

ST. GREGORY THE ILLUMINATOR ARMENIAN CHURCH, BINGHAMTON
PASTOR'S REPORT 1983

With the help of God, we completed another year in the life of our community. It can be characterized as a successful year. All the church bodies had their own shares in the success because they worked hard and in harmony. They carried out their tasks by making use of different means but pursuing the same worthy cause, that is the glorification of God and the benefit of our people. It is worthy to note that some members of the church bodies shouldered double or triple responsibilities in order to meet the requirements. In doing so, they set a fine example of unselfish dedication and sacrifice. Small communities like ours lean heavily on those handful of volunteers who struggle against great odds. As a result, the small communities manage to hold their heads high with honor and pride.

As for me, I can state in all fairness that I contributed to the success achieved on the part of the church bodies. It is not up to me to determine the extent of my contributions. My contributions give evidence of themselves as action speaks louder than words. Nevertheless, I find it necessary to provide you with detailed informations about the things I fulfilled. I considered my function two-fold: the servant of God and the steward of the church. These presuppose a sense of accountability to God and to our people. The first function allowed me a partnership with God, entering into the divine program in the world. I tried hard to live up to the expectations of God to become his faithful servant, and yet I do not feel that I have worked enough. Whatever service a servant of God renders, he can never exceed his obligation. As a servant of God, I am entitled to my wages but I deserve no extra credit for doing what was my duty.

With regard to my second function, that is being the steward of the church, I knew full well the heavy responsibilities confronting me. I cared for the church's possessions as though they were my own, and I looked to the members of the congregation as my brothers and sisters. As a faithful steward, I was eager to be a good finisher. I took things the way they came, good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant not permitting myself to quit, however difficult. I learned how to take the bitter with the sweet. On the completion of every task I wanted to utter the significant words of the steward in the parable of the Gospel of St. Luke, "I am an unworthy servant, I have only done what was my duty." My pastoral duties were divided into five major parts: Newsletter, Visitations, Cultural gatherings, Armenian school and Ecumenical activities.

Newsletter: I continued to publish without interruption the newsletter Sunrise which I set up three and a half years ago. I took full charge of its content and the manual work connected with it. Each time, I made ready sufficient material to fill seven pages. I asked several people to contribute short articles and reports to the newsletter. They gave me promises but they forgot to keep them. In the absence of reporters, I worked harder to make up for the difference. I mailed out two hundred and thirty copies every month. Two hundred copies are considered a minimum requirement set by the Post Office to be eligible for the special rate of non-profit organizations. I sent out thirty additional copies to the members of the St. Paul Armenian church in Syracuse. It is gratifying to receive complimentary notes from our readers about the meaningful and constructive content of the newsletter. Some sister churches even reprinted several articles from our newsletter.

Visitations: I attached a special importance to the hospital visitations. Whenever the hospitals notified me about the admittance of Armenian patients, I visited them as soon as possible. I was not contented with one visit, therefore I did all I could to repeat it several times. I found it necessary to visit Armenian patients without distinction

of their denominations and persuasions. Very often I asked for the patient's permission to say a prayer or I prayed upon request so that not to give the impression that he is in critical condition. One day, a patient got such an impression. As a result, he became much depressed. Along with hospital visitations, I paid regular visits to our senior citizens. Some regard themselves as cut off from society. They look for people who could keep them company from time to time. My visitations served the purpose of meeting their needs. There are certain issues that concerned them most. So they had an eager desire to talk it over. I could feel the intensity of that desire when they got carried away doing most of the talking. But the thing which amazed me is their strong adherence to the traditional Judeo-Christian values. Moreover, I visited Syracuse, once a month, 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.

Cultural Gatherings: In keeping with the established custom prevailing in most of the large communities, I held cultural gatherings to mark our major religious and national feast days on the occasion of the Holy Translators, Vartanantz, Martyr's Day, Mothers Day, Christmas and Easter. I took it upon myself to work out programs to be implemented on major feast days as well as during the monthly dinners. The programs consisted of songs, recitations, readings and short talks. They offered our people a beautiful time of fellowship and enjoyment. Our people had the chance to share the intellectual values of our beloved forefathers. Those values could generate in our people a great enthusiasm toward the noble aspirations and ideals of our forefathers. If we are really proud of the cultural heritage handed down to us and anxious to perpetuate it, then we should take interest and pleasure in attending the cultural gatherings.

Armenian School: I kept the Armenian Weekly Language Classes going in spite of the fact that the attendance dropped considerably. It is my obligation to carry on the work as long as there are persons who show interest in learning Armenian. Even if the number of students is reduced to only one, still it will be worth the effort. So far, I have three students. One of them comes from SUNY and takes the course for credit. I give her private lessons because she is a beginner and unable to keep pace with the other two students. The two students learn to read and write once a week on Monday evening at 7:30 p. m. lasting one hour. Everybody is welcome to join in. The Armenian language gives us a sense of belonging. We desperately need that sense of belonging if we want to continue our existence as genuine Armenians.

Ecumenical Activities: Our church forms a part of Southside Ecumenical Council. Meetings take place once a month. I try not to miss those meetings unless there is a compelling reason. Sometimes, they meet the last Sunday of the month which makes it impossible for me to attend since I visit Syracuse. I consider it important to work with them to indicate that we favor the establishment of close ties among Christian churches. On the occasion of Thanksgiving day we held joint services at the Ross Memorial Presbyterian church. Only two people from our church were present. Another combined services are scheduled for Sunday, January 8, 1984 to celebrate the feast of Epiphany.

I had a working and harmonious relationship with all the members of the Parish Council. I thank them for their cooperation, understanding and support.

Very Rev. Fr. Sooren chinchinian
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Pastor