

PASTOR, REV. ARTEN ASHJIAN, REPORT - 1974

Dear Members of St. Leon's Church:

During 1974, I have read periodic detailed reports of my activities at Parish Council meetings. This annual report will be as concise as I can make it.

WORSHIP--With the exception of Sept. 1, Divine Liturgy was celebrated on every Sunday and on three weekdays. We have had five visiting celebrants as substitutes or guests. The Primate, Abp. Torkom Manoogian presided at Sunday services on the occasion of the Annual Assembly of the Assn. of Armenian Church Choirs of America on Nov. 3. Most of our parishioners seem to be reluctant to attend services which are scheduled on any day other than Sunday. During the spring, all members of the Parish Council and two Diocesan delegates took turns in reading the lections. This novelty, which lasted for a period of eleven Sundays, was introduced to impress our leaders with the message that the Divine Liturgy is not merely a performance for the people who are in church, but rather a service with the people. The only time the church was full was on Easter. During summer, there is a substantial decrease in attendance on the part of the people and the choir members. For this reason, the "Recited Liturgy" was used during most of the summer. One of this method's benefits is the reduction of the duration of the Liturgy by a half hour. The need for oral announcements has been eliminated through the use of bulletins which I prepare for each Sunday with the help of Yeretzgin. In the Fall, I organized two home worship gatherings for shut-ins and widows. These were held in Paterson and Clifton and were attended by 14 women.

ASSISTANTS IN LITURGICAL FUNCTIONS--As singers, readers and altar servers, Deacons Charles Pinajian and Sarkis Soultanian, and Stole-Bearers Hagop Demirdjian and Shavarsh Torosian have been very helpful to me in all seasons. Young Wayne Kehishian gives valuable assistance not only as censer and helper on the altar, but also as instructor of a small group of boys who aspire to become acolytes and censers. Mrs. Lucy Dabagian, our experienced organist, teaches and conducts the Choir with great dedication and punctuality. I appreciate the assistance given by vocalist Helen Mazoujian and her husband Aram, who are in the Choir almost every Sunday and other occasions, arriving early. While some college students left the Choir this year, we welcomed four young married singers as new members. Guest or substitute organists have been Arline Dadekian, Lillian Kasparian, Yeretzgin Mary Ashjian, and George Marootian. Mrs. Siranoosh Boyajian and her team of "Mahs"-baking ladies have carried on their project joyfully. Improvements about the storing and distribution of "Mahs" were made upon their suggestion. The Altar Guild, under the chairmanship of Anne Marootian has brought about improvements in the form of gifts of linen and the construction of storage facilities in the vesting rooms. Miss Valerie DePalma continued until June her weekly service of updating the bulletin board in the front yard, rain or shine. Mr. Apraham D. Abrahamian and Mr. Joseph Bedrosian have represented the Parish Council at most funeral services.

RITUALS--There were 10 christenings (one adult), 3 marriages, and 12 funerals performed at St. Leon's. 32 homes of parishioners were

blessed. Blessing of graves: 12. Administration of Holy Communion to shut-ins: 2. I have also been involved, either as a participant or a substitute, in 11 funerals performed at sister churches or at St. Vartan Cathedral. In two cases where I was unable to attend a church funeral in other parishes, I participated in the wake service. I performed one wedding in Rochester, N.Y., and participated in two Roman Catholic weddings performed in New Jersey. I have celebrated the Divine Liturgy in three diocesan churches--including St. Vartan Cathedral, and two churches in the California Diocese. On eleven festive occasions, I have participated in the Divine Liturgy or other services held at St. Vartan and St. Patrick Cathedrals, or other sister churches in our Diocese.

