

ST. JAMES ARMENIAN CHURCH

PASTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT -- 1984
Presented on February 3, 1985

We thank the Lord for His presence and guidance in the life and growth of our parish in the year 1984. In our organizational activities, as well as individual communications, we have tried to maintain sensitivity and awareness of our dual pursuits for our parish, namely, educational enlightenment and spiritual growth, while fostering Christian fellowship among our parishioners.

This year our parish was visited by thirteen clergymen of different rank, including four bishops, four vartabeds, two kahanas and three deacons, some of whom also participated in our worship services.

Worship and Sacraments

I have celebrated Divine Liturgy, conducted other services and given sermons in both languages every Sunday, American Christmas Eve, the Eve of the Armenian celebration of Theophany, Lenten period and during Holy Week.

While the size of the congregation at our worship services has fluctuated, I always welcome and am gratified to see new faces in addition to our regular faithful members. We are also grateful that several new members have joined our choir and are currently being trained by our esteemed and capable choir director, Raffi Sevadjan.

The Church's proximity to our Seminary has brought the attendance of young people from sister parishes at our church services during the summer religious study seminars, as well as several other occasions.

Sacramentally speaking, we have had six (6) Baptisms and two (2) weddings in our church. I have also participated in, or been the officiating clergyman at nine (9) other weddings in other churches - Armenian as well as non-Armenian. An increasing number of weddings from our area have taken place in other churches because of the size and style of the structure of our present church facilities.

I have also conducted five (5) funeral services at our church and participated in, or officiated at seven (7) others in other churches.

Home Blessing and Grave Blessing ceremonies have also been conducted upon request.

Pastoral and Educational

In addition to visiting families on various happy and sad occasions, I have continued to visit also with individuals and families beset by problems and crises of various kinds and have "offered by hand and heart," in an effort to alleviate their pains and burdens, and to be a humble instrument of the Holy Spirit in giving them comfort and courage. I consider it a privilege to have been given opportunities for "share and care" with our people in pastoral ministry. Individuals and families in need have been in my prayers always.

This year we have had the pleasure of welcoming in our area more Armenian Families, to whom we have extended the various services of our parish — spiritual, educational and communal.

The Christian and Armenian education of our children has always been of first priority in my ministry. It has been my responsibility to recruit, and assist in their training, the teaching staffs of both the Armenian School and Sunday School, to contact the pupils and their parents with both oral and written communications, to participate in the Armenian School curriculum, periodically to meet with both staffs, as well as the Armenian School Committee, and also to participate in some of the extra-curricular activities of both schools. I prepared a brochure, containing useful information, for each school, which was sent to parents and teachers.

Those children whose parents insure their regular attendance have been benefitting considerably in understanding the spiritual and cultural heritage of our Church. The willing and devoted teachers are always left wishing that more parents will realize what it takes and not deprive their children of the unique opportunity to acquaint themselves with the Christian legacy and ethno-cultural wealth of our Church and people. Despite the short hours of instructions in both the Armenian and Sunday Schools, what the children learn with us is more than a set of instructions; they can experience a dynamic sense of belonging and identity with their history, religion and peers. It is indeed sad to cut the length and quality of such unique experiences short by irregular or no attendance. I do wish all our parents would understand the importance of these intangible values and place the Armenian and Sunday Schools somewhere at the top of their priorities for their children. Our negligences have a way of catching up with us - if not today, certainly tomorrow. All of us involved in the Armenian Church education of the children will continue to appeal to parents to consider being generous in giving the necessary time to their children to enable them to be included in both schools, and thus benefit from their spiritual and cultural blessings.

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 St. Vartan summer camp and St. Nersess religious study conferences.

For adults, we have continued our educational programs, which have included the study of our ethnic language, culture and religion. As an additional occasion of imparting Useful information about our Church and culture, this year I have instituted a series of periodic instructional sessions, which have taken place during the fellowship coffee hours following Church services on Sundays.

During the Lenten observance this year we instituted a cultural program, introducing three outstanding members of our parish, who made excellent presentations on the various aspects of our culture.

We have continued to publish our parish bulletin, The Hope, which offers news of community interest, as well as articles of educational value to over 600 families. The "Parish Council Column" has been an added feature this year and was instituted to keep the parish informed about the Council's activities.

I have made quite a few of my own books available at the library of our church, which we established this year, in an effort to promote reading Armenian and English books on our Church and culture.

Organizational and Administrative

As the President of the Parish Council and all Church organizations, I have attended all their membership gatherings and executive committee meetings throughout the year, offering necessary assistance and guidance in their deliberations. Our Junior ACYOA chapter has been more active this year. The Senior ACYOA chapter, despite its small number of members, has continued its active service in the parish. I have asked Bob and Deanna Stepanian to serve as advisors to the Juniors. Martha Gurahian has assisted as Parish Council liaison to both chapters, as well as to the Young Couples group, which is in the process of becoming a viable new group and a capable arm of service in the parish.

