

ST. JAMES ARMENIAN CHURCH
PASTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT
JANUARY 1 - DECEMBER 31, 1993

I greet you, my dear members of our parish, with thanksgiving to God for granting us one more year of growth in our church community. I present to you my "State of the Church" report.

One year ago today, we announced the purchase of the new 10.5 acre property at the southwest corner of Hutchinson Parkway and North Street for our new church complex. With the counsel of the Parish Council and the Building Committee and the competent service of the Building Committee Chairman and assistant, we received a swift approval of the site plan by the city authorities in White Plains. Ed Essayan and Zaven Tachdjian spent countless hours and effort in preparation for the approval. Our parish is forever indebted to them for their time and dedication, as we are also appreciative for Gregory Essayan's pro bono legal services in the completion of this process. At the present, the work of our architect is being supplemented by the service of two consulting architects, who are engaged in preparing a revised building plan to be presented to the congregation in the near future.

At the celebration banquet held on October 23, 1993, to mark the occasion of the purchase of our new property, the Soorp Hagop parishioners were filled with joy and gratitude that our esteemed Gnkahayr, Mr. Suren D. Fesjian, had pledged a matching contribution of \$1,000,000 for the construction of the new church. This announcement both heightened the motivation of the parishioners and at the same time gave grateful comfort about the prospective success of our building project. It was a reminder to all of us that the time is approaching that we open our hearts to give our best and to contribute with a feeling of duty and privilege to the realization of a magnificent church complex, to serve our spiritual, communal and educational needs, both now and for posterity. Let us continue to be guided by our Lord in the full realization of this unique once-in-a-lifetime project.

In the meantime, liturgical, organizational, educational and communal activities have continued at Soorp Hagop. The following is a brief account of them all.

I LITURGICAL

We have celebrated Badarak at our church every Sunday and week days of major feasts. While attendance for the most part has been very good, I have been concerned with the question of congregational participation. In order to understand reasons of the absence of some people and remedy to full participation, I have met with different groups in our parish to discuss ways of promoting liturgical participation. In November, we had a "narrational Badarak", when different parts of the service were explained periodically during the celebration. In addition, we initiated congregational review of the Badarak songs at the end of worship service which will continue until all the songs are reviewed. These review sessions are conducted by our choir director after my explanation of the theological and liturgical

significance of the songs reviewed. It is our hope that this way the congregational participation will be increased and Badarak will become a true experience of worship and spiritual uplift. It goes without saying that only those will benefit from this experience who will attend regularly.

We have gone one step further in helping our Sunday School pupils to experience the spiritual impact of Badarak. Children are now expected to attend Badarak every Sunday from 10:30 to 11:00 am, in order to have increased acquaintance with the service. I explain to them the meaning of the parts and songs, at the same time offering a spiritual message for them. The second Sunday of the month is "Holy Communion Sunday" for the children, parents and teachers. Soon we will train pupils to participate in the ritual duties by giving books, voghchooyn, reading of scriptural lessons and "mahs". I am confident that this kind of participation will make Badarak more meaningful to our children. I urge parents to bring their children to church a few minutes before 10:30 am regularly every Sunday.

Guest clergymen participating in our services have been the Rev. Fr. Arten Ashjian, the Rev. Fr. Garabed Kochakian, the Very Rev. Fr. Haigazoun Najarian and Deacon Hratch Tchilingirian.

With moderate consistency, we have devoted a Sunday in the month, usually the first, to "question and answer" period, in lieu of sermon. The response to this way of religious instruction has been very satisfactory. Occasionally, representatives from the Diocese or members of our parish have been invited to address our congregation at the conclusion of Badarak on subjects concerning aid to Armenia or the Diocese.

On November 7, we honored our Senior Deacon, John Vakassian, on the occasion of his 91st birthday, when a message from the Primate was read and John was given the opportunity to share the wisdom of his life's experience. He was then congratulated by the parishioners and a birthday cake supplied by the parish council was enjoyed by all. He is truly a model for faithful church attendance. The rank of our Deacons was augmented by the welcome addition of Deacon Vahan Kouyoumdjian (M.D.), who is doing his internship in psychiatry at Westchester County Medical Center in Valhalla.