CLERICAL TASKS--I am tempted to present a long list of the various tasks requiring the use of a desk, typewriters and other equipment, but I will resist the temptation, only mentioning that attention to various clerical tasks is the most time-consuming area of my ministry, along with driving to distant locations. John Nakashian of the Parish Council became instrumental in purchasing a new English, electric typewriter for the church, through his and brother Karnig's generous contribution to the typewriter fund. Earlier in the year, Charles Pinajian obtained the gift of a used typewriter, which will still be put to good use occasionally. Our office equipment is scattered in three different areas in the church and the Rectory, while collating and mailing jobs are handled in the multi-purpose room (the Library). Under Disbursements in the Budget Summary for 1974, you will notice that the \$1,500 for Part Time Secretary was left untouched, because in my way of appraising the situation, we could not hire a secretary unless we first provided him or her with a functional office where all equipment was logically positioned and easily accessible to the office worker, free from potential vandalism or other intrusions. To set up such a functional office, a survey committee was appointed by the Parish Council a year ago. I submitted to this committee a detailed memorandum listing five areas in our existing facilities which could be converted to offices. Each of these five areas are being used for purposes other than an office. The survey committee, of whose members two are on the Parish Council, has come up with a proposed solution which corresponds to the decision taken by the Parish Council last April 17. To Yeretzgin, reporters of the LRADOO, artist Aram Mazoujian and the many volunteers who have helped me in collating and mailing, I express my sincere thanks. Special mention is due to Mrs. Agnes Kapoian, who in addition to the work she does for the Armenian School, volunteered to type and reproduce various address lists for me, and has continued sending card messages at my suggestion. According to her report, Mrs. Kapoian has mailed 128 cards (Get well: 53; Sympathy: 49; Welcome: 6; New Home: 9; Farewell: 1; Overseas trip: 1; Baby congratulations: 9). To these may be added the 11 graduation cards signed and sent by me to high school and college graduates.

#### EDUCATIONAL:

1. LIBRARY--Perhaps because it is located in the multi-purpose room subject to traffic, is unlocked and unattended, our library is deprived of the care that it deserves. Books are relocated by people of all ages from one shelf to another, users leave books in all sorts of wrong positions, and sometimes borrow books without filling in the

cards. Last spring, Mrs. Harriett Kalemkerian, spend a good number of hours cataloguing the English-title books, donating a box and index cards for the list. The church needs a Librarian.

2. ARMENIAN SCHOOL--Teaching techniques have improved in some of the grades, thanks to the personal initiative shown by some teachers in practising the suggestions put forth by the Armenian School department of the Diocesan Educational Council. Whereas two years ago the burden of the school was still upon the shoulders of volunteer teachers, on my suggestion an Armenian School Board was created in the Fall of 1973. This Board has been strengthened by the addition of new members this year. Space-wise, classes which were all originally confined to the hall are at the present time using the following spaces: 1. Hall; 2. Library; 3. Priests' vesting room; 4. Trailer; 5. Rectory basement nursery. This physical situation causes difficulties of supervision and instant communication, and is an obstacle to assembly activities such as group singing.

3. SUNDAY SCHOOL--Two years ago, no male parent was directly involved in the Sunday School in a teaching or administrative capacity. Last year, we had two young fathers who assumed some administrative responsibilities. This year we have four fathers active in the Sunday School. I am happy to report that I have had a major share in the recruitment of these fathers and other staff members. The Sunday School is the field where the seeds of the future worshipping and serving community of St. Leon's should be sown. Teachers with all their good will cannot achieve much without the cooperation of the parents who should set a personal example of worshipping and serving in their church.

4. BIBLE STUDY--Last spring, I organized a Bible study course, which ran for four sessions and was limited to the introductory presentation of the first five books of the New Testament. The course was attended by a few of the Sunday School teachers and students.

MEMBERSHIP DRIVE--Planning for this drive began in the Fall of 1973, with Charles Pinajian as general chairman. The actual home visitation phase of the membership drive coincided with the months of February and March, at the height of the gasoline crisis of last winter. About 20 volunteers visited homes or otherwise solicited pledges. The results were as follows: 24 individuals became new voting members; 22 individuals, in addition to the above, signed pledge cards as supporters of St. Leon's Church; 71 individuals renewed their pledges, most of them increasing the amount of their contribution. A comparison of the actual receipts for 1973 and 1974 under Weekly Envelopes, Dues, Plate Collection shows a noticeable gain in 1974 which can be explained by the relative success of the membership visitation drive. On behalf of the Parish, I express sincere thanks to General Chairman Charles Pinajian, and to his colleagues Dovie Tilbian and Florence Gulkasian who tried to organize and implement the home visitation program. Thanks go also to the rest of the volunteer callers.

DIOCESAN AFFAIRS--In addition to my participation in the Annual Clergy Conference and the Diocesan Assembly, I have attended a regional conference and the A.C.Y.O.A. Constitutional Assembly, and have served on some committees. Upon the request of the Primate, I have done some

counselling and have taught a couple of courses for the benefit of the St. Nersess Theological School seminarians. I have attended a few receptions at the Diocesan center as a guest of the Primate. I have prepared, as in the past four years, the liturgical contents of the 1975 wall calendar of the Diocese.

