

PASTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT - 1979
ARMENIAN CHURCH OF WESTCHESTER
February 10, 1980

By the grace of God and through the participation of our active parishioners, we completed another year with noteworthy growth, climaxed by the acquisition of our new church property in Harrison, N.Y. and the parallel enthusiasm which has been generated by it. In evaluating the year past, standing at the threshold of the new year, we thank God for His many blessings in making this a fruitful year for our parish, we recount our achievements, learn from our mistakes and resolve to improve ourselves and our ways.

This is a brief account of my activities as pastor in the discharge of my duties and responsibilities in various dimensions: worship and sacraments, pastoral and educational, administrative and organizational, public relations and outreach, followed by several recommendations and propositions that will contribute to the further growth and maturation of our parish, which has considerable potential to become a truly dynamic community.

WORSHIP AND SACRAMENTS: I have celebrated Badarak and given sermons every Sunday, except four Sundays when I was away, for the Diocesan Assembly, for conducting an educational program for our Mid-West churches under the sponsorship of the Association of the Armenian Church Choirs of America of our Diocese (Rev. Arten Ashjian took my place) and for my annual summer vacation. Considerable work has been done in ensuring the presence and participation of altar servers and the choir. Many times I have invited friends as guest altar servers.

Three Sundays in the summer the church was filled with young people of high school and college age, who had come from other parishes throughout the Diocese to attend religious study conferences at the Ouzoonian House in New Rochelle.

On the first Sunday of each month Sunday School pupils have attended the latter part of Badarak, received communion and heard a sermon tailored to their understanding. The pupils of the class that studies the Badarak as its curriculum have participated fully in the services by singing in the choir, giving voghchoyn, taking up collection and passing out "mahs". Edgar Yeznaian and Bruce Sarkissian have shared the censuring. Nina Hachigian and Chris Sarafian read the narration of the Badarak on one Sunday. Making the Badarak a focal point and a living experience through the meaning of the reception of Holy Communion is the ultimate goal of this particular course, taught by Yeretzgin Dawn and Donna Dorian.

I have initiated an altar servers training program for both our adult servers and the Sunday School age pupils. Our hope is to have sufficient number of servers so that we will always have them at our services.

We observed Lent, in part, through special Lenten services conducted on Thursdays followed by Lenten dinners and educational programs sponsored by our church organizations.

This year, again, I was invited to participate in the services of Good Friday at the Sacred Heart Church across the street, giving a sermon on one of the Seven Last Words of Jesus. I also participated in the observance of Woman Saint of the year at St. Vartan Cathedral.

I have conducted four baptisms, one adult christening, two weddings and six funeral services.

On the weekend of June 22 - 24 the Primate graced our parish with a pastoral visit, acquainted himself closely with the progress made and gave us his moral support.

Those of you who attend Badarak regularly know how irregular the general attendance has been at our worship services. Through telephone calls, visitations, the parish paper and letters, I have reminded the absent of their duty to be more consistent and regular in their attendance. Suggestions and efforts to improve church attendance will be gladly and gratefully accepted.

PASTORAL AND EDUCATIONAL: This year, more than the last, I have been able to visit greater number of families, the elderly, the shut-in, the bereaved and the sick, both in their homes and in hospitals. I have made special efforts to go after the lost and lonely, the indifferent and the alienated. I have sought pastoral opportunities to hear grievances and gredges, and tried objectively to explain situations so that misunderstandings will vanish and good will may abound among our parishioners.

I have been given opportunities to counsel individuals and families in many dimensions of their lives and adjustments, and tried to be a faithful instrument in God's Hand to transmit His comfort and other blessings. It is a privilege as much as a sacred duty for a pastor to be called upon to become a healing agent in the relationships of people, especially in crisis situations. This is the most intimate and confidential part of a pastor's ministry. The priest is bound by an oath of secrecy to respect the privacy of the people who come to him to be unburdened. The Holy Spirit is the Healer.

Through frequent visits and contacts it has been possible to enlarge the number of workers beyond the nucleus few. More and more people are finding they can participate in the meaningful experience of giving and receiving by involving themselves in the different aspects of the life of the parish. In this respect we have just begun to scratch the surface. There are many more families to be brought within the fold of the church.

Educationally speaking we have had a rich program this year. It has been my pleasure to find and enlist the services of three additional teachers for the Armenian School, where we now have 5 instructors and 26 pupils. Attendance this year has been very satisfactory. As an experiment we have grouped the children of the Eastern-Armenian speaking families together and teach them the language they are more familiar with, which is different from Western Armenian. I have assumed the supervision of the School and attend every Thursday and teach folk and church songs as well as history and culture. I meet with the teachers regularly to discuss the curriculum and improved methods of teaching.

Progress has been made in the Sunday School too. Five former graduates of the Sunday School have responded to my invitation to teach. We have a total of 8 instructors and assistants, one of whom, Diane Davidian, is also capably serving as the coordinator of the School. I meet with these teachers regularly and conduct educational sessions with them, in addition to discussing current issues related to their teaching and the pupils.

In other areas, I have helped our youth groups set up the educational programs of the Martyrs Day (April) and Culture Month (October) celebrations. gave a series of talks on the meaning of Badarak in February, and conducted a language and heritage enrichment program for adults in March and April, participated in two retreats for the youth, one for the Senior ACYOA, March

23 - 25, and the other for the Junior ACYOA, December 27 - 29.

Several ACYOA members also participated in the Religious Conferences and a program of liturgical music and altar servers at St. Nersess Seminary, New Rochelle, the latter being directed by me. It is gratifying to see these attendants apply the knowledge gained from these conferences in their youth group activities.

It was a pleasure for me to help in the program of the newly initiated "Couple of the Year" Celebration, in which the dedicated service of George and Elmas Davidian was worthily acknowledged.

