vahram - 28 votes

There were 2 illegible votes.

Mr. Haig Pedian then moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Garo Dadian seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Mr. George Nahabedian asked who would advise the Diocese of this decision. Mr. Jack Cholakian said that it is the duty of the Parish Council to do so.

Father Vahram closed the meeting at 5:10 p.m. with a prayer.

Respectfully submitted,



Michelle Babikian  
Parish Assembly Secretary  
St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church  
Chicago  
March 25, 1990