

PASTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT - 1982
Presented on February 7, 1983

By the grace of God and the participation of our active members in the life of our parish we have completed a very good year and registered significant progress in the growth of St. James Church. We thank the Lord for His presence in our midst and inspiration in our deeds.

WORSHIP AND SACRAMENTS: I have celebrated Divine Liturgy, conducted other services and given sermons every Sunday, American Christmas Eve, the Eve and the Day of the Armenian celebration of Theophany, Lenten period and Holy Week. This year we began having Morning Service (Aravodyan Zhamerkootyoon) every Sunday at 10:00 A.M. before Soorp Badarak.

Two additions on our church building are to be noted: Opaque glass windows so as to eliminate the transparency of the existing windows and a beautiful Armenian Cross and the name of the church in English on the outside wall behind the Altar.

While the church is not overflowing with worshippers on Sundays, the attendance has been encouraging many Sundays and has left us wishing more of our parishioners and friends would join us at worship more regularly. Throughout the year, especially during the summer months we have welcomed at worship in our midst groups of Armenian young people, who have come from many parishes throughout the diocese to participate in Armenian study seminars and programs of liturgical music and deacons' training.

This year guest clergymen who have joined us for worship and either celebrated Badarak or preached, included: The Rt. Rev. Bishop Yeghishe Gizirian, Catholic Legate of Great Britain, the Rt. Rev. Bishop Avak Asadourian, Primate of the Armenian Church in Iraq, ^{the Rev. Fr. Arshen Aivazian, the new dean of St. Nersess Seminary} the Rev. Fr. Kevork Arakelian, Pastor of St. Gregory's Church, Fowler, California, the Rev. Fr. Diran Papazian, Pastor of St. Gregory of Narek in Cleveland, Rev. Fr. Vartan Jangulian, Deacon Joseph Kalemkerian, Deacon Michael Chevian, Director of Recruitment of St. Nersess Seminary.

For the first time this year we participated in a Thanksgiving Service sponsored by the Inter Congregational Laymen's Committee of Harrison, N.Y., held at Temple Emanu-El in Rye. Edward Essayan and I took part in the worship service.

This year we have had three baptisms in our church and I have participated in two others held at St. Vartan Cathedral. We have had one wedding ceremony in our church and I have participated in one at St. Thomas Armenian Church, Tenafly, N.J., and another one in a Roman Catholic Church. I have conducted three funeral services at our church and participated in one at Holy Cross in Washington Heights, N.Y., and another one at St. Vartan Cathedral.

With special joy and gratitude I express my thankfulness for having a professional conductor, Raffi Sevadjan, as our choirmaster, our organist, Alice Sakalian, and two of our altar servers, Mark and Garo Kapikian, all of whom travel the longest distance every Sunday to participate in our services. We have equal appreciation for the faithfulness of our main altar server, Sub-deacon John Vakassian, our young servers Khoren and Avedis Tutak and William Matian. St. Nersess Seminarians also periodically have served at our altar. May God bless all of the above as well as all members of our choir and their families.

EDUCATIONAL AND PASTORAL: I have had the pleasure of giving educational talks to our church organizations on various aspects of our spiritual and cultural heritage. This year we began a series of monthly forums, presenting relevant and interesting topics on the first Sunday of the month during refreshments. They seem to have been well received by the attendants.

I have also been invited to give talks on the basic teachings of the Armenian Church at SUNY Purchase, Holy Martyrs Church, Bayside, to the Conference attendants at St. Nersess Seminary, where I presently offer a course in intermediate Armenian.

We organized two retreats for our youth, one for the ACYOA Seniors, the other one for ACYOA Juniors, both were held in March at St. Nersess Seminary.

For the first time our choir sponsored a regional workshop in our church for choirs of New York - New Jersey area. Our choirmaster had a prominent teaching role in the program. We have continued our training program for the altar servers, who will be ready for ordination in June by our Primate.

Another first this year was the art exhibition by Armenian artists of our area, sponsored by the Women's Guild. I have also helped set up a boutique for Armenian books, souvenirs, records and art work in our parish house, being offered by the Guild as a cultural service to our parishioners. Mary Azarian is the coordinator.

This year's Lenten program was exceptionally well received by all attendants. We featured the liturgical music of Eastern and Protestant church denominations, in addition to our own music on Friday evenings, following lented pot luck dinners. The theme was "Lenten Spirituals and spirituality."

For the first time this year we were able to send the largest number of children to St. Vartan Camp in New Milford, Conn. They enjoyed their experience thoroughly and are anxiously waiting for the next summer session.

Our Armenian School for children and Sunday School are functioning very well under the direction of Aida Pisani and Yeretzgin Dawn respectively and with the dedicated participation of the teachers. The spiritual and cultural instruction of our children is part of my duty and concern, and I am happy that we have such devoted and loyal people involved in this most important task and service.

I continued holding Bible study sessions for adults and Armenian language instruction. Mark Kapikian and Karen Sirabian participated in the language teaching.

We have continued publishing our parish bulletin, the HOPE, which now goes to over 600 Armenian families in Westchester and Southern Connecticut area. My friend Deacon Joseph Kalemkerian did the art work of the new masthead.

