

PASTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT - 1975  
Armenian Church of Westchester

Through the grace of God 1975 became a year of significant developments in the life of this still very young church. 1974 can be referred to as phase one in the initial organizational activities of the parish when a sense of congregation was fostered and members of the community of Westchester had the opportunity to become acquainted with each other through social and fund raising functions.

Phase two can be characterized as a year of growing awareness as a parish with all the responsibilities and joys that go with becoming a parish church. A quick glance at some of the major developments show the following noteworthy improvements for which we thank God:

1. Acquiring new and better church facilities with increased attendance at church services and fellowship functions.
2. The inception of the Women's Guild, a very important organization in the life of the church.
3. The reorganizing of the junior youth group with improved participation.
4. The augmenting of the size and the quality of the choir.
5. Greater involvement of parishioners in the teaching responsibility in both church school and Armenian school for children.
6. Increased attendance at cultural-educational programs with a highly successful benefit concert by Lili Chookasian and a large enrollment at the Armenian language and culture program for adults.
7. Mutual cooperation among church organizations.
8. Extensive communication between the church administration and the community.

In the achievement of these results the parish council, the church organizations and various individuals have had significant roles. Of special mention are the seminarians whose participation and assistance in the activities of the various church organizations as part of their field work training program have certainly contributed considerably to the progress registered in the choir and altar service, the church school, Armenian school and the youth group.

#### WORSHIP AND SACRAMENTS

Divine Liturgy and the preaching of the Word of God have been conducted regularly every Sunday. Occasionally some seminarians and once the Very Rev. Oshagan Minassian of Watertown, Mass. were asked to preach in our church. This year the parish council members took turns in reading the Holy Scriptures during Divine Liturgy. Of great satisfaction to us has been the increased number of children and their parents receiving Holy Communion more frequently than before.

Twice this year we have conducted programs of narration of the Divine Liturgy for several consecutive Sundays for the purpose of making our worship service more understandable and meaningful to our parishioners.

Special worship services have included "antasdan" (Blessing of the Field), "hayrabadagan maghtank" (Service for the Catholicos), Lenten weekly devotional services on Wednesday evenings, and Christmas Eve Candlelight Service on St. Stephen's feast.

Upon request we have also conducted "hokehankisd" (requiem service), hair-shearing ritual, and the blessing of a portrait of Jesus for the candle rack for the devotional practice of lighting candles.

Furthermore, we have conducted dedication ceremonies for the newly elected members of the parish council as well as the teaching staff of the church school.

I have made myself available for homeblessing ceremony after Christmas and Easter as well as for the blessing of graves on Memorial Day.

A total of seven baptisms have taken place in our church this year. I have taken part in two wedding ceremonies and conducted four funeral services. 7 baptisms

"Mas" has been made for distribution by Mrs. Martin Blajian, Mrs. Araxie Tepikian and Yeretzgeen Dawn.

#### PASTORAL VISITATIONS

I have paid visits, when notified, to hospitals, homes and the two Armenian Homes for the Aged in Flushing and Emerson. The seminarians have accompanied me to the latter visitations. Many of my pastoral calls have been "televisits", telephone visitations due to the limitation of time and other factors.

#### EDUCATIONAL

I am happy to state that we have conducted a special program of adult education with our parish council, with periodic educational presentations at the beginning of our meetings, intended to acquaint ourselves more fully with the teachings and worship of our church, as well as the specific responsibilities of parish council members. I have given educational talks at the meetings of church organizations and especially supervised and participated in the training program of our church school teachers.

Of particular delight was the large attendance at a specially designed adult program of Armenian language instruction (assisted by Deacon Bedros Sarkissian) and Armenian history - culture-religion lecture series. An aggregate number of 34 young people and adults registered at these programs. Their enthusiastic response has resulted in planning another course of language and religion program of 10 weeks beginning the first Monday in February.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE

We have kept regular communication with the Diocesan Office and our church organizations and sent letters of thanks and appreciation to individuals and organizations for various services rendered to the church. The secretarial responsibility of the church has been born by the corresponding secretary of the parish council, Mrs. Jeanette Smith and Yeretzgeen Dawn.

I have attended both executive committee and membership meetings of all church organizations as the presiding officer and offered assistance and direction when needed.

We have been particularly pleased by the harmonious relations that exist among the Parish Council and the Pastor.

I have met weekly with those seminarians who have been charged with the responsibility of administering and have assisted in guiding the Church School (Miss Sirarpi Feredjian), the choir (Deacon Vazken Asadourian), the youth group (Deacon Arthur Sabounjian) and the Armenian School (Deacon Bedros Sarkissian) in discussing programs of education and activities.

