

ST. JAMES ARMENIAN CHURCH

PASTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT

JANUARY 1 - DECEMBER 31, 1991

We thank God for another good and active year in the life of our parish, made possible through the cooperation and response of many parishioners. With the increase of 36 new members in 1991, we have registered over 20% growth in our membership. While this record alone gives us reason to rejoice at our unprecedented progress, we are fully aware of our larger potential and we intend to continue all pastoral efforts to enlist more members, interested and committed in the spiritual, cultural and communal goals of our church.

I - LITURGICAL

Badarak was celebrated at our church every Sunday and weekdays of major feasts. In an effort to better understand Badarak and fully participate in it, explanatory sessions and sermons were given both for the adults and the Sunday School children. As an added means to our communal participation in this central worship service, we have placed explanatory sheets in our Badarak books to be used by the congregation. Badarak in our church starts at 10:15 am every Sunday, preceded by a brief Morning Service at 10:00 am. Promptness in attending services is still a practice that needs improving. I urge our parishioners to make a concentrated effort in the current year to get into the habit of arriving at church on time and participating in the service regularly.

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 discuss to the best of my ability. On the second Sunday of the month (Family Worship Day), school pupils, parents and teachers have been requested to participate in Badarak.

On January 6, the traditional date of Armenian celebration of Theophany (Nativity, Baptism and Manifestation of Jesus Christ), a pot luck luncheon was held following Badarak with an impromptu enjoyable program to enhance the celebration, the love and the fellowship of this occasion.

On May 19, our congregation was invited to attend Badarak at St. Nersess Seminary because our church hall was occupied with the rug sale and the Seminary was holding their graduation exercises. We plan to do the same this year on May 17.

During 1991 it has been my privilege to administer the following:

- .6 Sacraments of baptism in our church.
- .2 In other neighboring Armenian churches.
- .4 Chrismation sacraments (3 adults & 1 child) in our church
- .1 Wedding in our church
- .4 Participated in other neighboring Armenian churches
- .1 Funeral in our church
- .3 In other neighboring Armenian churches

House blessing, betrothal, grave blessing and memorial services have also been conducted upon request.

II - EDUCATIONAL

The educational ministry of the church includes adults of all ages, as well as children in the Sunday and Armenian schools. Sermons, adult educational programs, visitations and significant occasions in the life of families (Christening, wedding, hospitalization crisis and funeral) have been utilized to impart the basic teachings and traditional practices of our church as they relate to our daily living at the present.

The use of both languages in our church, while a blessing to many, is still a bone of contention to some. It is understandable that a non-Armenian "hars" or "pesa" will not understand or speak Armenian, however, it is incomprehensible to us when an Armenian makes no effort to learn our beautiful language, which serves not only as a means of communication, but also as a powerful agent of fostering ethnic identity. Not enough people have taken advantage of the language teaching programs we have conducted in our parish on a regular basis. Our language is part of our national identity. We should not be so complacent or lazy as to not learn or study it. If we deprive ourselves of a significant aspect of our cultural identity and richness, we will be losing one more factor about ourselves as descendents of a civilized nation with a wealth of cultural heritage. I am grateful to Haig Manoogian and Nectar Sarkissian Munro who have taken an active part in the teaching of the Armenian language in 1991.

In the spring we offered a series on "Christian Basics", exploring our church's teachings on various vital issues.

"Christian Witnessing" was the theme of our successful Lenten programs offered on three alternate Fridays with guest speakers.

A few youngsters from our parish participated in the St. Vartan and St. Nersess summer programs, becoming better acquainted with our religious and cultural heritage.

A seminar on the basics of Armenian culture was offered to the Armenian school pupils and parents.

During Lent I was given the responsibility by the Diocese of organizing an educational program for the clergy of our Diocese on marital counseling which took place in Larchmont. Several prominent professors and psychiatrists in the area participated also.

We have continued to use our parish newsletter "HOPE" and the monthly "BULLETIN" as another vehicle of imparting useful instructions and news of interest. The newsletter is received by more than 750 individuals including churches.

The most significant service the church offers to her members through the pastor is on the personal level of touching their lives in times of need or crisis. There have been several cases of grave illnesses suffered by parishioners that have enhanced in our minds the importance of praying for each other. Here too a reminder is in order that as soon as we know of any parishioner or friend being admitted to a hospital, it is greatly appreciated that the pastor be informed immediately in order to make pastoral calls. People seek prayers and benefit from these visits.

This year we have had several situations of needy Armenian families being established in our geographical area and thus the need has arisen for assistance and direction in establishing and adjusting themselves to various conditions of life in the United States.