One of the most intensely pastoral duties and privileges of a priest is the confidential sharing of pains, problems and grief with individual members or families in the parish, where he tries to be an instrument of the Holy Spirit in bringing about spiritual comfort, healing and courage. I am grateful for all the opportunities I have had this year in these sharing experiences. These individuals as others, have been in my prayers always.

To minister to people with burdens is part of the healing ministry of the church. Our parishioners are invited to contact the Pastor in person for private talks or consultation.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE: 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 necessary assistance and guidance in their deliberations. A few organizations are experiencing a low ebb in their membership. I urge you all to participate in any organization of your choice and become active supporters of their activities.

As per decision of the Parish Assembly last year a part time secretary's stipend was budgeted and we were fortunate to have Aida Pisani serve our parish as a faithful and conscientious secretary to the end of the year. Aida has terminated her post as of today in order to go on to a full time job. We are in the process of finding a new secretary from the area.

I am happy we were able to update our general mailing list and publish our first Directory of all Armenians in Greater Westchester County, including Southern Connecticut. We have been gratified by the comments of parishioners regarding its contents. We hope to further update the listings periodically.

We have utilized this list of over 600 names in launching a renewed campaign for our annual stewardship pledge program. The appeal for pledges went first to about 140 families who have shown an active interest in the wellbeing of the church and have participated, in various degrees, in its varied activities. We are grateful to all who responded to our appeal and made their pledges for the continued support of the church. A second group of about 280 families have also been contacted as the remainder of the names in the Directory will also be contacted soon to also pledge. For our church to function well financially, about one-third of its annual budget should be materialized from these pledges.

It is incumbent upon every Armenian family in the area, regardless of background, affiliation or participation, to make an annual pledge for the maintenance and growth of St. James, because we aim to serve all Armenians without any distinction or reservation, because we consider all part of the flock of this geographic area. Furthermore, the church serves not only the spiritual needs of the people, but also the promotion and perpetuation of our cultural values and ethnic identity. We are still a small though strong group of people. Much work of love, concern and outreach remains to be done in order to make this parish an even more dynamic community which it has the potential of becoming. In this challenging task I need your help, and I hope more of you will join the team of active participants dedicated to the growth and blossoming of our parish and of the maturation of their spiritual life individually.

INTER-CHURCH AND ECUMENICAL: I have celebrated Divine Liturgy and preached the word of God in the Armenian Church of South Florida in February and at St. Vartan Cathedral on Vartanantz Day.

Along with our esteemed Diocesan Delegate, Judge Vincent Gurahian, we have represented our Parish at the Diocesan Assembly in New Britain, Conn., where both of us served as chairmen of the Annual Clergy Conference and the Diocesan Assembly respectively for the second consecutive year.

I had the pleasure of serving as chairman of the jubilee Celebration Committee honoring 12 clergymen of our diocese for their 30 to 40 years of service, and was the master of ceremonies of that occasion at the conclusion of the Diocesan Assembly.

In the month of May I presented a discourse on the shortage of clergy to the Committee consisting of representatives of Eastern and Western Dioceses for cooperation on basic issues facing the church.

As a member of the Diocesan Council I have served on several other committees, the latest being one that is planning a Spiritual Renewal Conference for the Armenians in the mid-Atlantic region.

I continue to serve as a member of the Board of Directors of the St. Nersess Seminary, which has resumed its full activities at the Ouzoonian House since the Fall of 1982. I serve as the chairman of its Administrative Committee. The shortage of clergy is a very crucial issue in our church which has been part of my concern for years and I am glad to be part of the team of people who are intent on doing something for it. Our Church Gnakahayr, Mr. Suren D. Fesjian is also an active and contributing member of the Board of Directors of the Seminary.

APPRECIATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS: I ask God's blessings upon and express my appreciation to the members of my Parish Council that functioned with the spirit of professionalism under ^{Chairmanship} Dr. Jack Hachigian. My heartfelt thanks for the dedicated services of the altar servers, the choir, the choirmaster, the Sunday School and Armenian School Staffs, the School Committee, the various church organizations: the Women's Guild, the A.C.Y.O.A. Seniors and Juniors, the Men's Club, the Avak Group, the Management Committee, as well as all other committees of projects which, in one way or another, have helped the growth of the Parish. Special thanks to Mrs. Elmas Davidian our most efficient bookkeeper, Mrs. Aida Pisani our cheerful secretary, Mrs. Anahid Chookhachian for her ever ready assistance, and Mrs. Tamar Matian our "mas" maker. *Special thanks to the outgoing members of the Parish Council: Garo Bashian, Edvard Zessayan and John Melohojian.* Our parish is especially indebted to Garo Bashian, who managed two rug sales through the courtesy of George Bashian Jr. Proceeds from these sales have contributed substantially to our budget. May God bless all the Bashians.

For the further growth and enrichment of the spiritual life of our Parish, we need to focus our attention on the study of the life and the message of our Lord through planned Bible study and individual devotional practices. The thrust of our ministry and the emphasis of the parish should be in this direction.

We need to broaden our base as a parish through more contributing and participating members. This year we intend to concentrate on increasing the number of our truly active voting members. We need both pledging members and voting members, who are willing to give generously and sacrifice joyfully of their time, talent and treasure in order to make our parish even more vibrant for the spiritual well-being of its members and the glory of God. With your help this will be possible, I am sure. May God bless you all.

Prayerfully,

Fr. Karekin Kasparian
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