

ST. JAMES ARMENIAN CHURCH

PASTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT -- 1986
Presented on February 8, 1987

I start my brief report with a thankful heart and thanksgiving prayer for the many blessings God has bestowed upon our parish and my ministry in His vineyard.

The thrust of our ministry in 1986 has been: to promote spiritual sensitivity and to provide spiritual nurture; to foster educational and instructional enlightenment; to increase our church membership by 25%; to accelerate our stewardship pledge program, all as a result of our collective efforts and cooperation.

It is said that a clergyman wears many hats. In the order of their priorities I have tried to utilize my time to its fullest doing the things I am specially trained and equipped to do in my priestly vocation. The priorities are listed in the following sequence: priest, preacher, educator, counselor, administrator, organizer, ecumenist, Primate's representative and good will ambassador.

As priest, I have celebrated Divine Liturgy and other liturgical services regularly on Sundays and other feast days, making arrangements for substitution when away from the parish. In addition, I have had the joy of christening 9 babies and the privilege of joining in Christian marital union 6 couples. It has also been my solemn duty to conduct the Christian burial of 15 members who have entered their eternal rest, in addition to conducting requiem services at gravesites and in the church. I have offered my service for home blessing ceremony when called upon. It has been my pastoral share to participate both in occasions of joy, as well as grief, of our parishioners and friends, in a personal way.

As preacher, I have endeavored to gear my sermons to the needs, problems and aspirations of our congregation, both on personal and community levels, selecting topics from their daily experiences and the pressures of society. I have tried to make my sermons reflect the basic teachings of our church, offering guidelines to daily moral living, based on the message of the Holy Scriptures and the collective religious experience of our forefathers, always intending to make them relevant to now.

As educator, it has been my joyous experience to offer classes of instruction for adults in various aspects of our religion and culture. I have also given the necessary guidance to the other educators of our parish, the Armenian and Sunday School instructors, who endeavor with devotion to teach our youngsters our Christian faith and cultural heritage, using the curricula made available by our Diocese. My reward has been great in working with the largest number of Sunday School and Armenian School graduates we have had to date, whose learning and growth experience I have watched with paternal joy. I have utilized the occasions of Christening to impart to parents and friends the Church's teaching about the sacraments of Christian initiation, as I have also conducted pre-marital conferences with prospective couples, presenting to them the basic tenets, moral precepts, sacramental content and ethical obligations intended to give the marital union its Christian character. It has also been my joy to motivate youngsters and teenagers to participate in the instructional and inspirational programs of the St. Vartan Summer Camp, St. Nersess Summer Seminars and Deacons' training and Liturgical Music. I have continued

instructional sessions with prospective altar servers. I have also participated in the planning of many other cultural and educational programs throughout the year, organized by church organizations, our cultural committee, or myself.

As pastoral counselor, I have utilized all occasions to offer the comfort and guidance of the Word and Love of God in situations of grief, pain, suffering, loneliness, strife and other situations of stress, both on individual and family levels. Additionally, there have been many other occasions when I have been called upon to assist, serve and guide in situations of anxiety and concern involving matters of faith and failures. Visiting parishioners and friends in their homes, and businesses, as well as at hospitals, has provided added occasions to know and motivate them to fuller participation in the life of the church. It is to be understood that the church touches the lives of parishioners and friends most deeply when the Pastor is invited to involve himself in helping them cope with their conflicts and crises. I consider it a privilege to offer my humble assistance in these respects in helping people experience Christian faith, hope, love, courage and endurance.

As administrator, it has been my responsibility to coordinate the functions and activities of the parish, offer assistance or guidance, as needed, to any of our organizations or committees, promote good will and cooperation in and among our various church groups, help organizations understand and practice their respective goals and responsibilities, maintain balance in the various kinds of religious, cultural, communal and social activities, coordinate the secretarial responsibilities of the office according to priorities, and in general, perform the duties and responsibilities of a pastor, as prescribed in our Diocesan By-Laws. Office correspondence, publication of flyers, bulletins, as well as the monthly newsletter, HOPE, as a vehicle of communication and instruction, are among the many "office work" duties I have attended to. Above all, as president of the Parish Council, it has been my duty to see that decisions of the Parish Assembly, as well as the provisions of the Diocesan By-Laws, are carried out in a spirit of Christian fellowship and harmony. I must say that we are blessed with such Parish Council members who offer so much of themselves, above and beyond the call of duty, for the sound and steady progress of the parish, assisting the pastor in effectuating further growth in the parish in many ways. If the growth of a parish is measured in part by the increase of its membership, I am happy to report that through a systematic membership drive within the past few months alone the number of our voting members increased 22 per cent, rising from 123 to 150, thus qualifying our parish, for the first time, to have two diocesan delegates representing us at the Diocesan Assemblies for the next four years.

As ecumenist, I have tried to represent our church with dignity in all inter-church activities, both on the Diocesan level, as well as on the ecumenical scene by participating in activities of interest and obligation, such as attendance at monthly inter-church clergy association gatherings, observance of Thanksgiving and Martin Luther King, Jr. anniversary memorial program, etc. It has been my privilege to act as the representative of the Primate or the parish on various occasions. I have utilized special occasions to provide articles of interest to the Gannett as well as Armenian newspapers.

To those of you who serve and give without counting the cost, or expecting recognition, may I humbly express my affectionate pastoral appreciation, not forgetting 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.

Allow me to single out some individuals to express my deep appreciation. They are our Diocesan Delegate, Judge Vincent Gurahian, our Parish Council Chairperson, Martha Gurahian, our altar servers, Deacons John Vakassian, Mark Kapikian and ooraragir tbir Garo Kapikian and Avedis Tutak, our organist, Alice Sakalian, our Choirmaster, Raffi Sevadjan, our Armenian School Principal, Anahid Chookhachian, our Sunday School Superintendent, Lillian Boyajian, our bookkeeper, Elma Davidian, our Building Committee Chairman, George Davidian, our Fund-Raising Committee Chairman, Lionel Galstaun, 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.

Before closing, I ask you to ponder the following practices which warrant and deserve greater self-giving on the part of many, in order to register further growth in the educational and financial well-being of our congregation. Let us pose them as questions:

- a) Do I attend Soorp Badarak and receive Holy Communion regularly?
- b) Do I read the Bible and pray for my friends and enemies regularly?
- c) Do I participate in church functions regularly?
- d) Do I contribute generously in a stewardship pledge for the work of the church now, and in the building fund pledge for the mission of the church tomorrow?
- e) Do I consent to run for any church office gladly and givingly when I am asked?
- f) Do I participate in the educational programs of the church, offered seasonally?
- g) Do I bring my children faithfully to both the Sunday and Armenian Schools?

Let me conclude with a word of pastoral reminder. In our anxiousness for fund raising and the construction of the new church edifice and the cultural center, let us not forget that the "business of the church" is prayer, mutual love, respect and understanding, forgiveness, salvation of souls and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Church people are known to be different from people in the secular world with their values and priorities, manners and commitment.

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, inspiration, love, comfort and an anchor of hope and strength.

I consider it a privilege to serve the Lord and you, 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
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Pastor