

ST. GREGORY THE ILLUMINATOR ARMENIAN CHURCH. BINGHAMTON
PASTOR'S REPORT 1982

A pastor holds a peculiar position in any parish. As a result of his peculiar position, he is supposed to do a little everything. For him no task is too small to perform. Sometimes he fills in for somebody else, and at other times he picks up the pieces. He realizes that getting involved in modest tasks is not humiliating but ennobling so long as they are intended to glorify God and to benefit our parish. It is this idea that motivated my pastoral activities during the past year. Today instead of mentioning all the little things done by me, I am rather eager to keep you informed of the main responsibilities which I carried out conscientiously.

Hospital Visitations: These took precedence over all my duties because of their urgent nature. The depressed patients need to be comforted and cheered up so that they can hold out hope for speedy recovery. People whether they are patients or not live by hope. If one's hope fades his life ends up on the rocks. Whenever someone from our parish became hospitalized, I rushed to the hospital to lift his spirits by means of encouraging words and prayer. I did not content myself with visiting the patients only once. I made a special effort to visit them as many times as possible. I considered my duty to visit any hospitalized Armenian regardless of his denomination or persuasion. I strongly believe that our church as a national church feels obligation to all Armenians, and in return they have obligation to us.

Apart from hospital visitations, I made regular visits to some of our widows and widowers. As a result of prevailing circumstances, our widows and widowers are almost isolated. They feel lonely and despaired. They suffer from a lack of visitors with whom they could share their concerns, grievances, and hopes. Among these I must single out Keroppe Ketchoyian. This man has rendered valuable services to our church for many years. In return we feel deeply indebted to him. One way of expressing our indebtedness is to visit him or to give him a call asking after his health. During my visits to the widows and widowers I told them repeatedly that they could count on me in the event they needed transportation means to go to supermarket or to attend church services.

Preaching: It occupies a central place in the worship of any church. Preaching is the proclamation of the word of God. God's word should be heard loud and clear otherwise the worship loses its effectiveness. Being fully aware of this fact, I gave a special attention to my preaching. Preaching must not be taken lightly or for granted. I do not stand on the pulpit and start preaching relying solely on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God offers help to those who know how to help themselves. Meaningful preaching requires time and efforts. Some preachers try to get around it by repeating the Biblical stories and making shallow comments on them. To do so is like serving sandwiches during a banquet. The guests will not be able to get satisfaction, and will depart from the reception hall with bad impressions. The Divine Liturgy which we celebrate every Sunday represents a Spiritual Banquet. Therefore the preaching should be equivalent to a complete dinner so that the faithful may have the chance to satisfy their spiritual hunger. I delivered serious sermons on all the Sundays of the year including the summer season. The favorable comments which I have received from many people Armenians and non-Armenians convince me that my preaching served its purpose.

Newsletter: For the third year in a row I managed to issue the newsletter Sunrise in spite of all kinds of difficulties I encountered. These difficulties consist in finding volunteers to make reports on our church activities or to write short articles or to do typing. In every parish there is a special committee in charge of the newsletter. One member is responsible for editing, the other for making reports, the other for typing.

and others for folding, stapling and addressographing. I tried to set up such a committee but to no avail. Nobody is willing to commit himself on a regular basis. In the absence of such a committee, I have assumed full responsibility for issuing the newsletter. It is my task to put together enough material to cover seven pages; then type it, laying it out, folding, stapling and addressographing two hundred copies. I could easily avoid doing all these extra work since I have no helpers. But I chose the hard way for two main reasons: I took it as a challenge with a strong determination to persist. Secondly, I thought that it would be appropriate if I set an example of sacrifice. It is true that my office hours are fixed but keep in mind that I have another office in my apartment whose hours are extremely flexible dragging on sometimes up to two o'clock in the morning. Of course no one notices it except my nephew. I have received a number of complimentary notes from our readers concerning the informative content of our newsletter. It is suffice to mention only one of them. The former secretary of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of America wrote the following words: "In reading your newsletter I feel the extent of efforts you put in it."

