

St. James Armenian Church of Westchester

Pastor's Annual Report - 1983

presented on February 5, 1984

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 guidance in our deeds.

This year the growth of our voting membership by 16% and the decision of the parish to build a new church complex on our grounds were additional sources of joy for us.

Our parish was graced by the presence of our Primate, who, on June 26, 1983, ordained as deacons John Vakassian and Mark Kapikian. Other clergymen who have conducted or participated in services are: the Very Rev. Fr. Arshen Aivazian, Dean of St. Nersess Seminary, the Rev. Fr. Arten Archpriest Ashjian, Canon Sacrist of St. Vartan Cathedral, Rev. Goruine Mushegian of Azusa, California, Deacon Michael Chevian, Recruitment Director of St. Nersess Seminary and Deacon Joseph Kalemkerian of St. Thomas Church, Tenafly, New Jersey.

A beautiful name board bearing the Armenian name of our church was donated by Mr. Jack Aharonian, in memory of his mother, just as the English name with a beautiful cross was donated earlier by Mary Azarian, in memory of her late husband.

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.

The Church's proximity to our Seminary and my involvement with St. Nersess has encouraged the attendance of young people from sister parishes at our church services during the summer religious study conferences, as well as several other occasions.

Our choir has grown in the quality of its musical participation under the direction of our competent choirmaster, Raffi Sevadjan, who also held a day long musical workshop for our choir members. On the occasion of his 25th anniversary as a conductor, our church tendered a reception in honor of Mr. Sevadjan and our choir and members attended a jubilee concert given by him in Ridgefield, N. J. celebrating his professional service. We are indeed fortunate and happy to have a musician of the calibre of Raffi Sevadjan as our choir director.

Our Lenten observances of religious fellowship and services were enriched this year by the participation of six Armenian women versed in theology, giving messages on the theme of "the gifts of the Holy Spirit."

We installed vigil lamps in our sanctuary, given as memorial donations by our parishioners, adding to the beauty of the devotional appearance of our house of worship.

This year we have had five baptisms and two weddings in our church. I have also participated in three other weddings, one at our Cathedral, one in an Episcopal church and another one at St. Thomas Church in Tenafly. I have conducted two funeral services at

our church, and five others in other churches. I have also performed one engagement service.

Home blessing and grave blessing ceremonies have also been conducted upon request.

My appreciation and gratitude go to our choirmaster, the organist, Alice Sakalian, the altar servers, Deacon John Vakassian, Deacon Mark Kapikian, Deacon Hrach Chilingirian, Sub-deacon Garo Chakmakian, Avedis and Khoren Tutak and Garo Kapikian. Thanks also to Mrs. Tamar Matian and Mrs. Ojig Tooma for making "mas."

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. Of special quality has been the series of lectures on Armenian fine arts and Armenians around the world which guest speakers from our parish and elsewhere have given as part of an evening adult program, organized by us on ten consecutive Wednesdays, when we have also had Bible study and Armenian language instruction. Mrs. Araxie Tepikian has been one of the language instructors. I cannot hide my disappointment in the attendance at these quality educational sessions. The few people who attended found them of great interest and value.

In an effort to promote the Armenian educational growth and fellowship of our youngsters, we have encouraged and supported the attendance of several of our children at the St. Vartan summer camp and St. Nersess religious study conferences.

Sunday school and Armenian School teachers have taken advantage of training and enrichment programs both in our parish and at the Diocesan headquarters. Both the Armenian School for children and the Sunday School have made great strides in their respective programs. I am happy that we have been able to recruit new and dedicated teachers in both schools. Here, too, we need greater cooperation and support from parents, so that their children will derive maximum benefit from the excellent programs both schools have to offer.

We have continued publishing our parish bulletin, The Hope, which offers news of community interest, as well as articles of educational value to over 600 families. I thank Gabrielle Wolohojian for typesetting the recent issues.

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, aside from celebrating joyous occasions with them. As an instrument of the Holy Spirit it is a pastor's duty to bring spiritual comfort, healing and courage where needed. I thank God for giving me the opportunity to be part of this pastoral ministry. Individuals and families in need have been in my prayers always.

Organizational and Administrative

As the president of the Parish Council and all church organizations I have attended all their executive meetings and membership gatherings throughout the year, offering necessary assistance and guidance in their deliberations. We are in the process of strengthening our youth groups. The Women's Guild and the Men's Club have been inactive this year due to a series of reasons, although almost all members in both organizations have continued to offer their services in church functions. It is hoped and urged that both groups will reactivate and rejuvenate themselves as we embark upon the ambitious project of building new facilities on our church grounds.

We have initiated a new group consisting of young adults, who have been meeting monthly for fellowship and educational growth. This group, which will probably assume the name, "The 3-M Group," (Mr., Mrs. and Miss), will welcome all adults who wish to participate in experiences in social fellowship, cultural enrichment and community service.

