

SAINT GREGORY ARMENIAN CHURCH, BINGHAMTON  
PASTOR'S REPORT

With the help of God and with the cooperation of all the church bodies, we concluded another successful year in the life of our parish. The success was not resulted from individual endeavors but from collective efforts or team efforts. Therefore, the credit belongs to all, without exception. In order to account for the success, it is necessary to look back on our past year activities. Let us start with the church around which all our activities revolve. Our church attendance is considered more than satisfactory. We reach this conclusion after making a comparison between our church attendance and the church attendance of other parishes.

There are a number of people who attend church services every Sunday, on a regular basis to meet their spiritual needs. Only compelling reasons can keep them from coming to church. Their exemplary gesture is amazing and inspiring. We regard them as the crux or the nucleus of our church. On the other hand, there are those who show up in the church once in a while. But occasional church attendance loses its meaning and effectiveness. Jesus emphasized the point that our worship could serve its purpose only when we applied persistence.

Another factor which considerably enhances the effectiveness of worship is the feeling of togetherness or oneness. During the worship, we become one in Christ. There exist other reasons for attending church services regularly. The church represent the center of the Armenian community, our second home and our spiritual homeland. Once we hold this firm conviction, attending the church frequently will become a spontaneous act and habit.

We have quite a strong choir consisted of ten members. some of them cannot afford to come every Sunday for valid reasons. One is busy on Sunday mornings keeping up with her college studies. The other is on call from her job office. A third one has commitment also to another sister church. The fourth one is burdened with house-hold duties. It is very gratifying to know that we can always count on the punctual presence of three active members: Michael and Rose Ketchoyian, and Anoush Dekmejian. Neither the scorching heat of summer nor the biting cold of winter stand in their way to sing in the choir. Michael Findikyan, our dedicated organist has always carried out his task with a sense of responsibility. Our choir will be in a better shape if we have rehearsals more frequently, mainly on the eve of major feasts.

Preaching occupies an important place in the worship. It pursues many-fold purposes: religious, educational, moral, spiritual and social. Protestant churches give great attention to preaching. Eastern churches are moving in the same direction by stressing the significance of the preaching. Being aware of this fact, I delivered carefully prepared sermons almost every Sunday. My sermons dealt not only with religious subjects but also philosophical topics. Most preachers simply read the manuscript of their sermons because they look for an easy way or they cannot do otherwise. I have chosen the difficult way, that is oral presentation, on the assumption that it is more effective and forceful.

We feel deeply indebted to our altar-servers who perform their functions in the spirit of faithfulness. Deacon Hrair Dekmejian is considered my right-hand man in the church. In addition to doing deacon's part on Sundays, he conducts Jashou Service whenever I am away to Syracuse. Hagop Injajigian is also a great help to us. He comes every other Sunday

because he is compelled to work, otherwise we are certain that he would never miss the chance of serving the church.

We held cultural gatherings along with special programs almost every month as well as on the occasion of religious and national feast days. Programs of this dimensions can hardly be found in other parishes. I have a clear idea as to the nature of the cultural gatherings in other parishes. The cultural gatherings are the integral parts of any prosperous parish. We benefit from them in many ways. They represent a constant reminder of our rich and valuable heritage. They give us strength and inspiration to keep on holding fast to the unwavering faith and the creative spirit of our beloved fore-fathers. In short, they provide us the rare opportunity of spiritual enjoyment by spending one hour or half an hour in a truly Armenian atmosphere. Recently, we noticed that some parishioners left the cultural gathering in the middle of the program. For that reason, we reduced the duration of the program to half an hour. We strongly believe that any true Armenian should take pleasure and interest in listening to Armenian music or recitation once a month for half an hour.

The publication of our news-letter SUNRISE continues for the second year without any interruption except for two months in summer. As far as the content is concerned, it can compete with the news-letter of other parishes. The news-letter of other parishes are full of announcements and donation lists. Many people including pastors paid a compliment to us on our news-letter. The news-letter SUNRISE forms a strong bond which keeps parishioners and friends living far away in close touch with our church. I have assumed full responsibility for the publication of the SUNRISE. I take care of putting the material together, typing, layout, addressographing, folding, stapling, and sorting out according to zip codes. We mail out two hundred copies in order to be eligible for the low postage rate of non-profit organizations.

