

ST. JAMES ARMENIAN CHURCH

PASTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT

(JANUARY 1 - DECEMBER 31, 1990)

By the grace of God our church completed another good year of parish life. While we are still functioning at our present property, wrought with certain limitations, yet our growth as a parish has registered another milestone in ways that cannot be stilted by the limitations of physical facilities. The progress I am referring to has taken place in the areas of spiritual nourishment, cultural enlightenment, communal comraderie, personal commitment and increased involvement in the life of the parish.

1990 became on the one hand a year of continued mourning for wounded Armenia, and bereavement for the passing of Patriarch Shmork, on the other hand we began to hear of tangible reconstructional progress in our homeland, the declaration of the beginnings of a much desired independence of the Armenian Republic with the right to fly its own flag - a historic development indeed - which had its impact on the Armenian community throughout the world and ushered the outburst of an unprecedented spiritual renaissance among our brothers and sisters in our homeland. These phenomenal developments have shaken the very core of the Armenian soul challenging all loyal and loving Armenians to offer prayers, tears, service, donations and unitedness for the cause of reconstruction. Our parish has also been touched by all these workings of the heart and mind.

1990 has also been marked by two additional anniversary observances in our parish: the sad commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the genocide and the joyful celebration of the 10th anniversary of the St. James church at our present location. Another development of unexpected grief was the damage caused to our church structure by a fire and the ensuing multiple inconveniences we experienced during the following months, until the structure was restored to its original condition.

Despite unexpected tangible problems, the intangible work of the parish has gone on as usual.

I LITURGICAL - Worship is central in the life of Christians and the central worship experience for Christians is the Divine Liturgy (Badarak). Badarak has been celebrated in our church every Sunday and weekdays of major feasts. This year we had an exceptionally large attendance on the eve of American Christmas observance, so different from the attendance at the Armenian Christmas eve celebration.

We have continued to observe the second Sunday of the month as "family worship day", when pupils, teachers and parents of the Sunday School have been requested to participate in Badarak. On the first Sunday of the month, in lieu of sermon, I have encouraged the congregation to ask questions of interest pertaining to our Christian faith, practice, worship and cultural legacy, which I have tried to answer and explain to the best of my ability

We are blessed to have Raffi Sevadjan as our Choir Director who conducts our choir with such professional skill that we hear very beautiful music when all members are present.

During 1990 it has been my privilege to administer the sacraments of baptism on 14 children (13 last year), Chrismation on 2 children and 2 adults (1 of each last year), and 8 weddings (6 last year). I have also had the solemn duty of conducting 11 funerals (6 last year) and participated in 6 others in sister churches. House blessing, betrothal, grave blessing and memorial services have also been conducted upon request.

Services of "blessing" are part of the traditional worship and devotional experience of the Armenian church. We must continue to practice them always considering them as sources for additional divine blessings as well as for spiritual comfort and solace. Good and meaningful traditions should never be discontinued. We need to fight against the temptations of apathy and indifference regarding our cardinal Christian duty of participation regularly in the corporate and uplifting worship experience of our beautiful Badarak.

Non-spiritual concerns and secular considerations tend to lead us into spiritual indifference and religious laxity. All of us must care enough to offer support and encouragement to each other to continue participating in the worship experience of the parish, because that is where we receive added spiritual nurture and strength to "fight the good fight" against the temptations of the world and build the spiritual life of our families on firm foundation.

While we continue waiting prayerfully for the breaking of good news about a new prospective property for our building project, we need to continue the building up of our spiritual church, each family and individual becoming "the church", through whom God will manifest His loving presence and redeeming grace.

II EDUCATIONAL - It has been my pleasure to conduct the teaching ministry of our church utilizing all available occasions, such as sermons, adult educational programs, significant occasions in the life of families (Christening, wedding, hospitalization, crisis and funeral), the Armenian and Sunday Schools and other programs of culture or discussion.

The content and presentation of my sermons have of necessity, fluctuated to include the feasts and saints and celebrations, biblical, ethical, liturgical, theological, cultural and other essential topics of daily interest and concern.

The use of both languages in our church, while a blessing to many, is still a bone of contention to some. We must remember that with increased inter-marriages, we have more people who do not understand Armenian, yet wish to be part of our worship and communal experience. By the same token, we must make a serious and concerted effort to learn and to use our mother tongue.

Our series of lenten supper-worship programs had as a theme "The 3 Strongholds of our spiritual and cultural heritage - the church, the family and the school". Members of the congregation participated in the presentations of commentaries and musical selections.

Our adult education programs continued with the teaching of conversational Armenian and a series on "The Armenians in Diaspora" with the participation of our parishioners.

New members of the parish council participated in an orientation program to review their liturgical and administrative duties. A day long seminar was held at our church with representatives of the parish councils of the Armenian churches in Trumbull, Tenafly and Westchester to discuss some common administrative and financial issues.

A few youngsters from our parish participated in the St. Vartan Camp and St. Nersess Summer Seminar programs, being better acquainted with our religious and cultural heritage. I have participated in an educational program at the Diocesan Assembly giving a presentation on the topic of "Church ministry in crisis situation".

The major educational and celebrational function of the year was the 75th anniversary of the genocide, which took place at the Greek Orthodox Church of Our Saviour in Rye, NY with the participation of ecumenical as well as county and state government representatives. Musical and artistic presentations and stirring speeches and moving testimonies made the event a worthy and unforgettable experience for all in attendance.

We have continued to use our monthly parish newsletter HOPE and the BULLETINS as another vehicle of imparting useful instructions and news. The HOPE is received by more than 650 people.

