

## PASTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT - 1995

This year I will digress from my practice of presenting to the Parish Assembly a report of my pastoral activities of the year just completed as related to the four major categories of the parish life -- spiritual/liturgical, educational/cultural, administrative/organizational and service. Instead, I will give you a birdseye view of the phenomenal and significant milestone activities and growth we have had for the last 15 years, since we moved here in Purchase. To do this, I have read the 15 year issues of our parish newsletter HOPE.

It goes without saying, as the saying goes "we've come a long way". They used to call us "baby parish", but over the years we have grown to steady and sturdy maturity. We can consider ourselves an experienced and vigorous parish with the attributes of a mature young adult. Here now are some facts and figures, as well as the people involved, as we have evolved from where we were in 1980 to where we are now.

### SPIRITUAL/LITURGICAL

The present converted church structure was blessed, the altar consecrated and the parish church was named Soorp Hagop by the then Primate, Archbishop Torkom Manoogian with Mr. Suren D. Fesjian serving as gnahayr. On the following day, June 8, 1980, the first Badarak was celebrated by the Primate.

As early as our first year here, we initiated special programs to enhance the congregation's understanding and appreciation of our Badarak by occasionally conducting "Narrated Badaraks", "Demonstrated Badaraks", slide explanations and special educational programs analyzing parts of the Divine Liturgy. As a result, I feel our congregation has become a more participating congregation than spectator. Sermons have been devoted to explaining the Bible, liturgy, lives of Saints, current moral issues and ethical problems and the spiritual needs of the parish. In addition to my sermons and explanations, we have heard messages from archbishop, priests, deacons, seminarians (including women graduates of our seminary) and even some qualified lay people.

Additionally, to respond to parishioners' questions and queries, otherwise not addressed in regular sermons, we initiated a monthly question and answer program in lieu of sermons. This program, while not always kept at a monthly pace, has proved of interest and benefit to our congregation. The growth of the spiritual life of a parish can be measured significantly by the number and frequency of holy communion receivers. We have registered progress in this respect.

Altar servers training on-going programs have continually kept a good supply of servers at the altar. In 1983, two deacons were ordained in our church -- Deacon John Vakassian and Deacon Mark Kapikian, who still continue their participation in our worship services. It is heart-warming to welcome back on the altar young men trained with us, who return from college or trips from time to time, and find their places at the altar.

For the last 15 years, Raffi Sevadjian as our Choir Director has enhanced the rendition of the choir parts with his training and sonorous voice.

## EDUCATIONAL/CULTURAL

As early as 1980, we had a theater performance sponsored by the Armenian School, called "Ser Teh Geragoor". We have continued on regular basis our children's Armenian Schools and Sunday Schools, following the diocesan programs of education and training for teachers. We have always been fortunate to have dedicated teachers and superintendents in both schools, some of whom are serving for over 15 years.

In addition to adult Armenian language and literature classes for beginners and intermediates, we had even initiated a class to teach English to newly arrived Armenians in 1980.

Cultural and educational programs have abounded on series of literary and historical subjects, taught by me and guest lecturers. Some prominent guest personalities participating in such lecture or panel discussion programs have been Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan of blessed memory, Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, Bishop Avak Asadourian, Prof. James Russell and Prof. Peter Cowe, both from Columbia University, musicologist Sahan Arzrouni, oudist George Mgrdichian, actor Michael Kermoyan, poetess Diana Der Hovanessian, art critic Shahan Khachadourian and others. We have organized recitals, concerts, talent shows and have donated English books on Armenians to local colleges and libraries.

Bible classes have been conducted with the participation of guest clergymen on the content and the message of the Holy Scriptures. My close association with St. Nersess Seminary as its former Dean and an instructor, has facilitated the participation of other teachers and students in various educational and cultural programs, in addition to taking part in our liturgical services.

In 1987, we instituted Pastor's Annual Seminar, a day long unique program designed to deepen the knowledge of parish council members about the faith and practice of our church. In the subsequent years, parish council members of neighboring Armenian churches also participated in these stimulating programs.

Our parish newsletter HOPE has served as a vehicle of education, information and enrichment, as well as a record of the continuing and constant growth of our parish.