After several months of faithful service as our church secretary, Janice Tepikian has been succeeded by Mrs. Helen Galbraith, who assumed the office management last week. She comes to us with a wealth of secretarial experience.

We are pleased to have Gregory Bochow as our caretaker, who has been performing his duties conscientiously.

We are enthused and encouraged by a decision at the Special Parish Assembly on September of 1983, charging the Parish Council with the responsibility of studying and initiating ways and means of fund raising, so that we will soon embark upon the project of expansion and growth of our physical facilities. It is necessary to have the support and assistance not only of all our members, but the entire Armenian community in Westchester and Southern Connecticut, in order to succeed. Building a church is a spiritual challenge and a special privilege. Let us all rally around this noble cause and rise to the occasion, following the example of our faithful forefathers.

Inter Church and Ecumenical

After a successful Spiritual Renewal Conference, organized under the auspices of the Diocese for the Armenians in the mid-Atlantic region, the Diocesan Council has appointed me the coordinator of similar spiritual renewal conferences to be held in various regions of the Diocese.

Our parish is fortunate to have a person of the calibre of our Diocesan delegate, Judge Vincent Gurahian, who was elected as a member of the Diocesan Council. Both of us continue our active participation in the deliberations of the Council, also serving on various committees and projects. We have also attended the Annual Diocesan Assembly in Chicago.

The Primate has also appointed me as advisor to the New York-New Jersey area Junior ACYOA Regional Committee, where my assistant, Martha Gurahian, and I continue to offer our assistance in planning worthwhile projects and programs for the Juniors in the region.

I continue my affiliation with St. Nersess Seminary as an instructor, the chairman of its Administrative Committee and, along with Mr. Suren D. Fesjian, a member of its Board of Directors. We need to give our Seminary full support as it is now the most hopeful institution for the training of clergymen to serve in this country, at a time when almost one out of four parishes in our Diocese suffers from the lack of clergyman.

This year on the occasion of Thanksgiving our church participated in a special ecumenical service held at the Greek Church in Rye, and also took part in a holiday food program of the Town Hall of Harrison, through our children's donations.

I was privileged to speak at the 25th Anniversary celebrations of two of our clergymen, Fr. Michael Buttero, Bayside, N.Y. and Rev. Fr. Diran Papazian, Cleveland, Ohio.

Appreciation and Recommendation

I ask God's blessings upon and express my appreciation to the members of my Parish Council, who functioned with harmony and concern under the chairmanship of 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 church organizations, the Management Committee, the School Committee, as well as all other committees of programs and projects which, in one way or another, have helped the growth of the parish.

In addition, allow me to single out some individuals whose continuous dedicated services in various ways have contributed to the church's enrichment, in moral and/or material ways: Elma Davidian, for her faithful handling of the church's bookkeeping; George Davidian, for his loyal managing care of our property along with Mike Pisani; Mary Azarian and Grace Cassidy, for their glad management of the successful "Get-Away Weekend"; Anahid Chookachian, for her cheerful helpfulness with various church groups; Karnig and Aram Chookachian and Zaven Adourian for consistently keeping the church vestments and choir robes clean; my Parish Council chairman, Jack, for his professional leadership and of course, Mr. Suren D. Fesjian, our Gunkahayr, for his wise guidance in the progress of our parish.

The Parish Council saw fit to select Garo Bashian as the recipient of a newly initiated service award for continued service to the parish, but Garo felt he hadn't done all that much to deserve such an award and respectfully and humbly requested that the Council refrain from honoring him. We feel Garo is an example of faithful and steady service to the church.

For the next year I wish to set the following goals for the parish:

- 1) To take subsequent steps toward the implementation of the parish resolution to build church facilities on our grounds.
- 2) To increase the number of our voting members.
- 3) To expand our financial support by more and greater participation in our program of stewardship pledge.
- 4) To attend worship services more regularly both for our enlightenment, uplift and strength, as well as for setting an example for our children.
- 5) To participate more fully in the spiritual and educational enrichment programs of the church, (Bible class, history and culture sessions, language instruction, etc.).
- 6) To utilize the church library which is in the process of formation.
- 7) To be more committed in facilitating the attendance of our children at both Armenian language school and Sunday church school.
- 8) To continue being hospitable toward visitors or infrequent church attendants.
- 9) To offer our services, rather than wait to be asked and even less refuse, to help in the building of both the spiritual church and the physical edifice.
- 10) Finally, to continue praying for God's grace and guidance to develop and nurture our spiritual life.

Exciting and challenging days are ahead. We need to join our hands and hearts to work according to God's will. May He bless us all.

With prayers,

Fr. Karekin Kasparian
Fr. Karekin Kasparian
Pastor