

WESTCHESTER BANQUET

Dear Parishioners,

Anniversaries are milestones in our lives when we rejoice that we have reached a certain age; we reminisce about the good and the bad times, and wish for a better future. At occasions like this it seems that the three dimensions of time—the present, the past and the future—are simultaneously within our reach. It is at times like these that we are in an ideal state to assess our achievements, to examine the pluses and minuses in our method of approach and to consider our capabilities in order to set our future goals.

The 10th anniversary of the St. James Church of Westchester is such an occasion, a milestone in the life of the relatively new parish. A critical assessment of your achievements in the past ten years shows the tremendous achievements and the attained goals. What originally began as a mission parish to gather the scattered flock in the northern suburbs of New York, turned into a wonderful parish, one of the most active in our Diocese. This was due to your faith, to your love of God and to your Armenian spirit.

Otherwise you would not tackle the numerous hardships and problems which you resolved in order to come together as the body of our Lord.

At present you may not have a church building, but you yourselves are the church or the corporate body of Christ, since you are gathered in His Name. New congregations and churches remind me of the early church, when the first Christians gathered to worship together and share their meals. The enthusiasm and the zeal with which the parishioners of this Church have moved about are not any different from the activities of the early Christians. Your pastor, Fr. Karekin Kasparian, one of the best educated clergymen in our Diocese, has worked with you like an early Christian missionary. The territory he covers as his pastorage is extensive. Despite the odds and obstacles created by distance and time, he has succeeded in bringing most of you together into the fold. He has also worked very hard to keep the youth involved in the church. The evidence for this are the active youth groups, the Sunday School and the Armenian School at the St. James Parish.

There are in your midst several good parishioners whose activities extend beyond the limits of your parish and reach the Diocesan Headquarters and even beyond.

For example, you have among you one of the great philanthropists of our community, Mr. Suren Fesjian, the Chairman of the Diocesan Endowment Fund, who is still doing everything in his power to put the Diocese on an economically solid foundation. Mr. Fesjian is also a veteran in Armenian life and is highly respected by His Holiness Vasken I, Catholicos of All Armenians.

The Chairman of our Diocesan Council, the Hon. Judge Vincent Gurahian, is also a member of your parish, where his wife, Mrs. Martha Gurahian, has served as Chairlady of the Parish Council. They both have given several decades of service to their church and people and are still willing to continue in their course of dedication. I believe that the spiritual nourishment they receive in their home parish inspires them to work for the Diocese. The present Chairman of the Parish Council, Dr. Lionel Galstaun, is also a well-known personality in Armenian life, who has voluntarily devoted his talents and intellect to the service of his people. I am sure that it was the activity and the wonderful spirit in your parish that attracted him to come and join you soon after he settled down in this area.

You have many other good and capable people among you and have every reason to continue in the same vein. The celebration of the tenth anniversary of this parish puts the obligation on you to build a permanent "house of light," a holy site where God would dwell and you would readily reach him. That holy site must be a part of the Christian heritage your generation is privileged to pass down to posterity. You are privileged because during church services we pray for people who build houses of God.

During the next few years you will have to pull together your resources in order to raise your new sanctuary. That will generate new activities and will draw more people to the church body. I pray that you succeed in your holy endeavor. I also pray that you remain firm in your faith and reach your goal. The task you have undertaken is pleasing to God. May His right hand protect you and your families always, and may you hold the future anniversaries of this parish in your own cultural hall.