Ecumenical Activities: I maintained and further strengthened the friendly relations with other sister churches. Occasional contact with sister churches proved mutually beneficial. We learn interesting things about them, and they need to learn from us. The new experience which we gain through our contacts enables us to look at religious issues from a different angle. With this firm conviction I took part in the activities of the Southside Ecumenical Council. I invited them to hold one monthly regular meeting in our church building. I joined them in the Thanksgiving celebration which was held in the St. Andrews Catholic Church. On the occasion of the feast of Epiphany, I participated in the Ecumenical Worship Services at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church where I talked about the life of St. Gregory the Illuminator, our father in the faith. January is known as the Christian Unity Month. Within this framework, there was exchange of preachers among various churches. Rev. William Bouton preached in our church and I preached in his church, that is Tabernacle United Methodist Church. As the associate pastor introduced me to the parishioners he made the point that the Armenians were the first nation to accept Christianity as a state religion while the United Methodist Church takes pride in tracing its beginning back in the eighteen century. During the procession, I realized that I was walking taller.

Cultural Gatherings: I prepared programs composed of readings, recitations, songs and speech on major National Feast Days, such as Holy Translators, Vartanantz, Martyrs' Day, Mothers' Day, Christmas and Easter. In addition to these I put together short programs for our monthly dinner gatherings. The purpose of the programs is to make our people more conscious of the valuable cultural inheritance of our beloved forefathers. Through the programs we learn a great deal about the lives of our national heroes and saints who changed the course of our history and became a constant source of true patriotism and religious fervor. Secondly, the programs provided a good opportunity to our young people to be exposed to the public so that they can gain self-confidence which will help them considerably to play a leading role in future. As Armenians we should be able to find time once a month to come together for the purpose of enjoying Armenian songs and recitations. If we show willingness to do so we become better Armenians.

Visitation to Syracuse: Once a month I visited Syracuse to celebrate Divine Liturgy at the St. Paul Armenian church. My visit was beneficial in two ways: First, I did a favor to our sister church taking care of their spiritual need. Secondly, I contributed to the budget of our church by two hundred dollars, every month. I spent my whole weekend and traveled by bus for four hours. I am doing this on a voluntary basis.

Special Acknowledgments: I extend deep thanks and appreciations to Prof. Hrair Dekmejian who did his utmost to enhance the beauty of our church services and cultural gatherings in putting to use his distinctive gifts. Special thanks are due to Jack Injig.

ian for having done his part as altar server with great enthusiasm. I express deep gratitude to our organist, Michael Findikyan who performed his duty so faithfully and persistently that we simply admire him. I feel indebtedness to Adrienne Kachadourian for keeping our Sunday School open and strong with the help of Linda Misakyan and Barbara Ketchoyian. I am greatly thankful to Kevork Papazian and Satenig Ketchoyian who worked very hard inside the kitchen to make our monthly dinners a success. We thank Ursula Findikyan for serving on the Women's Guild as chairperson. One year ago when we had a hard time finding a suitable person to assume the chairmanship, she accepted the position only upon my urging. Now, upon the completion of her term of office, she wants to be relieved of her responsibilities. My appreciation to Edward Seraydarian for the helping hand he has been giving to our church. My greatest appreciation goes to the active and dedicated members of our Parish Council who did everything in their power for the welfare of our church. Our relationships were based on mutual respect, understanding, and trust. Dr. George Rejebian, the chairman of the Parish Council is the right man, on the right job, and at the right time. Some of his rare qualities such as patience, reasonableness, and impartiality amazes me. For him wrong is wrong whether it is done by his friends or by others.

Our church can best be described as a body. A body has many parts: eyes, ears, arms, legs. Likewise the church consists of various organs such as Sunday School, Choir, Women's Guild, Youth Group. Each part of the body performs two main functions: First, to stay in close touch with the body as a whole. Secondly, it must do its share for the wellbeing of the body. The task of the eyes is not to attract attention to itself but to serve the body as a whole. Similarly, the activities of the organs of the church are aimed at contributing to the progress of the church. To do so requires that we set aside all our personal interests and narrow considerations as soon as we step into the church building. The church is an end in itself, and not a means to be used for promoting ourselves. We can best elevate ourselves by losing ourselves, by forgetting ourselves for the benefit of our people and for the glorification of God.

Very Rev. Fr. Sooren Chinchinian
Pastor

Very Rev. Fr. Sooren Chinchinian