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St. John's Armenian Church
OF GREATER DETROIT



VERY REV. FR. PAREN AVEDIKIAN
PASTOR

VERY REV. FR. SAMUEL AGHOYAN
ASSISTANT PASTOR

22001 NORTHWESTERN HIGHWAY

★ PHONE: 569-3405 ★

SOUTHFIELD, MICHIGAN 48075

His Eminence
ArchBishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate
630 2nd Ave. New York, N.Y. 10016

24 July, 1993

Your grace

I would like to express my appreciation to you for having confidence in my capabilities in assigning me as temporary visiting clergy at St. John's Armenian Church of Greater Detroit. Through this assignment, you provided an opportunity for me to grow, learn and broaden my realm of pastoral experience in serving as a clergymen of the Eastern Diocese.

As you know, upon accepting this temporary assignment, I entered a divided, angry, emotional and unstable community with an uncertain future. My purpose in accepting this temporary position was to assist you and tend to the spiritual and pastoral needs of a community experiencing turmoil.

When I recognized that it was going to be difficult and certainly challenging I felt that my mission during my service in Detroit was to guide the parish through their difficulties and create calmness, harmony, and stability and re-focus on their faith. There were many trying days but I endured the hardships to fulfill my promise to you and to help this parish in need.

I was not judgmental nor did I take sides in this divisive atmosphere I was placed. Rather it was my efforts through the messages of my sermons, me behavior and fair treatment, service, and communication to all the parishioners, I felt I was able to accomplish my mission.

During the six months that I have served in detroit, I provided my best to this community both spiritual through my performance of sacraments and Divine Liturgy and pastorally through home blessings, hospital visits, counseling and attendance of organizational meetings, activities and events.

Through my service, I was able to become acquainted with many families who welcomed me in their homes to get to know me and express their appreciation to me for the Spiritual and Pastoral guidance and assistance I was providing their parish.

I have learned that Detroit is a parish with an abundance of faithful and dedicated parishioners, with a wealth of much talent and capabilities, and great potential for growth and greater involvement in the Church and community.

As per our conversation by phone on July 14, 1993, you expressed your desire to assign me as pastor for a 1 year temporary assignment to Holy Cross Church in Union City, New Jersey.

I would be happy to accept this assignment upon my departure from Detroit in mid-September. I will continue to provide my best to the Holy Cross parish to serve and enrich their spiritual lives and for the advancement and flourishing of their Church and community.

As you indicated, after a year of service to Holy Cross parish, there will be an assignment of more permanence for me. We have discussed my preferences; those being canon Sacrist of the Cathedral or Assistant pastor of St. John's in Detroit. I feel that in either capacity, my extensive pastoral experience in large parishes I have served, namely Holy Martyr's and St. John's will prove to be beneficial, and will allow me to grow and contribute to their respective communities and the Armenian Church.

In this life of sacrifice to our Church and people, we all like to feel a sense of satisfaction and witness the fruits of our efforts. I have been fortunate at St. John's to receive an abundance of positive feed back, compliments, and expressions of appreciation through the warmth and hospitality from many parishioners for my performance and service here in Detroit.

However, your trust and encouragement through the assignments and responsibilities you entrust with me communicates your respect and confidence in my capabilities and service to the Armenian Church.

As you indicated, I will place my trust in you that you will take into consideration my experience and my requests, and with your wisdom provide me as assignment that will enable me to utilize my experience and contribute fully to the flourishing of the Armenian Church in my God serving endeavors. Thank you in advance.

Prayerfully Yours



Fr. Vazken Karayan

St. John's Armenian Church

OF GREATER DETROIT
VERY REV. FR. PAREN AVEDIKIAN
Pastor



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SOUTHFIELD, MICHIGAN 48075

August 17, 1993

His Eminence
Archbishop Khajag Barsamian
Primate
630 Second Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10016

Your Grace,

During the course of my assignment as temporary Pastor of St. John's Armenian Church, many issues and concerns of parishioners were brought to my attention.

One issue in particular I felt was necessary to convey to you for you to review and address accordingly.

