

ST. JAMES ARMENIAN CHURCH OF WESTCHESTER

Attendance at Diocesan Assembly April 30 to May 3, 1992

As one of the two elected lay delegates of St. James Armenian Church of Westchester, I attended the Diocesan Assembly for 1992. The second delegate, Hon. Vincent Gurahian, attended as a delegate of St. James Church and as the Chairman of the Diocesan Council. Attending as ex-officio delegate was our Der Hayr. The Assembly was held in Boca Raton, Florida, with St. David Armenian Church of Boca Raton as the host parish.

The Clergy of the Diocese had met for three days prior to the convening of the General Assembly, the First Session of which was called to order at 2 PM on April 30. Most of the business in the First Session was routine. After election of the officers, the meeting got under way with the first substantive item, the Report of the Clergy Conference. A copy of the Report is attached.

The Armenian Church Endowment Fund reported a return of about 7% for the year 1991. This is considered a good return in a recession year, though it is not up to the best historic rates of over 10%.

The Second Session got started about a half hour late at 9:30 AM on May 1. The Nominating Committee announced its slate of candidates for the Diocesan Board of Trustees (1 position), and for the Nominating, Proposals and Auditing Committees. Each election had to go through several ballots; Haig Dadourian was elected to the Board of Trustees. Father Karekin was elected to the Nominating Committee for 1993 and subsequently selected as Chairman by its members, with the responsibility of conducting the nominations for officers of various key positions in the Diocese. The remaining posts were heavily contested. I have to admit that I did not keep track of the final winners.

The Primate's Report was very well accepted. He laid heavy stress on the importance of healing the split in the Church, especially in view of the fact that the emergence of an independent Armenia has made the separation of the Church in the United States incongruous if not irrelevant. He announced that a Youth Ministry, under Father Mardiros Chevian is now organized and ready to operate. The Diocese is committed to setting up a meaningful dialog with the youth themselves, rather than a "pass-down" through seniors. A severe shortage of prepared clergy persists, and this is being made even more critical by the formation of two new churches, one in Florida and one in Dallas, Texas. Six Deacons, now nearing the end of their training, will be available to fill some of the vacant Parish Priest positions.

Substantive aid to Armenia in the form of food, medicines and clothing continues. The U. S. Government has recognized the Diocese as an efficiently functioning medium for the distribution of this aid, and recently assigned to it 3000 tons of additional food and medical items. Father Yezhnik Balian has been assigned to coordinate the distribution of aid in Armenia, and he is doing a first-class job. In addition, Diocesan clergy are being assigned to missionary work in Armenia on a rotating basis. With regard to the finances of operating the Diocese, availability of funds remains scarce, and painful cuts in spending and programs have been made to counter, only partially, a deficit in the Budget.

The Unity Committee reported that meetings were held with their counterparts in the Prelacy, but not much progress is being made because of the insistence of the Prelacy

Committee that cooperation in schools and commemorations should be a prerequisite to development of By-Laws governing both groups.

The Third Session, held during the afternoon of May 1, featured a panel discussion on and by Young Adults, organized and moderated by Dean Shahinian from St. Mary's Church, Washington, D. C. It was entitled "Young Adult Involvement in the Parishes". The first presentation was a pair of "vignettes", the first of which was an example of the "bad" way to enlist the cooperation of young adults. The second illustrated a "good" way. I thought the presentation was simplistic and rather condescending. By contrast, the discussion panels which followed, giving views by Young Adults and by Parents were very well done. One of the participants in the panel discussion was our Pastor, who was also referred to by young adult panelists as one of the influences in their lives, stimulating in them, sustaining interest in the church through St. Nersess educational programs. The ideas expressed showed that communication between youth and the next older generation is possible if a reasonable effort is made by both parties.

Father Mardiros Chevian reported on the rationale of the Youth Ministry Program. He outlined three main goals: 1. to foster total growth of the youth as persons; 2. to draw youth into responsible participation in Church activities; and 3., to prepare them for leadership. To accomplish these results, it is planned to involve youth (defined as age 14 to 35) in five main fields: education, fellowship, faith, service to others, and worship. Further steps planned include the strengthening of the ACYOA (Seniors and Juniors), development of staff at the Diocese, and coordinators in the parishes.

REPORTS ON EARTHQUAKE RELIEF AND FROM PROPOSALS COMMITTEE

The Fourth Session heard a report on the Earthquake and the status of the aid program presented by Ared Bulbuljian and reports by the Proposals Committee. Salient points of the Earthquake Relief Report included the following:

1. Contributions from the U. S. Department of Agriculture have been raised from an initial \$8 million to \$43 million total.
2. The housing project in Stepanavan is now complete. 96 new apartments provide shelter for 700 people.
3. Food aid totals are 890 metric tonnes of chickpeas, pasta and sugar; 10,600 tonnes of butter, bulghur and powdered milk; 7 planeloads (500 tonnes) of surplus rations (from Desert Storm); 1 planeload of milk donated by Utah farmers.
4. All clothing collected, plus bedding and medical supplies have been delivered or are en route.

Administration costs have been held to less than 2%, but some niceties, such as receipts for deliveries have been foregone. The presence of Father Balian and the cooperation of the church in Armenia have assured that the supplies have been delivered to those in need.

