

As 1975 comes to an end, I complete one part-time, and two full terms of pastoring the Holy Ascension Armenian Church in Bridgeport.

Since the establishment of this church some 45 years ago, a lot of service devotion, witnessing and togetherness has been experienced. Hard and difficult days have come and gone, leaving us with cherished memories, past glories and hard earned achievements.

Today, as we stand at the threshold of a progressive, prosperous, safe and secure new era, we feel, somehow, saddened and disheartened. The questions come to our minds HAVE WE DILIGENTLY CARRIED ON THIS TRADITION, ADHERED TO OUR PREDECESSORS EXAMPLES - HAVE WE AS A COMMUNITY MATURED BY THE MEASURE OF 45 YEARS EXPERIENCE

As much as it has been a pleasure to work with many devoted stewards of this church, worship together, and enjoy the friendship, goodwill and respect, as well as a happy relationship with many of you, yet, an inner voice tortures me and reminds me of our failures.

We realize that we have not done enough for our children, our youth, we have not done enough for our spiritual reformation, for our personal commitments, organizational life, as a devout and model family of God.

We have been lax all the way, shirking our responsibilities and thus, doing disservice with our indifferences.

This is the time for Annual Church Checkup! This means examining the overall health of our parish.

Your pastor will not tell you anything new, that you already do not know. We will report about the same statistics, the same promises, hopes and aspirations - will talk about the bright side of situations, will thank you, praise you, yet has to be utterly cautious to talk about your shortcomings, pitfalls, disillusionings, ill feelings, and irresponsibilities that keeps crippling the health of our parish.

Unfortunately the prophetic spirit of scolding and chastising the "public enemies" who affect the spiritual growth and progress, the unity and the happiness of our community, cannot be practiced.

It is "check up" time - one sided check up, indeed! In my estimation, the examination of activities and behaviour will only be complete and beneficial when it is done from both sides - you and me, as pastor and congregation!

Now, your pastor will report and when he is through, he wishes he could have some answers to the questions as to why this congregation (exceptions always honored) has not been responsive, attentive, active and involved. To the best of our ability, we have struggled to show you the way and by all means, to stimulate your interest.

- All year around, the pastor has conducted services, Celebrated Badarak with harmonious singing of the Choir and Deacons and the Organist - preached in both languages - held Services every Thursday night during Lent - and on many other festive occasions -
- has Baptized five of your children, married one couple, and buried nine of your beloved ones.

- Visited 63 sick individuals in various hospitals, 28 in their homes, and 32 others on miscellaneous occasions.
- Blessed 28 homes and blessed 13 graves.
- Attended to all office chores, clerical, management, inquiries, issued certificates and directives, sent all occasion cards, prepared "in lieu of flowers" and "Yughakin" lists, and even attended to Janitorial responsibilities.
- Your "Hoviv" has given Pastoral counseling to 17 of your brother's and sister's, with various family and personality problems - helped them in times of distress and sorrows.
- Your Pastor, with the help of Yeretzgin Grace, edited, printed, and dispatched to you, as well as to a total list of 800 addresses, mailed to interested and influential people throughout the United States and abroad, the church bulletin "VOICE", comprised of an average 34 pages each issue.
- Aside from the regular issues of "Voice" the pastor sent interim pamphlets, (37 in number) concerning our organizational activities, keeping our parishioners informed fully.
- The pastor has presided over all the Parish Council meetings, Membership and special, as well as Executive and general meetings of all our organizations, without fail!
- Has kept an up-to-date mailing list and a filing system, added 53 new prospective families to our addresses, thus preparing ground for a concerted Membership Drive.
- Has reopened the Armenian Language School - initiated the Armenian History and Culture Class for adults, prepared work sheets for each week's lessons, and systematically prepared and delivered lectures on Armenian History and Culture, to an average number of 73 participants in both classes.
- During the year, has helped organize and produce various affairs, such as "Vartanantz", "Nahadagatz" "Mother's Day" "Name Day" "Cultural Month" as well as the Three Day Bazaar, and M.C'd most of these presentations.
- Devoted lots of time and effort, trying to locate a suitable ground for a new church building and community center.
This continuous experience can almost earn him a Connecticut State Real Estate License...

My dear friends - your pastor would have been more effective and our affairs and undertakings would have been more encouraging and productive, if we could have only enjoyed your full hearted support and cooperation in these endeavors.

I am reminded of the parable in which God extends an invitation to people of all walks of life to attend a banquet which He has prepared for their enjoyment, but all of them refuse to accept with various lame excuses. It would have been a great and rewarding affair, if all had accepted to attend. I leave the matter in your hands - to examine your hearts and minds and see exactly where YOU stand!

You regularly receive the churches open invitation to come and participate. This year we will be celebrating the 45th Anniversary of our church. Let us record some achievements and involve ourselves in order to justify our calling as conscious Armenians, faithful Christians and responsible individuals.

My dear friends, this is MY checkup of one year's toil, struggle and experience. This is My story! What's yours?



Rev. Levon Arakelian
Pastor