

Feb. 12, 1989

PASTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT

It is hard for me to believe that two weeks ago, I started my sixth year of service as the Pastor of our 58 year old Holy Ascension Parish.

Together with the Parish Council, I am charged with providing leadership to this Parish and responsible for the spiritual life and work of this congregation.

I accept my responsibilities with total commitment to our Lord, the Armenian Church and her people.

With the help of God and the services and support of our faithful people, we have completed another successful year.

In general, I am happy to see that the church attendance has gone up, the number of members have increased (in spite of having lost many members in recent years), the number of children who are attending our Sunday and Armenian Schools have increased, the number of actively involved parishioners in our Parish life has also increased.

This is all good news. And all this, because of you and your commitment to our Lord and our beloved Church.

1988 was full of many religious, cultural, educational, social and fund-raising activities. I will not mention each and everyone of them here as I did in my last year's report. I leave that to you to look into your last year's calendar of events. The two activities that were cancelled were the Armenian School's dance and the fund-raising dinner because of the Armenian earthquake.

In 1988, I have presided over 100 organizational and committee meetings and I have made the same amount of visits to my parishioners (to members and non-members) to the elderly, to the sick, and visits for specific purposes, such as to counsel, to bless homes, to give communion to shut-ins, etc.

I have performed 8 Baptisms, 9 Weddings and 2 Funerals in my church.

I have attended four Trumbull Clergy meetings and had one Ecumenical Requiem Service for the earthquake victims in our church.

Outside of my Parish, I have attended the following functions:

- Feb: - Ghevontiantz Feast Day Celebration at St. Leon's Church, Fairlawn, N.J.
- April: - On April 2, I participated at the memorial program and service at the State Capitol, in Hartford, where the Governor also spoke about the Genocide.
- Attended Fr. Guregh Kalfayian's funeral at Holy Cross Armenian Church, New York
- May: - Attended Clergy Conference and the Diocesan Assembly in Cambridge, Mass.
- Attended a graduation ceremony at St. Nersess
- Participated in the Choir workshop in Westchester, N.Y.
- Attended the Choir Associations Annual Workshop in New Britain
- Visited St. James Armenian Church in Watertown, and Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Cambridge with Bedros Nahabedian, for a fact finding mission, to learn more about their activities and youth programs. We met with the Parish Council Chiarman, one of the Pastors, church architect, caretaker and secretaries.

Besides all the above, at least on 3-4 different occasions, I have visited our Diocese, met with the Primate, vicar and have been at the different departments and bookstore.

In 1988 we have had successes and failures.

First our successes - PAINTINGS - last year at this time we had 3 donors for the Church Paintings. Today, I am happy to inform you that we have 10 donors for the 10 church paintings. Hopefully all the paintings will be ready by the end of 1989. I thank all the donors for understanding my plan and purpose and for their generosity. When the time comes, their names will be announced.

CLASSROOMS - as of today all the small classrooms have donors. Each will have memorial plates on its door. We still have the large classroom and the hall. If anyone wants to donate either one in memory of his or her beloved one's, can see me. The hall will be named after the donor's name, (or his/her families name).

For those of you who don't know, I must say that this is not a new idea, many churches have done it before us, including our Diocese. In this way we hope to raise the major part of the renovation expenses. When the time comes, we will honor all our donors.

HALL RENOVATION - speaking about the hall renovation, which indeed was a big project for our small parish, I thank you for supporting us by passing what was proposed to you during last year's Parish Assembly. Here I must mention the name of one person, and I mention his name with great appreciation for being in-charge of this difficult project and handling all the detailed and specific decisions, of course with the co-operation of the Council members. That person was Shavarsh Papazian, our treasurer. Thank you Shavarsh.

PURCHASE OF THE LAND - in 1988, we bought a piece of land adjacent to our church property which was for sale for a very attractive price. This will give us a second entrance to our back 5 acres of property. Therefore, I express my appreciation to you for making the wise decision to purchase the land during last year's assembly.

I thank Nazareth (Hoagy) Azarian, Mardy Azarian for helping in the paper work and last but not least Bedros Nahabedian for bringing the property to my attention and doing some research at the Trumbull Town Hall about this piece of land.

NEW COPYING MACHINE - I am thankful to Mrs. Sylvia Zotian for donating towards the new copying machine. Similarly, I thank Aram Tellalian for sending us an amount from a special fund which we partly used for the above purchase.

TWO NEW VESTMENTS - I thank Mrs. Heghine Tashjian for donating 2 new sets of vestments to our Church.

In 1988 we had some failures too:

NEW DIRECTORY - we completed our work with the directory and mailed the entire up-to-date list of our community to the "New England Church Directory, Ltd". Unfortunately, it was never printed by them because of business failure and bankruptcy. We pursued every channel to put pressure on him to respect our agreement. We were told by our lawyers that we cannot do much in this case, because there was not monetary payment involved from our part. I thank Barbara Bousian for taking this responsibility upon herself and doing her part. I still feel that we must publish a new Parish directory.