My deep appreciation to all our deacons and altar servers, our choirmaster, organists and choir members, several of whom travel long distances to participate in our worship services. May their service and proximity to the altar add blessings upon them and their families.

During 1993, it has been my privilege and duty to administer the following liturgical services: 10 baptisms, 1 adult chrismation, 5 weddings and 12 funerals.

II CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS

Church organizations in our parish meet only when they have functions planned, rather than on regular monthly basis. They are given guidance to include in their programs religious, educational, social and service activities. Through their various functions, they develop a stronger sense of comraderie and Christian fellowship.

The Senior A.C.Y.O.A. consists mostly of serious minded young adults in their 20's and 30's, who are ready to be given challenging responsibilities in the church community. In her responsibility as a member of the Central Council, Meline Kasparian has been coordinating the meetings. Recently they met and decided to have a "Youth Celebration Sunday" on Palm Sunday, March 27, with a dinner and program following church services.

The Junior A.C.Y.O.A., consisting of about a dozen teenagers, are in the process of clarifying their goals and wishes. Assisting them in guidance are Ara Ishkanian, Lillian Boyajian and Meline Kasparian, who are in the midst of motivating them to focus discussions on issues of interest to teens and to learn spending time with each other in fellowship, fun and service activities.

The Armenian School this year has undertaken ambitious programs under the capable leadership of Anahid Chookhachian, Principal, who has brought a new spark to the enthusiasm of the teachers, pupils and parents alike, coordinating all school related activities.

The Sunday School with its dedicated teachers and assistants continues its challenging task with Derek Kruienza as its conscientious superintendent.

Hye Steppers, a group of faithful adults enjoying learning traditional Armenian folk dances, continue to cultivate lasting fellowship amongst themselves, as they also periodically organize fundraising functions with George Guendjoian as their experienced chairman.

The 3 M's, originally initiated as Mr. & Mrs. Club, have been more active this year, focusing primarily on developing fun, funds and fellowship. They have organized a series of wine tasting events with Karen Sirabian as their competent coordinator.

The Cultural Committee under the conscientious chairmanship of George Omartian completed another successful year in promoting Armenian culture through interesting and useful programs.

The Senior Fellowship group (AVAKS) was organized this year to meet twice a month for lunch, with speakers from various walks of life, under the dedicated chairmanship of Lionel Galstaun. Presently, Avadis Sakalian has taken over the responsibility.

As of September, we have initiated a series of monthly Friday Evening Open House, taking place on the second Friday of the month with dinner and a talk program, intended to introduce qualified members of our parish to make presentations on their specialized knowledge or hobby. A committee of 5 headed by Norayr Ohanian coordinates the evenings, where attendance and the quality of the programs have been very gratifying.

Our Women's Guild is experiencing an unplanned recess until it reorganizes once again of assuming its traditional role of being a "church back-bone" organization. The time and the need are here for the women of this parish to come together and pledge their time and talent to become the most supportive and reliable church group.

It is our hope that before we even begin to enjoy more adequate facilities in our new church complex in a couple of years, our church organizations will assume greater enthusiasm and challenge to help our parish life become even more vibrant and enjoyable.

We have always maintained sentiments of praise for our choir members, choir director and altar servers. This year, we have not only augmented our choir but extended its activities to diocesan functions by participating in workshops and regional musical performances. Thanks to Raffi Sevadjan, we are enjoying noticeable improvement in our choir. We are also continuing our on-going training program for altar servers.

III EDUCATIONAL

Our church's educational programs are imparted both through formal programs as well as informal occasions.