It has been my pleasure to prepare and publish our monthly newsletter, the HOPE, since the inception of our parish. It gives a complete picture of the life of the parish, points out our needs and carries educational tidbits being sent out to about 450 families and individuals.

I have also participated in the meetings of the Oriental Orthodox - Roman Catholic Theological Consultation as one of the representatives of our Diocese at the invitation of our Primate.

As a service to Armenian music I chaired the committee that organized a concert in April at the Kavookjian Auditorium, given by the Erevan Choral Group under the direction of the Very Rev. Fr. Oshagan Minassian.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND ORGANIZATIONAL: As president of the parish council and all church organizations I have attended all their executive committee meetings and membership gatherings throughout the year, offering the necessary assistance and guidance in their deliberations. I am happy to see progress made in the deacons' training program, the School committee and the Women's Guild. Despite the fact that the number of the Senior ACYOA members has dwindled down to a handful of active ones, the quality of the programs undertaken by them is distinctive and gratifying.

I have attended the annual assemblies of the Diocese in Chelmsford, Mass., the ACYOA in Milwaukee, Wisc., and the choirs in Hartford, Conn., representing our parish.

For sometime now I have felt the need for organizing a Men's Club and forming an advisory committee to analyze and re-define the needs and goals of the parish. With adequate planning I hope we can bring about these bodies to work for the strengthening of the communal and educational life of the parish.

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND OUTREACH: Special occasions this year made it possible to obtain wide publicity not only for our own parish but the entire Armenian Community in Westchester County.

On the occasion of the Armenian Martyrs Day Observance, the Gannett chain of newspapers in the county carried a feature article, the County Executive declared April 24 as Armenian Martyrs Day with a special proclamation, and the Grinten Wills Library in Yonkers carried an appropriate display in its lobby during April 23 - 28.

Recently I helped in a pictorial article which appeared in the Westchester Magazine on the Armenians in Westchester. The article not only gives interesting background material about Armenians in general but speaks of the distinctive contributions Armenians in Westchester make to the life of the county.

Picnic - Our annual picnic was held on August 26, 1979 at the Holy Trinity Greek Church in New Rochelle, N.Y. under the direction of Rose and Berge Derdarian. This day was a success socially and financially, thanks to the efforts of the Derdarians.

One World Festival - Participating once again in the One World Festival at St. Vartan Cathedral complex on Sept. 8 and 9, 1979, the Armenian Church of Westchester this year chose to sell coffee, kadayif and tahn and a profitable share was realized by us, with Ed and Anita Essayan chairing the event.

Bazaar - Our second annual bazaar was held on October 13 and 14, 1979, at St. John's Episcopal Church in Yonkers, N.Y. Under the chairmanship of Garo Bashian and Zaven Adourian, the bazaar concentrated in three areas: the sale of oriental rugs, an a-la-carte table and a white elephant section. A profit in excess of our budgeted amount was made from this effort, primarily due to the rug sale, conducted by our own Garo Bashian.

Fund-Raising Committee - As of the beginning of the year 1979 the Fund-Raising Committee has been working to solicit funds from the community. The Committee, under the presidency of our Pastor consists of George Davidian, Chairman; Edward S. Dorian (White Plains) and Harry Keleshian, Vice-Chairmen; Grace Cassidy, Recording Secretary; Alma Davidian, Treasurer.

From January to May the committee spent vigorous efforts in six meetings discussing in depth various effective methods of fund raising, sent reminders to pledgers at the Annual Celebration Banquet (January 14) to fulfill their pledges, sent thank you letters to donors, issued three letters of appeal to the general mailing list, followed up by telephone calls, and in general continued personal contacts to prospective donors.

The Committee was soon faced with the realization that the community's motivation and enthusiasm to give would be intensified after the finalization of the acquisition of the new property in Harrison and beginning to use it as the center of our church and communal activities. After this realization, which was substantiated by a general response from the community, the committee resorted to a low key campaign. The principal occasions of donations were the Annual Celebration Banquet on January 14, the "Open House" on December 2, and the on-going response to solicitations. In all, over \$80,000 were realized this year, of course the "lion's share" being donated by Mr. Suren D. Fesjian who not only met his matching pledge, but was instrumental in obtaining substantial amounts from his business colleagues and friends, both here and in Europe.

The Committee will soon resume a more vigorous fund-raising campaign.

Building Committee - The Parish Council asked George Davidian in November to assume the chairmanship of the Building Committee, in order to plan and supervise the execution of the construction work involved in converting the present garage structure to a chapel and community hall with the professional direction of architect George Masumian. Mr. Davidian found it imperative to relinquish the chairmanship of the Fund-Raising Committee in order to devote all his time to his new responsibility which he assumed and continues to perform

with great enthusiasm and dedication along with the other members of the Building Committee, Apkar Omartian and Berge Derdarian.

Open House - On December 2, 1979, an "open house" was held at the Harrison property. Proposed plans of conversion were presented to the community and additional donations were made on this day to the Building Fund. It was indeed a day of joy and hopeful anticipation for the realization of conversion plans soon to commence.

Raffle - A raffle with a grand prize of a Pontiac Phoenix was initiated during the 1979 year and actively promoted by Robert Stepanian as chairman.

New Year's Eve Party - In charge of our second New Year's Eve party were Grace and James Cassidy. Held at the Harrison property, this party was enjoyed by all in attendance.

Conclusion - With the help of our entire community we have had and will continue to realize successful functions and affairs for the support of our Church. Sincere thanks to all individuals for their participation throughout 1979.

The Parish Council also thanks you for the honor of electing us to serve the Armenian Church of Westchester.

Respectfully submitted,

Edward Essayan, Chairman

Barbara Dorian, Rec. Secty.