Many parishioners have expressed serious concern regarding the St. John's Food for Armenian Fund, and whether the funds are being utilized for the intended purpose, namely aid to our needy brothers and sisters in Armenia.

Evidently, in the past two years, three projects were implemented from these funds; purchase of a farm and cattle, purchase of flour, and most recently funds were sent to subsidize feed for a fishery in Armenia. These three projects amounted to expenditures of nearly \$200,000.00.

Lack of evidence and documentation of these transactions and project reports of who and the number of needy receiving the benefits and aid from these projects has aroused doubt and has caused people to question the validity of these projects.

To avoid and eliminate such concerns and questions, it is my recommendation to you as Primate and to the Diocesan Council to exercise your authority bringing such fund-raising efforts to aid Armenia under the Diocesan Authorities and DFAR whose organization and network of offices and personnel insures that such aid is in fact reaching the people it is intended to help and accounts fully for expenditures for all funds collected and distributed.

Since DFAR has been developed and established for this very purpose and represents all parishes of our Diocese, there is no reason for any Parish Council to act independently. Rather,

individual parishes of this Diocese should be commended and encouraged to continue their fund-raising efforts for this purpose, forwarding proceeds from such efforts to DFAR for proper distribution of assistance to our homeland.

I am sure that you share my concern that funds collected in the name of our Church for such Christian and humanitarian causes, be reputably managed, distributed and reported to maintain the confidence of the donors who entrust their contributions with Church representatives.

Thanking you in advance for your consideration in this matter.

I remain prayerfully,


Fr. Vazken Karayan

John

St. John's Armenian Church

OF GREATER DETROIT
VERY REV. FR. PAREN AVEDIKIAN
Pastor



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SOUTHFIELD, MICHIGAN 48075

September 11, 1993

His Eminence
Archbishop Khajag Barsamian
Primate
630 Second Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10016

Your Grace,

I would first like to express my appreciation to you for your confidence in my capabilities and your support and encouragement during my service in Detroit.

Now that my temporary assignment as Pastor of St. John's Armenian Church has been completed, I have reflected on my service and would like to share with you my thoughts, observations, and experiences as well as recommendations for the future well-being and success of the parish.

Because of the nature of Fr. Paren's resignation, the burden of this emergency and urgent need for pastoral service was upon your shoulders. I willingly accepted your call to duty to serve this parish in crisis, which initially was to be a two week assignment.

Without prior notification, compensation or benefit agreement, or preparation time, I began my pastoral service which later was extended six months. My financial resources were limited. I performed numerous sacraments without remuneration, yet I remained silent in order not to appear to be materialistic, and to fulfill my commitment to you and serve the St. John's community to the best of my ability.

As you are aware, following Fr. Paren's departure, much gossip, viciousness, and resulting division dominated the parish. In this climate I did my utmost to accomodate the needs of its members, communicating and giving attention to all its parishioners, without discrimination.

I did my best to provide pastoral care and spirituality through performance of services, through my sermons which I focused on relevant Christian messages for Christian living and a harmonious community, and through performance of sacraments which included messages explaining meaning, significance, and application. In addition, I made home and hospital visits, and attended many organizational meetings and activities which I was invited to.

My purpose, with a gentle, patient and caring approach was to ease the pain and bring calm and stability to an emotional community.

First and foremost, now that I have served here, witnessing and experiencing the system, and have an understanding of the community and its people, I learned that one cannot pay attention to everything you are told, and you cannot act in haste. Rather, your own eyes and ears of ones words and deeds give you the true picture, not someones's judgement or misinterpretation.

What one may say to you or publically express to a large gathering of fellow parishioners, I witnessed at times, was contrary to their opinions and decisions made in the privacy and confines of the Council meetings.

Still, after six months since Fr. Paren's departure, I see a relatively small group perpetuating the negative feelings and division. Unfortunately, this small group includes some Parish Council members and Delegates. These few obviously are not clear as to what their role and mission is in their leadership positions. This may be due to lack of experience, or being misguided by others. Their purpose should be to serve and administer the business and needs of their parish and her members without discrimination, and serve the Armenian Church as a whole. A few seem more interested in their own egos and protecting and promoting their former pastor rather than their church.