The formal programs for our children are dispensed in the Armenian and Sunday Schools, where in addition to knowledge about our Christian faith and culture, the students are exposed to a sense of ethno-religious identity. Adults are offered the opportunity to study and practice our mother tongue through the innovative teaching methods of Anahid Chookhachian. Another series of talks and discussions took place in a course on "Daily Issues & Problems in the Light of the Bible", with the participation of qualified clerical and lay instructors, some from our parish, to an aggregate audience of 45 participants. This was a stimulating way to learn about the teachings of the Bible on challenging issues of our time. In addition, we have given educational talks on Sundays after Badarak.

Informal occasions have presented themselves for teaching our Christian faith and the traditions of our church during baptisms, weddings, funerals, home blessings and other visitations.

Our traditional Lenten dinners once again presented stimulating and interesting educational programs.

We have continued to use our parish newsletter HOPE and the monthly BULLETINS as additional vehicles of imparting useful instructions and interesting news.

IV COMMUNAL SERVICES

On diocesan level, I have been a part of an outreach program to assist the mother church in Armenia to meet the growing spiritual needs of our people there to be enlightened, strengthened and comforted. Last summer, like the previous summer, I used my vacation time to go to Armenia for 3 weeks on a religious mission, as a part of the programs of HAVAD Committee. From June 23 to July 15, a group of 8 priests and lay people joined with 16 others from Armenia, travelled from village to village in 4 dioceses in the homeland to preach the Gospel, pray, bless homes and cemeteries of the fallen fedayins, baptize children and adults, visit schools, hospitals, work places and prisons. In addition, we distributed medicine, clothing, food, candles and financial aid, including money collected from our own parish.

In 1993, our parish sent 1,059 cartons of clothing and food to Armenia as part of the humanitarian aid from our Diocese through the generous help of the State Department, which made available 3 ships to transport over 700 containers. A group of concerned members of our parish had the satisfaction of expressing their genuine patriotic sentiments in a tangible fashion.

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 personal calls. People seek prayers and benefit from these visits.

Again 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 U.S., in addition to finding and supplying household furniture and other items.

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 challenges of life.

Service is the basic and ultimate act of faith and dedication. It is particularly acceptable in God's sight when it is rendered with joy and humility. Our parish has always had its share of devoted servants who have given "above and beyond" the call of duty and contributed to the growth of the parish one way or another, morally or materially.

While God rewards with many blessings the efforts of all who, as good stewards, offer their time, talent and treasure for the well-being and progress of the church, and while all such people have our unreserved gratitude and appreciation, I wish to name the heads of various groups (not mentioned before in this report) who have worked diligently for the financial as much as intangible growth of our church in 1993.

We ask God's blessings upon Chairman Lionel Galstaun and members of the Parish Council, Chairman Ed Essayan and members of the Building Committee, Chairman Ara Momjian and members of the Fund-raising Committee, Chairman Richard Papalian and members of the Stewardship Committee, Chairman Shahen Guiragossian and the Celebration Raffle Committee, Chairman Michael Guroian and members of the Picnic Committee, as well as the 4 volunteer members of our office staff, Margaret Brophy, Elmas Davidian, Martha Gurahian and Gale Perzigian.

After 20 years of efficient bookkeeping service - a true labor of love - Elmas resigned and two months ago the Parish Council hired Nazik Kayekjian as part-time bookkeeper, working on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Thus, the church office will be attended everyday, Monday thru Friday.

In closing, a few reminders:

Our Sunday worship begins with a morning service at 10:00 am, Badarak at 10:15 am.

Membership dues for 1994 is \$60 per person and dues are due before December 31, 1994.

To meet the annual budget of the church, each one of us needs to contribute generously to the Stewardship Pledge Program

Each family should be prepared to make a commitment for the construction of the new church complex by making a pledge on the day of the Complimentary Fundraising Banquet on May 1, 1994.

In three months, it will be 20 years since my ordination to the priesthood. While my service to the church preceded in other parishes and extended in other parts of the Diocese, I consider Soorp Hagop Church my home, my parish and my school. I have been challenged to learn and grow during the past 20 years as I have attempted to teach and to give. I thank you all for enriching my life and for giving me the pleasure of serving the Lord by serving you. You have always been included in my prayers and spiritual care.

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