#### INTER-CHURCH PARTICIPATION

As delegate I attended the Diocesan Assembly in Cambridge Mass. the first weekend in May, a regional meeting of church executives and pastors at the Holy Cross Church on September 18, and the Annual Assembly of the Association of Armenian Church Choirs of America in Springfield, Mass. November 6 - 8. I also took part in the constitutional Assembly of the A.C.Y.O.A. the last weekend of August in Miami, Florida.

It has been my privilege to be invited as celebrant and preacher by sister churches in Worcester, Mass. (February 4), FairLawn, N.J. (October 18), St. Mary Indian Malabar Church in the Bronx (December 25) and Washington, D.C. (December 28).

I have also attended and organized a Lenten retreat for clergymen a weekend in the Middle of Lent.

Having been charged by the Primate with the responsibility of assisting the Armenian community of Northern Westchester I have met with representatives several times to discuss ways in which I can be of service to them. Last Christmas I celebrated the Liturgy in Yorktown Heights. I have accompanied the Archbishop at an organizational meeting on June 2nd and later invited their active representatives to a consultation meeting at our church the beginning of the Fall. This meeting was also attended by Mr. Apkhar Omartian, The Chairman of the parish council. Based on an agreement reached at that meeting I have assigned seminarian Deacon Arthur Sabounjian as part of his training program, to visit the Northern Westchester parish once a month to conduct worship services and give the necessary guidance to the church school and the teenagers group. Other seminarians have also taken turn to conduct programs for the children as well as the adults. Participants have expressed their appreciation for these programs. I would like to mention with appreciation that the local parish council has also graciously given for use in our church a censer, a chalice and their choir robes. Once a month interested members of that community, some of whom are among our parishioners, attend Divine Liturgy in our church as a group.

#### COMMUNICATIONS

We have continued the publications of our monthly newsletter, Hope, which contains news of community interest as well as educational articles. Special recognition is due Mrs. Elmas Davidian who handles the mailing of the Hope monthly to more than 450 addresses in our area, as she does all other mailings.

We have prepared and mailed out a handsomely designed brochure on the reasons for building an Armenian Church in Westchester County. The art work was done by Mr. David Davidian and the technical production by Mr. Robert Stepanian. Throughout the year we have sent flyers, bulletins and leaflets to our community on many occasions.

Three major articles about our church have appeared in the Herald Statesman, and several more in the Armenian Church monthly and the Armenian Reporter weekly, keeping the public abreast of significant developments in our community.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

While we rejoice and thank God for the progress registered in our parish, we are aware of our limitations and feel the need for augmented efforts and increased participation to make this a viable and dynamic church and community. At the end of the summer I asked Mrs. Berjoohi Daderian to make a few telephone calls for me contacting churches in Hartsdale area to find out if there was any Church that ends services at about 11 A.M. Berjoohi called me back and told me of St. Andrew's Church.

After negotiations between the two Pastors and the Parish Council, its facilities became available for our use. We are fortunate and thankful to have St. Andrew's Church accommodations at our disposal. Periodic meetings between our parish council and St. Andrew's vestry, as well as the tea reception for the two parishes on November 16 have enhanced a hospitable relationship and cordial cooperation between us.

Yet, we cannot help but remind ourselves that this is a temporary arrangement and that the comfort and convenience of the present cannot allow us the luxury of inaction for the cause of search and acquisition of a permanent home we can call "ours." Therefore, I call upon our parishioners to make the year 1976 the year for finding and purchasing our own Church property. To that end the help of every member is needed besides the effort of the Building Fund Committee and the Parish Council. Let us pledge today, before we overstay our welcome in any temporary hospitality, that we will all make concerted efforts to find a suitable piece of property for ownership.

I also recommend that again with concerned concentrated effort we double our church attendance this year, and we double our contributions to the church both for its current operation and building fund. Let us also begin to think of adopting a pledge system to give the church permanent sustenance. Let these be our pledge and renewed commitment today so that a dream which has already started dawning will become reality very soon.

In closing I would like to thank all church organizations and individuals for the teamwork and dedication which have made our work together both enjoyable and fruitful. Let us not forget that the nucleus of the parish that has regularly offered their services for the enjoyment of many is still small. It needs to grow by greater participation and involvement. Let us not cease to express our appreciation for their labors of love without reservation or criticism, and at the same time join hands with them in carrying this "sweet burden" together.

We are humbly grateful for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the blessings of God.

*Fr. Karekin Kasparian*

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