For me, it is a responsibility and a privilege to be part of the Christian ministry of spiritual and emotional healing and reconciliation in the lives of individuals and families beset by the burdens and perils of life.

III - ADMINISTRATIVE

The church office has been open regularly on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 10:00 - 4:00 pm. I am contacted by either of the two telephone numbers, one at the church and one in my study at home. We are still in need of a full time secretary with the ability to handle the bookkeeping and computer.

In an effort to provide opportunities for Armenian young adults in the area to meet each other, we compiled an extensive list of men and women of post college age group and initiated a gathering for that purpose. The group seems promising and is expected to grow.

Another newly organized group is the St. James Couples who are between the ages of 25 to 45 or so. They have been meeting periodically for fellowship and comraderie. In due time they may become a viable organization vital to the growth of the church.

The ACYOA Srs. and Jrs. continue their periodic gathering pursuing the goals of their organization.

The Women's Guild after a lengthy rest is once again in the process of being organized into a cohesive group serving their needs and the needs of the church.

The Armenian School and Sunday School teachers have continued their devotion to their respective programs with diligence. Those children who attend classes regularly benefit considerably from what is offered.

This year our parish found itself involved more actively than before in the charitable task of aiding Armenia in various ways. In June I was sent to Armenia on a fact finding mission to determine the feasibility of periodic visits by clergy from the Eastern Diocese to help in the urgent task of evangelizing, teaching and counseling to the earthquake survivors and others seeking spiritual edification and direction. With my companion priest from Washington, DC, we met with His Holiness, bishops, priests, teachers, students and youth groups in addition to giving spiritual messages on TV, in churches and study groups.

Gregor Melikian, one of our parishioners, has made several trips to Armenia to aid in the establishment of a school of management to which he has made a large monetary contribution.

During a trip for yet another form of aid to Armenia, George Leylegian and Harry Keleshian witnessed the dire need for warm clothing by about 28,000 Armenian refugees who were forced at gun point by Azeris and migrated into the Vardenis area of Armenia. Their emotional report resulted in a diocesan-wide clothing drive collecting about 100,000 lbs. of new and used clothing for the needy refugees. Our parish spearheaded the drive and collected about 18,000 lbs. of clothes. One half of the total collected was distributed to our brothers and sisters under the management and supervision of Harry and George, who enlisted the help of Avadis Sakalian and Harry's son Arsen from our parish. His Grace, Bishop Khajag Barsamian, our Primate, acknowledged the prominent role of organization that Harry and George played with a "Letter of Blessing" to both. The remainder of the clothes are being shipped to Armenia by the Diocese. The daily need for clothing and food in Armenia has taken precedence in our attention and action for aid. This need, along with the need for spiritual food will continue for a long time. Never before has Armenia needed the Diaspora Armenians for survival and support as it needs right now. The concepts of compassion and sacrifice have taken on a tangible significance for us.

Our parish has chosen to recognize one person annually for continued service to St. James. The recipient of the 1990 St. James Award was Lionel Galstaun, who has offered unstintingly of his time, talent and treasure to enrich our parish. For 1991 the selecting committee with the approval of the Parish Council chose Ann D. Boghosian as the recipient who was recognized earlier today, requesting to forego any fanfare. Congratulations to both of them.

Lionel has just completed his 6th year of service on the Parish Council. According to the by-laws, he has to stay out of office for one year before he is eligible to run again. Undoubtedly, we all agree that he has set a beautiful example of selfless, quiet and dignified service to God and the parish with such graceful dedication that the younger members of the Council will emulate.

Serving the church and the community is a distinct privilege which brings with it a spiritual satisfaction which transcends all remuneration and recognition. Nevertheless, today as we review our annual activity, we wish to express our heartfelt thanks and appreciation collectively, as pastor and parish council to all of you who one way or another have contributed to the well-being and progress of our parish. At this time, we wish to acknowledge all the devoted and dedicated members of our parish who have uncomplainingly given of their time and/or talent helping in the administration office, the worship services, educational programs and organizational life as well as any other service they may have offered. The services are too many to enumerate and it is too sensitive to omit anyone's name. May God bless them all including their families and loved ones.

To register further progress in our church, I propose the following for the current year:

- . To streamline our stewardship program and membership campaign.
- . To develop the young couples and young adults groups.
- . To strengthen the choir and to initiate a junior choir and additional altar servers.
- . To re-institute an Avak group and to create a sunshine committee to welcome new families and to keep in touch with the old ones.

May the Holy Spirit continue to inspire us all to become more active participants in making this parish even more dynamic and vibrant for the Glory of God and for the strengthening of our spiritual, cultural and communal life.

With prayers,

Fr. Karekin Kasparian

Rev. Fr. Karekin Kasparian