The Women's Guild and the Men's Club have been reactivated as organizations, though their members had continued to offer their services in the implementation of various functions of the Church.

October 14, 1984 will remain as a memorable date in our Parish records, as on that day the Parish took a giant step in reconfirming its commitment to build a church on our grounds and to contribute generously to its realization.

Our secretarial efficiency has improved, not only because of the quality service Mrs. Helen Galbraith offers, but also because of a beautiful duplicating machine which Mr. & Mrs. Paul Bashian and Mr. & Mrs. Daniel Mushegian donated to the church. We are grateful to them.

While we have had an increase in our Church membership, our effort has concentrated more on increasing the number of our stewards, who, through their pledges, have committed themselves to the present well-being and future growth of the Parish. They have at the same time become voting members of the Church. John Boyajian is implementing, with effectiveness, the promotion of the Stewardship Program as its chairman.

Inter-Church and Ecumenical

It has been my pleasure to represent our Parish at various functions and occasions in our sister parishes.

I continue serving the Diocese as a member of the Diocesan Council, and of various committees. As coordinator of spiritual renewal programs of our Diocese, this year I have contacted other parishes to hold regional conferences of spiritual renewal. The program organized for the churches in the Metropolitan New York/New Jersey area was attended by a few of our parishioners. These programs are unique occasions for spiritual uplift, educational enlightenment and Christian fellowship with members from neighboring parishes. The next one will be held on Saturday, March 16, 1985 at Holy Martyrs' Church in Bayside. I invite and urge all of you to set aside that day for a beautiful experience. Only when you attend this program will you truly appreciate its tremendous impact.

This year my involvement with St. Nersess Seminary is in offering a course in Armenian language and liturgies, consisting of three hours of instruction weekly. I have also attended its monthly administrative committee meetings during the first half of the year only. St. Nersess Seminary needs and deserves the support of the community. Our parish continues to give its share towards its support, financial and otherwise.

I have attended the monthly gatherings of the Sound Shore Clergy Association, an ecumenical group of clergymen of various denominations in the area. We hosted a luncheon for this group in November.

Appreciation

Our Parish and I are blessed to have so many people extend helping hands when called upon, and some even without being asked. My gratitude to Mr. & Mrs. Suren Fesjian, Gunkahayr of our Church, for continuing to give their support and to Honorable Judge Vincent Gurahian, for his ever-ready and wise counsel in the course of progress of the Parish. I ask God's blessings upon and express my warmest appreciation to each and every member of the Parish Council for continued concern and dedicated service to the Parish, under the able chairmanship of Dr. Jack Hachigian, in offering their service in helping in various dimensions of the Church's life and growth. Jack's leadership has spearheaded our current program of construction of church facilities. He will be missed on the Parish Council, just as the other two members who also chose not to run for Parish Council, Ben Tepikian and Dr. Hagop Cetinkaya. To each we say a special thank you for their quiet but much appreciated service. My personal thanks and appreciation to the Parish Council for their thoughtfulness and generosity in sponsoring a celebration for the tenth anniversary of my ordination.

My deep appreciation to the staffs of both Sunday School and Armenian School, the choir, the organist, the choir director and the altar servers, whose names were printed in the January issue of The Hope for their faithful weekly service. We are aware of the sacrifice involved, especially in the case of the choirmaster, the Sakalian family and the Kapikian family who travel a long distance every Sunday to participate in the Badarak.

Special thanks and gratitude to the two recipients of the St. James Award: Deacon John Vakassian and Garo Bashian, who in their own special ways have set an example of faithful and steady service to the Church.

Our deep gratitude to Elmas Davidian, who has offered her services in many ways, especially as the bookkeeper of the Church, giving countless hours to this task, above and beyond the call of duty.

Without leaving anyone out, let me thank the chairpersons and the officers, as well as members, of all church organizations, the various committees and functions mentioned in the Parish Council report; to all who have helped the Church to sustain itself financially - Stewards, Youghakin donors and other contributors, and especially those who gave to the Ethiopia Relief Fund.

We close the year with thankfulness and satisfaction, especially with a new vision and challenge to join our talents and means in erecting an edifice worthy of our devotion to our Church and ancestors. On the occasion of the 70th Anniversary, let us all pledge to do our best in every way possible, especially in building up the spiritual life of our Parish, even as we dedicate our efforts to the construction of a church edifice.

With prayers,

Fr. Karëkin Kasparian
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Pastor