

SAINT GREGORY ARMENIAN CHURCH, BINGHAMTON  
PASTOR'S REPORT

On Thursday, May 15, 1980 I arrived in Binghamton, coming from Belleville, Illinois to assume the pastorate of your church. I was led to an apartment which was properly furnished thanks to the strenuous efforts of Carol Bogdasarian and Marion Rejebian. I am greatly indebted to them for their help. The Parish Council did everything in its power to facilitate my transfer from Belleville to Binghamton. My special thanks go to them.

As pastor, it is natural that my first objective would be to get acquainted with the parishioners. Therefore, I decided to make visitations to their homes. In my visitations I gave priority to those families who had cut off their relationship with our church for factional reasons. In doing so I tried to make two points: First, that I consider them a part of our community. Secondly, that I care for them regardless of their attitudes toward our church. With the exception of two, they received me with warmth and respect.

Then I turned my attention to the rest of the families who are regarded as sympathetic towards our church. I did not have the chance of visiting some of them because they failed to give me an appointment. Apparently, they had so tight schedule that they could not find half an hour or one hour time to receive the pastor. As a result no harm came to me personally. The real harm was done to the sacred tradition of our church. If they persist in disregarding the age-old traditions, sooner or later they will find themselves out of touch with our church. I made up the difference by visiting the elderly, the widows, the widowers and in return I received their blessings, blessings that cannot be bought, they are only granted.

When I took office, our church used to issue a circular which included mainly the religious calendar of the month. We did not have a newsletter in the true sense of the word. There was the need of a newsletter befitting our community. I took upon myself the responsibility for it, knowing full well the difficulties involved. It was considered a real challenge under given circumstances. Shortly, the first issue of the newsletter came out with a promising title SUNRISE. We started issuing a newsletter at a time when the big parishes had interrupted their's because of the summer season. I took care of putting the material together, of folding, of stapling, of addressographing and sorting out two hundred copies according to zip codes. Grace Baradet and Adrienne Kachadourian were kind enough to type it. Recently, I undertook also the task of typing it.

Many parishioners expressed their joy and appreciation over the appearance of the newsletter. Surprisingly several persons questioned about the delay of the newsletter instead of saying a word of appreciation. I considered it destructive criticism. I strongly reject destructive criticism but warmly accept constructive criticism. Those engaging in destructive criticism must realize that they are doing disservice to our church. Let them know that even the big parishes cannot put out their newsletter on time despite having potential in terms of helping hands and all kinds of facilities. In order to be fair in our judgments, we should not forget to point out the advantages of a work along with its disadvantages otherwise we become narrow minded. Some took a pessimistic view of our newsletter. They held that it had no chance for survival. At that time I disagreed with them. Today, after having printed seven issues, the indications are that it will survive because "where

there is a will, there is a way!"

When I assumed pastoral responsibilities, Armenian weekly classes did not exist. I considered it necessary to establish or re-establish it provided that minimum three persons enrolled in it. I did not wait for the fall season to start classes. I started off at the beginning of the summer season. My intention was to give opportunity to our youths to join it since they were on school vacation. Unfortunately the Armenian classes had no appeal for them. Around fifteen persons participated in it. Late enrolment considerably interfered with the pace of the work. Each time someone joined the classes, I felt compelled to start from the outset.

As in everything else perseverance is an essential factor for making progress. Frequent abstention constituted great obstacles. Those who expected to get quick result, became frustrated and eventually dropped out. Those who attended the classes regularly and had a real desire to learn, benefited substantially. I can mention the name of Michael Findikyan who will be in a position to teach Armenian classes next year.

It is incumbent on every Armenian to be able to express himself more or less in his own native language. The language is the most effective bond which identifies one with his people. How can we feel a sense of belonging to our beloved forefathers when we have ceased speaking the same language and lost even the desire to learn it. Those who stay away from Armenian classes making the excuse of not having time, I can give them the example of two doctors attending the Armenian classes despite being extremely tied up. Therefore, the thing which lacks is not the time but the willingness. To me, to make the Armenian classes available is a matter of national conscience. Seven months ago, in my first sermon, I had announced that there should be three persons in order to start Armenian weekly classes but today I state that the Armenian classes will go on even if the attendance is reduced to one single person.