In the last two years, we have actively participated in the diocesan designed observance for "The Year of the Armenian Family", "The Year of the Bible", and this year we participate in the "Year of the Youth". Recently, we initiated an effort to rejuvenate our Senior ACYOA group. Consequently we have a notable increase of involved young adults participating in the preparation for the forthcoming Palm Sunday Banquet and other events.

## ORGANIZATIONAL/ADMINISTRATIVE

Our church organizations have always had educational and cultural programs as part of their activities, thus adding to the knowledge and growth of their members. They have participated in diocesan and regional workshops, seminars, retreats and other educational programs. They have sponsored and attended Lenten Dinner-program - worship series, lectures, musicals, meditations, art displays, retreats, conferences, panel discussions and other cultural and educational programs.

Many of our Armenian School and Sunday School pupils have attended St. Vartan camp sessions. Teenagers and college students have participated in St. Nersess Summer Conferences and have matured in their religious knowledge and Christian commitment.

Some of the firsts in 1980 were: The first appreciation picnic was hosted by the Parish Council honoring the choir members and the teachers of the Armenian and Sunday Schools. With some hesitation, the use of the pool was made available to our parishioners. The first picnic on the new church grounds was attended by about 500 people. Berge Derdarian was the chairman. The first get-away weekend soon after we moved here was organized by Mary Azarian and Grace Cassidy. An enjoyable and successful program. The first annual bazaar on the new church grounds was chaired by George and Elmas Davidian. The first New Year's Eve party was sponsored by the newly formed Men's Club with Malcolm Shadoian chairing the party with his infectious enthusiasm.

In 1980, the annual membership dues was only \$25 per person and there were only 87 members registered. We now have 188 members, soon to be increased to 200, and annual dues are only \$60 per person far less than the dues of some sister churches, where the accepted membership dues are \$100. In 1980 most people put in the collection plate one dollar or more. I understand 15 years later and a growing inflation, many people still put one dollar in the plate! While the number of the stewardship pledging families has increased along with the general revenue from the pledges, the church still expects one third of its income to be realized from these pledges, we need more families who will commit themselves more fully to contribute to the growth of our church.

The Rug Sale was successfully initiated by Garo Bashian, who for several years continued the venture with very satisfactory results. The first annual Parish Assembly at our new church was chaired by Martha Gurahian with Ara Ishkanian serving as Secretary.

In charge of the church groups were: Armenian School Committee, Anita Wolohojian; Sunday School, Diane Davidian; Women's Guild, Grace Bozian; ACYOA Srs, Laura Boghosian; ACYOA Jrs, Linda Derdarian; the Avak Group, Aghavny Sahagian.

Parish Council chairmen have been since 1980: Ed Essayan, Ara Shimshidian, Jack Hachigian, Martha Gurahian, Ara Momjian and Lionel Galstaun. Representing our parish at Diocesan Assemblies have been Ed Dorian, Vincent Gurahian, John Wolohojian, Lionel Galstaun and Ara Ishkanian. The Parish Council initiated an annual award, later named as St. James Award, given annually to members of the parish who had distinguished themselves for their dedicated and continued service. The recipients of this award have been, in alphabetical order: Garo Bashian, John Boyajian, Anahid Chookhachian, George & Elmas Davidian, Ann D. Boghosian, Edward & Anita Essayan, Lionel Galstaun, Martha Gurahian, Michael Guroian, Yerezgin Dawn Kasparian and John Vakassian.

Members of various church organizations participated in helping Armenia after the 1988 earthquake. Of particular mention are the following who hastened to Armenia to distribute food and clothing: George Leylegian, Harry Keleshian and Avadis Sakalian. With other related benevolent missions, time was spent in the homeland by Jennifer Gurahian, Krikor Melikian and Judge Vincent Gurahian.

Aside from food and clothing, responding to the need for spiritual nourishment through the Diocesan HAVAD Committee, preaching and instructional missions were organized and participated in by me several times. It has been a great spiritual reward to be part of a missionary venture in various parts of Armenia in teaching, preaching and counseling ministry to hundreds of adults and children in our homeland.

Pastoral counseling and psychology being my academic study and experience, it has been my privilege to offer spiritual support and guidance to individuals and families in their times of need, as part of my pastoral ministry.