Women's Guild has a vital role to play in any parish. The well-being of a parish much depends on the state of the Women's Guild. To strengthen Women's Guild means to put the church on a sound and firm basis. Our Women's Guild under the Chair-person of Ursula Findikyan is trying hard to live up to our expectations. It can be more productive if new and young blood is infused into its body. With this idea in mind, I contacted several young women asking them to become a part of Women's Guild. I am anxiously waiting for the implementation of the commitments they made. Last year, at this time, I called upon all women of our community to enroll in Women's Guild. Today I reiterate my appeal to them. There is no justification whatsoever for a passive attitude when the Women's Guild is in desperate need of helping hands. Last Sunday, I was in Syracuse where following Divine Liturgy I presided over their Annual Parish Assembly. I felt deeply moved and amazed to see three American young women married Armenians indicating a spontaneous desire to become members of Women's Guild. If American women are giving helping hand to Women's Guild, how much more is expected from Armenian women.

Our church is not an island in itself. It maintains friendly relationships with other churches located on Southside. Within this frame-work, I visited the Ross Memorial Presbyterian Church for the purpose of attending the Installation Ceremony of their new pastor. On the occasion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Pulpit Exchange, I delivered a sermon at the Ross Memorial Presbyterian Church. A few days ago, I received a telephone call from their Adult Group Director inviting me to give them a talk. I participated in the Ecumenical Services which took place at St. John Catholic Church. When we celebrated the Fiftieth Anniversary of our church, I extended invitations to all the clergymen residing on Southside. Some of them could not come because of their prior commitments.

Despite the efforts made on my part and on the part of Linda Misakian, it became impossible to get the Youth Group off the ground. They are having serious problem with getting together to hold regular meetings. The first and minimum requirement of any Youth Group member is to be present at the meetings, once a month. Until recently, they used to have meetings following our monthly Dinner-Program. In my judgement, the timing was inconvenient since at the conclusion of the Dinner-Program everybody feels somewhat tired and inclined to go home with his children. Secondly, it is difficult to be confined to a meeting room while chatting and talking going on in the hall. Upon my suggestion they agreed to hold their meetings in homes. Last year, at this time, I stressed the necessity of appointing an adult advisor. Today, I would propose the name of Adrienne Kachadourian.

The Armenian Weekly Language Classes are still in existence. The emphasis is laid on everyday conversational language. You learn Armenian along with having fun. For those wishing to join the classes is never late. It is our responsibility to keep the door of the classes open and it will remain open as long as there is one single person interested in it. Recently, someone made the following witty remark, "If you had fixed a price tag on the Armenian classes, you would have many people taking interest in it, but you made it cheap by not charging anything." The Armenian classes are not cheap for those who can really appreciate its value.

As the pastor of this church, I did everything I could to recruit new people for our church bodies. I took advantage of all my conversations and meetings with people to achieve this important goal. I talked on a personal level to young and old people alike urging them to attach themselves more closely to our church and to serve our church to the best of their ability. Whenever we had outside visitors in our church, I considered my duty to bid them welcome and to get acquainted with them. Then I asked for their addresses so that I could send our newsletter to them. Thus we built bridges of friendship. In return we received occasional donations and a note of gratitude. Sometimes I used my power of persuasion not to allow members of the church bodies to quit or to turn away for small problems. In several cases, I felt compelled to press too hard and as a result I was given the label "pushy." However, I did not get offended because the protection of the interest of our church comes first.

We are both the masters and the servants of this church. There is no task too small to undertake for the sake of our church. Whatever sacrifice we make for our church will fall short compared with what our fore-fathers did. Let us work together closely in spite of our personal differences and make the year 1982 a better and brighter one for the welfare of our parish and for the glorification of God.

Very Rev. Fr. Sooren Chinchinian  
Pastor