Future efforts will be directed toward promoting self-sufficiency by switching to seeds instead of finished or semi-finished agricultural products.

To date, Armenia has received about \$14 in value for each dollar spent.

Critical areas remain, the most important of which are medicines and medical supplies, where Armenia lacks indigenous sources. Other critical areas have been identified.

For the longer term, linkages between Armenia and the U. S. are vital. At present, the most immediate and pressing needs have been satisfied. On-going training programs for high-tech labor, professionals and medical personnel are in place. Improvement of social conditions is one of the next steps.

Seven proposals were presented by the Proposals Committee. Following is the disposition by the Assembly (Note: the following are paraphrases, giving the gist of the proposals. Many are very lengthy):

Proposal 1: By Holy Trinity Armenian Church, Cambridge, MA.

Analyze the growth or decrease in church membership in recent years and report findings along with a plan for growth at the next Diocesan Assembly.

APPROVED

Proposal 2: By St. Mary Armenian Church, Washington, D. C.

Primate and Diocesan Council are requested to place highest priority in strengthening the parishes by helping attract youth, young adults and professionals, to help lay leaders and parish priests in their administrative duties, and to educate parishioners in faith and culture.

APPROVED

Proposal 3: By St. James Armenian Church, Watertown, MA

Primate and Diocesan Council instructed to send to all Parish Priests, Parish Council Members and Diocesan Delegates a complete list of all proposals passed from 1982 through 1992.

APPROVED

Proposal 4: By St. James Armenian Church, Watertown, MA

Minutes of this and future Diocesan Assemblies will be sent to Delegates within 60 days after adjournment. Amended to include: Within 30 days, officers of the Assembly will submit minutes of the Assembly to the Diocesan Council.

APPROVED AS AMENDED

Proposal 5: By St. James Armenian Church, Watertown, MA

Annual Report of the Diocese shall be sent to delegates at least 45 days before the next Assembly, or by March 15, whichever is earlier. Discussion indicated that the lateness of some Parish Assembly Reports is a factor in the delay.

APPROVED

Proposal 6: By St. James Armenian Church, Watertown, MA

This proposal called for setting up a Panel Format for formalized discussion, and called for six sessions with broad agendas for each.

DEFEATED

PROPOSAL 7: By Holy Trinity Armenian Church, Cambridge, MA

This proposal would empower the Diocesan Assembly to determine the minimum dues to be paid by church members. Parish Assemblies could increase the dues above this minimum, but not decrease. A minimum of \$50 was proposed.

DEFEATED

FINANCIAL REPORTS

For the year 1991, the audited report indicates a deficit of \$315,204 of revenues under expenditures. For 1992, the revised budget shows an anticipated deficit of \$198,424 which is proposed to be covered from the undesignated funds in a major contribution of \$1 million from Dikran and Aznive Sewny. The proposed budget for 1993 shows an anticipated deficit of \$208,346 without indication of how the deficit would be met. The report for 1991 was accepted as was the overall financial report including the revised Budget for 1992. Details of the Financial Report are covered in a lengthy presentation in the Diocesan Annual Report for the year 1991 and are available for review on request.

ASSEMBLY BANQUET

The Banquet of the Assembly was held on Saturday night, May 2, at the Marriott Hotel. Dr. Edgar Housepian was named "Armenian Man of the Year", and was awarded a plaque commemorating his outstanding services to Armenia in the post-Earthquake period.

IMPRESSIONS OF THE PHYSICAL LAYOUT OF ST. DAVID CHURCH

I was well impressed with the physical layout of St. David Armenian Church in Boca Raton, Florida. The Sanctuary seats just under 300 comfortably in 22 fixed pews. I believe 350 could be squeezed in. All pews were provided with kneelers. By opening two sliding doors, the entire auditorium can be made participatory in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, effectively increasing the capacity. Father Arzoomanian told me that they actually had 900 at Divine Liturgy last Easter Sunday. On entering the church, parish members are greeted by Parish Council members seated at a desk in a foyer which serves both the Sanctuary and the Fellowship Hall. What appeared to be offices and/or conference rooms were on either side of the foyer.

The overall design follows the general form used in several Diocesan churches (St. Stepanos in Elberon, N. J. and St. Mark in Springfield, MA) designed by Mr. Hovsepian, although he may not have actually designed this structure. External treatment appeared to be a kind of stucco. A dome over the Sanctuary provides light and gives the structure an "Armenian" appearance. It is supported by wooden arches made up by laminating standard 2 x 10 or similar size lumber, with thickened sections to accommodate greater stresses at the "knees". There are no columns in the Sanctuary. Stained glass was installed in all the windows. The Fellowship Hall includes a stage at the far end from the entry, and a well equipped kitchen on the north side. It is a very large hall; my "visual" measurement estimated it at about 70' x 120', say close to 9,000 square feet. Parking space was provided on the grounds of the church, but the available space would be totally inadequate for a maximum crowd. The Church is located in a row of churches, including a Methodist, a Greek Orthodox and a Synagogue. It would seem to me that a confluence of Easter and Passover would create a monumental parking problem.

Report prepared by

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