I attach great importance to Cultural Gatherings because they play a vital role in the life of our parish. They are the driving force of our parish without which we become like stagnant water. As parish, we get our spiritual nourishment from them. I made plans to organize cultural gatherings on the occasion of major national feasts. Thus far, we had a cultural gathering dedicated to the Holy Translators, a Shadow Play prior to Christmas. We have scheduled the commemoration of St. Vartan on Sunday, 1st of March, following Divine Liturgy. The purpose of Cultural Gatherings is three-fold; First, to honor the memory of a hero, a saint or a scholar. Second, to understand the significance of their lives and work. Third, to get spiritual inspiration in order to follow in their footsteps. I strongly urge our parishioners to make a special effort to attend these cultural gatherings.

I had a meeting with Sunday School staff to discuss issues related to curriculum, textbooks and attendance. I provided them with reference books which could broaden their knowledge about the history and doctrine of the Armenian Church. I asked them to be more interested in rekindling the student's national spirit and religious feelings rather than trying to fill their minds with much informations. Adrienne Kachadourian and her colleagues are doing their best to contribute to the moral and spiritual development of the students. It is gratifying to note that this year the attendance of our Sunday School has increased.

We have every reason to be happy with our choir which consists of dedicated members. They are fully conscious of their obligations toward

our church. They abstained only when they had a tenable reason to do so. I recruited two persons for the choir. During my conversations and meetings with people, I tried hard to persuade them to get involved in the church organizations, particularly in the choir. Sometimes I succeeded, other times I failed but it was worth to give it a try. Our organist, Michael Findikyan was always at the helm.

We feel deeply indebted to our altar servers; Hagop Injajigian and deacon Hrair Dekmejian. Professor Dekmejian is regarded my right hand in the church. He is rendering valuable service to our church. He gladly accepted to conduct services when I am away in Syracuse. Although he has no time to scratch his head, he finds plenty of time to devote to our church. We all need to follow his wonderful example.

I continued the friendly relationship which existed before between our church and the South-side sister churches. I took part in inter-faith church services on two occasions: Thanksgiving Day at First Baptist Church, and on the feast of Epiphany at St. Andrew's Catholic Church. We should not miss these interfaith church services if we are really interested in strengthening our ties with them and learning from their experience.

The Women's Guild holds a very important place among our church organizations. It is not an exaggeration to state that it forms the backbone of our church. As a home ceases to be a home without the presence of a devoted mother, so our church will lose a great deal without Women's Guild. All the women in our community are expected to be part of it, giving their moral and financial support. The out-going officers of the executive body of Women's Guild; Margaret Medzigian, Anoush Dekmejian and Barbara Gialanella deserve our deep gratitude. They carried out their responsibilities with faithfulness for several terms at the unanimous request of the members. We firmly believe that the present officers under the chairmanship of Ursula Findikyan will carry on the work with renewed enthusiasm and dedication.

We cannot overstate the importance of our Youth Group. The future of our parish hinges on them. Sooner or later, they will play leadership roles here or elsewhere. For this very reason we need to cherish and care about them. It has become a necessity to assign an adult advisor who can give guidance and supervise their activities. On my part I have always encouraged them to take an active part in our cultural gatherings.

It is true that our Parish is small but we should bear in mind that we have potential. We make a big mistake by imposing the whole burden on a few. This is not fair. Whether we are involved in church organizations or not, we have obligation to do our share. Once we are convinced that the church is our second home, we will not hesitate to offer our service. By serving our church we do good to our people and we do deeds which are pleasing to God. The end result is that we get inner satisfaction and spiritual enjoyment. That is our biggest reward, inviolable treasure. Blessed are those who possess this kind of treasure. I am hopeful that with united and concerted efforts we will manage to achieve all our goals.

It was a real pleasure for me to work with the members of the Parish Council. I would like to express my thanks for their cooperation and understanding. My special thanks go to the Chairman of the Parish Council, Dr. George Rejebian who always showed readiness to give me a lending hand not only in church related matters but also in my personal problems.

Very Rev. Fr. Sooren Chinchinian  
Pastor

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