Parish Council members and Delegates who are in these leadership roles should be good Christian examples (as they claim to be). Unfortunately, the practice of their claim is lacking in a few. Some of their behavior was beyond my comprehension. I have witnessed on many occasions their indifference, neglect, and disrespect of their fellow parishioners. They complain about apathy and non-involvement of members, yet behave in such a way to discourage participation. Discrimination and such misbehavior has no place in the leadership of any community.

I feel it is also necessary to comment on some incidents which occurred during my service not only to clarify, but to avoid repeating in the future.

First was the petition that was circulating on Easter Sunday in the lobby just outside of the sanctuary. For parishioners to be greeted by petitions as they enter the building when they have come to worship, and for this to take place during Badarak is a disgrace. Who granted permission for these to circulate, I don't know. Had I been informed of this as I should have been prior to the service, I would have condemned it. What surprises me is that some Council members who are so concerned about the manner in which the service is conducted were aware of this and witnessed it, allowing it to take place during Badarak, thus condoning it rather than putting an end to it and protecting the sacredness of the service. Petitions, for whatever purpose or cause, have no place in or just outside a House of Worship, especially during the service.

This petition was soon followed by a second petition to remove a Delegate from his elected seat. These acts, condoned and participated in by Parish Council and Delegate members and their families only adds to the hurt and division.

I see an atmosphere where many times there is a lack of communication, where differences of opinion are not tolerated, where there is a double standard of rules, policies, questions and conditions that are applied or ignored depending on who you are and not out of genuine concern for the welfare of the parish.

I, myself, experienced this group's mode of operation. A few had a problem with my fairness and communication with all parishioners, but I ignored their objections and behavior towards me and proceeded on this path for it was not only natural, but I felt was necessary for the healing process and future harmony of the parish.

A few also objected to my voicing my concern in sending \$22,000 and \$53,000 cash funds to Armenia upon Fr. Paren's recommendation. In light of their bleak financial situation, I urged them to delay their decision until Fr. Baret's arrival, for his input and guidance, just as they did with other issues. What followed was misinterpretation of my words and good intentions with their own slanted versions. They also attempted unsuccessfully to create animosity with the community and between myself and Fr. Baret.

I again urge you to encourage this parish to channel its Food for Armenia funds through DFAR instead of acting independently with little or no accountability as I mentioned in previous correspondence.

My purpose in informing you of the situation in this parish is so that you, Surpazan, and the Diocesan Council are aware and will guide this parish and its leadership in a positive direction to bring about the much needed peace and harmony in the community.

I believe that you and the Diocesan Council's communication with the parish and re-establishment of a good working relationship can destroy the "Diocese does nothing" myth that many have been told, and some Council members believe and are voicing to others. This parish, I believe can flourish with close supervision and guidance which has been lacking for a number of years.

Also vital to the restoration of peace, harmony, and cooperation is the treatment of its parishioners, particularly by those in leadership positions. I urge you to give a strong message to Parish Council members and Delegates that it is their responsibility to communicate with and respect fellow parishioners for it is they who are key in setting the tone and atmosphere in the community. From the response and expressions of appreciation of my kindness, fairness, and friendliness towards all members of the community, it appears that these have been sorely lacking in the past.

I met many formerly active members of the community who I believe with open communication, fair treatment, respect, and appreciation for their efforts, they can be encouraged to again become active and contributing members of the St. John's Community.

St. John's is a wonderful parish with an abundance of wealth,

beauty, and dignity in its Church complex. But the true wealth of a church community is in the atmosphere and spirit of the people. All the beauty of the structure and magnificent edifice diminishes with the emptiness, apathy, and negative feelings. The people give it life, give it meaning, give it purpose.

With your guidance and leadership and Fr. Baret's pastoral care and positive efforts, I believe that St. John's can rebuild itself into a Church family, a welcome place for all, and utilize the abundance of knowledge and talent among the people of the community to do good things so that it can reach its great potential and continue to be an outstanding example for our Diocese.

Prayerfully Yours,



Fr. Vazken Karayan