Ed Essayan and George Davidian had an important rôle in the acquisition of 2 Lincoln Lane. About 2 years ago, during the purchase of our new property at the corner of Hutchinson Parkway and North Street, again Ed Essayan as the pro tem Building Committee Chairman and Zaven Tachdjian as advisor, played a prominent role in the speedy and effective acquisition of the land and reducing the purchase price by \$250,000 because of a segment of the land being declared "wet land". The parish is grateful to them, as it is to George Davidian, who for several years before that chaired the Building Committee with dedication.

Our present church was converted to a house of worship with the help of many people who gave freely of their time and skills for countless hours under the chairmanship of George Davidian. They will always be remembered for their labor of love, as will others for their respective services and donations.

Ed and Alice Kalaydjian of Kalaydjian Pontiac in Bedford, twice donated automobiles for raffle, netting a handsome income to our church.

Certain individuals from our church have rendered services that go beyond the limits of our parish and have contributed considerably to the financial and/or moral well-being of the Diocese. They bring honor to the community and to our parish. Most prominent among them is our gnkahayr and benefactor Mr. Suren D. Fesjian, who for many years as the Chairman of the Armenian Church Endowment Fund, has been managing its portfolis, increasing many fold the assets of the ACEF and the help to worthy causes, including annual revenue to our church from his own fund. Among other honors, Mr. Fesjian is also the recipient of the St. Gregory the Illuminator distinguished medal given to him by our late beloved Catholicos.

Judge Vincent Gurahian has been capably serving as the Chairman of the Diocesan Council for over a decade. Vincent also participated, along with Fr. Arten Ashjian in the election of the new Catholicos of all Armenians.

Lionel Galstaun has served on the Committees of several diocesan projects.

Apkar Omartian has served as chairman of the Diocesan Committee of Architects, advising the Primate and the Diocesan Council on the architectural plans of proposed Armenian churches in the Diocese.

St. James is also proud of Michelle Ekizian, the winner of several national and international composition awards, whose commissioned compositions have been played under the auspices of the Diocese as well as in wider professional musical stages and circles. She claims to have received knowledge and inspiration for some of her Armenian compositions from our own church.

In 1995, on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the genocide, our parish participated with a walk-a-thon with the children, attendance at a memorial concert, religious observance and with the project of writing a book on "Growing Up Armenian in America: A Celebration of our Cultural Heritage", which is being coordinated by Louise Yacobian Garofalo.

Also in 1995, our Women's Guild, after a period of inactivity, was rejuvenated into a dynamic group, ready to serve the church any way possible, under the joint chairmanship of Elizabeth Derderian and Noem Dodakian.

This is also the year when we initiated monthly Family Badarak where Sunday School pupils get further acquainted with our services through active participation.

Our parish registry shows 13 baptisms, 4 weddings and 4 funerals during 1995.

To make this report complete, I extend my heartfelt thanks to all members who have played key roles and contributed significantly to the well being and growth of our parish. They are: Elmas Davidian, Lionel Galstaun, Michael Guroian, Paul Keyishian, Ara Monjian, Richard Papalian Gale Perzigian, all members of the Parish Council, the altar servers, choir members, Armenian and Sunday School superintendents and teachers, the Cultural Committee, the chairpersons and members of various church organizations and committees and all volunteer workers, too many to be mentioned individually.

While we are not always able to give the names of each and everyone for their help, but we are grateful to them all and believe that God sees their services. In our parish the services of all, who contribute one way or another to the spiritual, educational, social, physical and communal life of the parish, are greatly appreciated. We hope everyone who can, will offer of themselves in a noble spirit of Christian volunteerism. May God grant all and their families good health, happiness and other blessings.

Significant progress has been made in our building project. With great anticipation and eagerness, we all wait for the ground breaking to take place in a few months.

Unending work lies ahead of us, above and beyond the construction of the church complex. Before we even move into the new church, I repeat what I've said before...that we must strive to become a church before we build the church. To this end, we need to join efforts to increase the number of participants in the choir, the Armenian School, the Sunday School, the ACYOA, the Women's Guild, the stewardship pledging members, the voting members, the Bible and culture class attendants as well as all church functions. We also hope to re-form a Junior ACYOA and get a junior choir ready before the consecration of the new Soorp Hagop Church.

In closing, I pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to inspire us all to become more active participants in making our parish even more dynamic and vibrant for the glory of God, the strengthening of our spiritual and cultural life and for the challenge of setting a good example and model for our children to follow.

  
Rev. Dr. Karekin Kasparian