INTERCHURCH RELATIONS--Upon invitation of our Primate, Yeretzgin and I attended a formal banquet honoring His Eminence Cardinal Jan Willebrands, President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity of the Holy See. I also took part in the ecumenical service held at St. Patrick's Cathedral in observance of the 800th anniversary of the death of St. Nersess Shnorhali. I attended a Clergy Conference at the Jewish Temple Emanuel of Paterson, one meeting of Associated Clergy of Fair Lawn, and a symposium at the Catholic St. John's University in Long Island. I took part in a panel discussion at the Armenian Presbyterian Church, Paramus, and participated in a two-day retreat of Armenian Orthodox and Armenian Protestant Clergy which included our Primate.

PUBLIC RELATIONS--On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Fair Lawn, I was photographed with a group of local clergy for a picture which appeared in the souvenir book. I have offered invocation at the Fair Lawn Borough Council meetings according to a pre-arranged schedule. I participated in a publicity workshop sponsored by the Fair Lawn Shopper. I have attended public gatherings of several fraternal, charitable and cultural associations.

MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES--All couples married at St. Leon's have had premarital conferences with me. I have conferred personally, by telephone or by letter with all parish organization heads. I have attended all pre-announced meetings of these organizations except when I have been ill or out of town or occupied with an urgent matter. The Women's Guild, the Annual Bazaar Committee and the Parish Council send cards for their meetings. So did the A.C.Y.O.A. until their recent lull in their activities. If the rest of our organizations will adopt the method of mailing notices for meetings and decide at each meeting the date for the next one, there will be less misunderstanding and better attendance.

FORMATION OF A COUPLES ORGANIZATION--Andy Dabbakian of the Parish Council volunteered to work for the eventual formation of a "Mr. and Mrs." or "Couples" organization from among St. Leon's parishioners. I helped him by supplying him with sample by-laws from other parishes and by compiling an address list of 175 couples. After long deliberation, the Parish Council has approved the amended by-laws. The first meeting was held in November and was attended by 28 people. Membership in the group will be open to widows, widowers and ~~single adults~~ also. I am certain that with good will and the support of the leaders of the Parish, this organization will be firmly established in 1975. It is desirable that all geographic areas in Bergen and Passaic Counties where the majority of our members live be represented in the membership of the "Couples" organization.

VISITATIONS--Ours is a parish church without a secretary, without a resident custodian-janitor, lacking messenger and purchasing personnel for trips to the Post Office, banks, printing shops, stationery stores, church supply shops, bookstores, candle factory, etc. No one should be surprised that after more than two years of ministry at St.

Leon's, I have still been unable to visit scores of parish families. Nevertheless, in 1974 I have visited 115 individual homes of our parishioners, 11 hospitals or nursing homes, 5 homes of clergy in the metropolitan area, and 5 homes of Armenians living within the borders of neighboring parishes. Visits to places of business: 136 times; visits to churches (including 1 synagogue); 48 times; administrative errands: 101; sick calls: 71; sympathy calls: 46; visits to clergy: 41. Visits associated with public and/or ecumenical relations: 28; visits of pastoral, religious ritual nature: 80; visits of educational nature: 38; social occasions: 23; home blessing ritual: 32.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The Membership Drive should be a permanent, annual project, not only for the recruitment of new members, but also to revive interest in the existing membership. New contacts have to be made. For this project to succeed, a lay leader and at least three dozen loyal helpers are necessary.

2. The physical condition of our properties and grounds should be improved and maintenance care should be given better attention. We should not wait, for example, for the borough authorities to complain about the condition of our lawn before taking action. I repeat what I said more than two years ago, that a resident custodian should be found who could live in the cottage and do janitorial, gardening, minor repairs and maintenance work, plus take care of lights, heat, air conditioning, locks and keys, etc.

3. Some areas of record keeping (dues paying, membership), acknowledgement of monetary gifts and payments should be done on a more professional level. A regular system of issuing receipts should be adopted. Inventory should be taken of all moveable assets and supplies.

4. We should develop the habit of long-range planning, whether it is for the next six months, one year, or five years. Our haphazard way of preparing for the immediate future does not look appealing to anybody sitting on the fence.

5. Individually and collectively, we must reevaluate our goals and priorities as members of St. Leon's Church. What do we want this church to be? Are we exclusively kitchen-oriented, or altar oriented? Do we look upon the church as a place for social gathering, or a language and music school, or a Bible School, or a place for indoor sports? The church should try to satisfy all or most of these interests, provided there is a harmonious balancing of all these ingredients. If each individual member or parish body insists upon emphasis on one exclusive area of activity within the church, then the inner health and harmony of the church is in danger.

Let us pray God for His guidance in meeting the tasks that are ahead of us.

