

ST. JAMES ARMENIAN CHURCH

PASTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT - 1987
Presented on February 7, 1988

By the grace of God we completed another good year in the life of our parish to be remembered by many signs of growth...spiritually and communally.

The church is the place where the faithful are offered spiritual nurture and uplift, cultural knowledge and enrichment, communal fellowship and friendship. In addition, to the specific functions of, consecrating through the sacraments, through the initiation of children into the church, the spiritual union of men and women in holy matrimony, as well as offering sustaining comfort to families whose loved ones have fallen asleep in the Lord are services also offered by the church.

Faithful members and friends who choose a parish as their spiritual home, become active participants in many or all aspects of its life and growth to the extent of their interest, time and ability. They understand the church's tradition of both receiving and giving -- stewardship giving of their time, talent and treasure. To offer one's service in any way that will contribute to the building up of the kingdom of God and His house of worship in our parish, as well as to promote Christ's loving presence in our midst, is a rewarding spiritual experience all members should participate in.

Worship services were held regularly every Sunday, in addition to other traditional feast days, such as Christmas eve, Vartanank and Martyrs observances. It is always comforting to see people participate faithfully, including those special days of prominent feasts. I cannot hide my disappointment that there are still some individuals who come to church at 55 Lincoln Avenue, but spend their time only socializing outside the house of worship. Such people should realize that they leave a bad impression upon those impressionable children, who learn otherwise in Sunday School. On the other hand, it is comforting to see the attendance and the number of communicants grow.

This year we have had 8 baptisms, 2 chrismations, 5 weddings and 5 funerals in our church. As always, the church continued to offer its pastoral ministry of comfort, guidance and support to all who experienced conflict and confusion, pain and grief. The church also continued to visit hospitals as well as the homes and work places of parishioners and friends, sharing in the various aspects of their lives.

The church, in her educational ministry, offered opportunities for expanding knowledge of our Christian heritage and cultural legacy through sermons, individual instructional programs, pre-sacramental sessions, adult education programs in the Fall and the Spring, (with a series of most interesting speakers on vital issues, as well as a series of Armenian films). In addition, we have facilitated attendance at conferences, seminars and workshops both for our educators and students, the monthly newsletter Hope and other educational publications. This year, our Armenian School has registered greater success through better attendance and participation, while the Sunday School attendance has not been very encouraging. In the Fall, the Sunday School started using a long awaited new curriculum, excellent in its professional and Armenian contents.

A few new educational "firsts" have been initiated this year:

- a. The first Sunday of every month, questions from the congregation are discussed in lieu of sermon.
- b. A monthly bulletin listing the feasts and activities of the month is published.
- c. A week-long summer session in Armenian language and culture was conducted at our church for our children.
- d. A day-long educational seminar was held for our Parish Council members on May 30th.

The varied and diversified elements and backgrounds of our parishioners, as well as their lifestyles and commitments, seem to make it difficult, though not impossible, for some of our traditional church organizations to function at a high gear, although attendance at our programs and projects is supportive and encouraging,

I foresee a time in the near future, when our new church edifice and cultural hall will be completed, when a renewed enthusiasm and commitment will reactivate and energize our church organizations, when the parish will become truly a hub of communal activities of all kinds. In the meantime, however, we need to keep ourselves open to the infusion of the Holy Spirit and the call to rise to the occasion and meet the challenges that will affect the life of our church family.

The fact that our building project has not progressed as rapidly as expected has caused all of us frustration. However, let me just remind us all, that we have always believed that God has guided and led our parish since its inception. There is no reason for us to believe otherwise now, even though we may not understand and accept the long delay. In some Armenian communities, such as Iran, it is a tradition that the building project of a church will take seven years to be completed. While we hope ours will not last that long, we must still continue trusting in the quiet guidance of God. In the meantime, we must continue to be loyal and steady in our support and prayers for the crowning of the project in God's own good time.

Finally, our parishioners, as many others in our Diocese, were privileged this year to see His Holiness, Vasken I, the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians during his recent, albeit brief, visit in New York. We all lived experiences of spiritual exuberance and grace-filled exhilaration in the presence of our holy father. Our parish was well represented in the planning and/or execution or attendance of several of the functions through the participation of Mr. & Mrs. Suren D. Fesjian, Judge Vincent and Martha Gurahian, Dr. Lionel Galstaun and some Parish Council members. I was invited to attend most of the functions in His Holiness' honor and was given the privilege of coordinating the arrangements for the Badarak at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine and the reception at the residence of Cardinal O'Connor. Our community became the richer by the gracious and inspiring presence of our Vehapar Hayrabed. We continue to pray for a long and healthy life for the successor of St. Gregory the Enlightener.

My sentiments of gratitude...To those of you who serve and give without counting the cost, or expecting recognition, may I humbly express my affectionate pastoral appreciation, remembering also that our ultimate reward comes from our Heavenly Father. I pray God will accept our giving with His loving. I am grateful to all our members and friends, who, many times at the expense of their comfort and time with their families, have continued to offer their support and service with devotion and dignity.

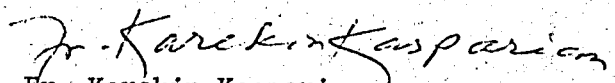
In our Parish Council Report a few "old faithful's" have been singled out for gratitude, Let me also mention the key people who continue to give unstintingly of their time and talents. They are our Diocesan Delegates - Judge Vincent Gurahian and Lionel Galstaun; our Parish Council Chairperson - Martha Gurahian; our altar servers - Deacons John Vakassian, Mark Kapikian; and altar servers - Garo Kapikian and Gregory Haroutounian; our organist - Alice Sakalian; our Choirmaster - Raffi Sevadjan; our Armenian School Principal - Anahid Chookhachian; our Sunday School Superintendents - Lillian Boyajian and Yeretzgin Dawn; our Stewardship Pledge Committee Chairman - John Boyajian; our bookkeeper - Elma Davidian; our Building Committee Chairman - George Davidian; our Fundraising Committee Chairman - Lionel Galstaun; and our Secretary - Gale Perzigian; and all others who serve our church on a weekly basis. In addition, I appreciate the labors of the chairpersons and the members of all committees, programs, projects and organizations, too many to mention individually, including our main and other Gnkahayrs and donors of all categories for their faithful contributions of time, talent and treasure, offered for the well-being and growth of our parish.

It is with special appreciation and thanks we register the expansion of the endowment gifts of our Gnkahayr, whose recently increased donation in the Armenian Church Endowment Fund has now reached \$150,000, in the name of our church. Annual proceeds from this Fesjian Fund benefit our church. Mr. & Mrs. Suren D. Fesjian have also been instrumental in initiating a new category of large donations, as "benefactors", of which the first two donations have been made in the name of their daughter, Sylvia and her husband, Richard Sarkissian.

In the coming year, may the "spiritual church" become rooted within us more deeply, as we continue our determination to build the "physical church", not for the sake of building, but attending; not for the glory of the past, but with the hope of the future; not for ethnic pride, but for spiritual nurture; not necessarily and only for our children, but definitely and collectively for ourselves now. May it become all of these, plus a source of spiritual knowledge and inspiration, love and comfort, and an anchor of hope and strength.

I consider it a privilege to serve the Lord and am glad to have you all as my beloved parishioners and friends. I pray God to bless the "Soorp Hagop Family" with good health, happiness and vision.

With prayers,


Fr. Karekin Kasparian
Pastor