In our last year's assembly, I mentioned to you how Peter Finkbeiner, Trumbull's Town Engineer promised me to give us the exact place of a street that could be named an Armenian name, ARMENIA or MT. ARARAT. In March of 1988, I visited Mr. Finkbeiner at the Town Hall to see where our request was standing. He told me neither now or in the near future a street will be available simply because there aren't any. He apologized to me for making that kind of promise. I guess, I, in turn should apologize to you.

PLEDGES - As you know, last year new pledge cards were mailed to all our parishioners and friends, who live in our community and benefit from the services of our church. Those cards were mailed to over 250 families. According to our 87 records, only 68 families pledged.

Last year 97 families pledged, almost doubling the total income from pledges.

I thank all those families who are pledging and also the committee members, Mardy Azarian, Richard Kalfaian and Archie Misakian for their services in this field.

In 1988, we collected approximately \$20,000 from pledges. Later when the treasurer presents our 89 budget, you'll see that we are projecting \$40,000 in pledges.

I know that some of you immediately will think that this is an unrealistic amount. But if only 200 families pledge (out of the 270) \$300 a year or a dollar a day (over a 10 month period, excluding July and August), we can easily reach and surpass that \$40,000.

I strongly believe that the time has come for us to explain to all non-pledging parishioners that we cannot run and keep this church without their full participation.

Unfortunately, we still have many who never pledge and others who never increase. I hope that we all understand the importance of pledges and also feel our Christian obligation towards our church. I am shocked sometimes to hear statements like this: I am not a member, why should I pledge. The Pastor is available not only to members but also to non-members. In fact, speaking from my experience, I serve more to non-members than to actual dues-paying members. They too benefit from our church services, activities, lectures, schools and receive regularly our newsletter and other mailings.

A few words about our youth

As I said in my last year's report, I will repeat the same this year. More than the help of the Diocese, Pastor or Parish Council, we need the help of our parents.

Yes, the help of a concerned father, the love of a mother to bring their sons and daughters to our and their church services and functions.

To guarantee and secure our survival, we need to bring and teach our youth. We love our young adults. They are ours, our present and future.

For that purpose I invited Douglas Tashjian, the ACYOA Executive Secretary last June, who met with our ACYOA Seniors. Our Chapter was approved by the Primate.

In 1989, I am planning to spend one day a week with our young adults and teenagers, to teach them history, religion, and Badarak. They will be divided into two groups. 10-14 in one group and 15 and up in the other. To know the words and music of Badarak is not enough, one must learn also the meaning to understand the whole service. Hopefully from these groups will come forward our new Altar servers, choir members, teachers and why not future council members. Parents, help us by bringing them, so that we can help them.

CHURCH MORTGAGE - It is encouraging to see that our church mortgage is reduced to \$130,000, because of your generosity and support. This coming May, we are planning to celebrate the 58th Anniversary of our Church and have the fund-raising then. The Building Committee will be asking you to pledge to the Building Fund for over a 3 year period. I strongly feel that this could be our last fund-raising if we all pledge.

Let us do our best to attend that dinner and pledge our share.

I know very well that, some of our parishioners are tired of us asking them to pledge here and there, to give for this purpose or that. I assure you, we too are tired of asking. For that purpose, with the approval of the Parish Council, I have formed a committee to do some research and find ways and means to put this church financially on a sound foundation. The committee members are Bedros Nahabedian, Harry Tarpinian, Nazareth Azarian, Carmen Cartiglia and Vartan Vartanian. The committee has met once and at this time they have nothing to report. Hopefully in the near future they will come up with good ideas and plans.

CHURCH SCHOOLS - I am very happy to see that our church schools are doing their mission successfully. This, because of the dedicated superintendents Maureen Najarian, Linda McGann, Salpi Tokatlian, Maria Agulian and all the other teachers who give their time and talent. I thank also June Utecht, the former superintendent of Sunday School. I thank all those who support our schools morally, financially and by their services.

CHOIR - The Choir is a very important part of our church. We wish to increase the numbers of our choir members by especially teaching and involving our young adults. Here, I thank all our choir members, Vrej Yapoujian, Chairman. Conductors Peter Kapusuzian and Charles Balian. Deacons Vrej Yapoujian, Tom Dabagian and Vartan Tarpinian. Organists Virginia Kalfaian and Rose Avakian. Also Tom Dabagian, the Secretary, for sending the reminders.

I also thank the ACYOA advisors Tom Dabagian, Kim Kasparian and Steve Avakian and the Chairpersons Maral Kehkejian and Mèchelle Kasparian.

Although in 1988 we did not have Women's Guild officers, I thank the following for their services. Eleanor Zysk, for being in charge of the coffee hours; Nicky Tarajian, for ordering the paper products; Sara Der Megerdichian, for organizing the Michink dinner; Rose Gadikian for being the treasurer; Felice Avakian and Arshaloos Dinihanian for making the church bread, and all the others who helped on different occasions.

I also thank all the Cultural Committee members and the Chairman, Ralph Trapasso. Surpazan's lecture about Gomidas Vartabed was very inspiring and educational.