We are blessed to have a group of dedicated teachers in our Sunday School and the Armenian School as well as parents of the latter, who contribute to the effectiveness of our teaching experience in their own respective ways. We continue to wish for parents to bring their children to Sunday School more regularly and promptly.

III PASTORAL - Having been trained in pastoral counseling and parish administration, I consider it my privilege to share the pain and concerns of people who face personal, family, faith, job or other problems. The most significant service the church offers to her members is on the personal level of touching their lives in times of need or crisis. My visitations to the sick in hospitals or at home bring me in contact also with the families. I have tried to relate the healing presence of Christ in the lives of patients as well as their families. As Christian believers we do well to ask for the pastor's presence and prayers as soon as we know of someone sick, at home or in a hospital.

In addition to the above situations I utilize baptisms and weddings, as well as unhappy occasions to instruct and counsel. Prospective couples meet with me on the average of 3 to 5 times prior to the wedding, being instructed in the basics of Christian family and sacramental living, the fundamental teachings of the church and their responsibilities in the life of the parish.

This year we initiated something new. A group of young mothers and their tots meet bi-monthly at the church to develop comraderie and fellowship.

IV ADMINISTRATIVE - For the most part our church organizations seem to favor getting together periodically for certain projects, rather than monthly routine meetings.

The church office has been open regularly on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. Most of my desk work and study is done in my office at our home, where I am reached through one of the two telephones of the church. The Secretary and I are in regular contact with each other when I am away from the church office.

All of us are appreciative and grateful to Gale Perzigian and Elmas Davidian who continue their service faithfully and competently in their respective responsibilities. Martha Gurahian, Treasurer of the parish council has been meeting with Elmas every Wednesday to assist in keeping the accounts and the books, putting in long hours. In addition, Margaret (Hewsenian) Brophy also has been an invaluable helper in the office on Wednesdays. Occasionally Grace Cassidy and Anahid Birnbaum have also offered their assistance to the office. We ask God's blessings upon them all.

Our church needs secretarial help 5 days a week. We are still looking for a full-time secretary who will also handle the bookkeeping and be able to use the computer.

Being a Christian institution, our church like others, has to rely upon volunteers to be in charge of or serve in various responsibilities. Volunteering has always been a Christian duty. All those who offer of their time and talent in different aspects of the church's administrative duties, I am sure feel particularly blessed and rewarded in the joy of serving in the Lord's work, one way or another.

One major event in our parish delighted us all as we observed the 10th anniversary of St. Hagop Church at Purchase, our first landmark date. Aside from the successful dance which created a joyful community celebration, in addition to netting \$10,000 revenue to the church, the climax of the observance came on December 9, 1990 when our newly elected Primate, The Right Rev. Bishop Khajag Barsamian, ordained our choir members as acolytes during Badarak, consecrated a painting of the Asdvadzadzin and gave an uplifting message noting with appreciation the special occasion being feasted. His Eminence later expressed in a letter his appreciation of our choir, especially commending Raffi Sevadjian, our Choir Director for his professional competence.

Also, during this year our Gnkahayr, Mr. Suren D. Fesjian was honored as "Man of the Year" at our Diocesan Assembly in Worcester, MA. The joy of the occasion was marred by the accidental fall of Mrs. Fesjian, who never recovered from the unfortunate accident and ensuing complications, which resulted in her tragic demise. May God rest her soul in His eternal peace.

I present to you two issues for your support and cooperation. They are: STEWARDSHIP and MEMBERSHIP. From the initiation of the stewardship pledge program it has been our effort to get as many people as possible participate in it, both as an expression of commitment to our church as well as a source of support to its service. We not only

need to multiply the number of stewards in our church, but we need to give more generously, proportionate to the blessings God has bestowed upon us.

As regards membership, while it is true that 10 years ago our number here was about 80 and at the present it stands at 125 or more, yet our parish growth should reflect in the more increased number of our membership as well. I appeal to all of you to help us in building up both our membership and stewardship program. Your assistance and encouragement will be greatly appreciated by us and blessed by God. I guess a good motto for all of us would be "total commitment, full participation and proportionate giving" regarding our relationship to our "spiritual mother".

In closing, while appreciating the involvement and contributions of every single member of our church, I pray for God's abundant blessings upon all who have given of their time, substance and talent for the well being and progress of our parish.

In special ways: - Gnkahayr Suren D. Fesjian, Dr. Lionel S. Galstaun, George Davidian, Edward Essayan, Garo Bashian, Zaven Tachdjian, Mike Pisani, Deacons John Vakassian and Mark Kapikian, Organists Alice Sakalian and Marguerite Sagatelian, Choir Director Raffi Sevadjan and all choir members, Sunday School co-superintendents Lillian Boyajian and Beatrice Postian and all the teachers, Armenian School Principal Garbis Tiratsuyan and all the teachers and School Committee members, Cultural Committee Chairperson George Omartian, Hye-Steppers Chairperson George Guendjoian, Woman's Guild Chairperson Rose Darien, Choir Chairperson Noimik Poulatian, ACYOA Srs. & Jrs. Chairpersons Leslie Kalaydjian and Lori Kasparian, church fund investors Ara Momjian and Richard Varadian as well as Chairpersons and members of all committees.

May the Holy Spirit inspire us all to become more active participants in making this parish more dynamic and vibrant.

To all of you, I wish good health, happiness and God's other blessings.

With prayers,

Fr. Karekin Kasparian
Fr. Karekin Kasparian, Pastor