My appreciation and thanks also to the Building Committee members, Edward Jevarjian, Chairman and Richard Khachian, Treasurer.

Special thanks to all those who helped in the typing and putting together (colating) and mailing our church newsletter Ani, namely Margaret Azarian and Helen Misakian, typists; Hermine Azarian, Peter & Agnes Kapusuzian, Sonia Trapasso and Margie Malkasian. Also thanks to Peter Kapusuzian and Herbert Avakian to taking the Ani and all the other mailings to the post office.

Thanks to all the Rug Sale Committee members and their Chairman, Shavarsh Papazian.

Thanks to all the Bazaar Committee members especially Co-Chairmen Herbert Avakian and Stanley Zysk and Treasurer Richard Najarian.

Thanks to the Dance Committee members, Nicky Tarian, Virginia Kalfaian, Douglas Trapasso and Helen Tashjian.

I thank Dr. Berdje Harabedian, our Diocesan Delegate, for representing our Parish at the Diocesan Assembly in Cambridge, Mass.

Also thanks to our so-called church maintainance people namely Richard Kalfaian, Stanley Zysk, Herbert Avakian, Harry Tashjian, Shavarsh Papazian and Peter Kapusuzian. They always have extended their helping hands whenever we needed them.

I thank our social worker, Margaret Manugian for morally helping our parishioners and friends.

I also thank all the parishioners who sponsored coffee hours in 1988.

Special thanks to Richard Kalfaian, Perry Shegirian for dis-connecting and re-connecting or installing the new organ in our Church. We are thankful to the donor also. These two have saved us \$1,200 by doing the job by themselves. I thank Mardy Azarian for arranging the mover and Virginia Kalfaian for all her help.

(1) x I thank the entire community, the Parish Council, and my 10th Anniversary Committee members and it's Co-Chairperson's, Connie Kasparian and Margaret Azarian for all that was done, on the occasion of my 10th Anniversary into the Holy Order of Priesthood.

Once again I thank you all for the beautiful Cross. It is a constant reminder to me that I am called to serve and not to be served. And once again, I assure you all, that's what I'll do, and that's why I am here.

The Bible says the Good Shepherd must leave the 99 and go after the lost one.

In the Diaspora, in our communities, many times it's just the opposite. We leave the one aside and go after the 99 lost ones. Just for this reason, I am hopeful that in 1989, we will have our part-time secretary and caretaker. These will lighten my burden and give more time to do what I am called to do. In this, I am very thankful to the Council members for understanding me and supporting me.

In spite of that 1988 was in general, a good year for our Parish, it was indeed a bad year for our people in Armenia. The Karapagh movement, their just cause and demand and the rejection by the Central authorities left our people emotionally and psychologically in a very depressed mood. Although they did not give up their hopes and dreams.

The Dec. 7th earthquake was another tragedy for our people that opened new wounds. The government might be able to rebuild those destroyed areas, cities, towns and villages in four years but psychological wounds cannot be healed, not even in 40 years. We will continue to do our best to help our brothers/sisters, who were the victims of this unexpected tragic event

Here I thank all our Earthquake Relief Committee members for raising over \$100,000 within 50 days and for all other fund-raising activities that they are planning to do. I thank the Chairman, Carmen Cartiglia, Vice-Chairman, Lionel Ketchian and the Treasurers Margaret Azarian and Richard Kalfaian.

Fortunately, the Karapagh Movement and the earthquake brought our people together and closer to their homeland and roots. Our church leaders came together in Etchmiadzin and New York, for the first time in 45 years.

My report will not be complete if I forget to mention all the members of our Parish Council who provided leadership with the Pastor to this community in 1988.

Archie Misakian, Chairman, I'm thankful to him for his support and input in our church matters. Mardy Azarian, Vice-Chairman, Shavarsh Papazian, Treasurer, Herbert Avakian, Secretary, Margaret Azarian, Corresponding Secretary, Richard Kalfaian, Ass't Treasurer, and Connie Kasparian, Advisor.

I thank them all for their councils, wise decisions, services and for attending our church services almost every Sunday. Special thanks to Mardy Azarian for serving six years in the Council.

Yes, I do admit that we are still far from being the perfect Church-Parish.

We too have our weaknesses and shortcomings, but the important thing is that we tend to correct ourselves and become more and more perfect.

And this we can do only by the love of Christ and the faith of our Holy Fathers.

I thank all of you for supporting our church morally and financially and by all your unselfish services.

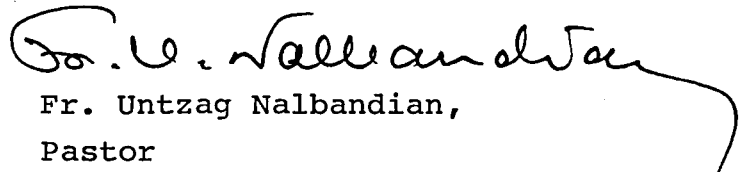
We need each one of you. Whenever you have difficulties or complaints, please see me before you see others and I'll do my best to help you.

May God bless you, your families and all your loved ones, and give you health of soul, mind and body.

I conclude my report by the words of Jesus, which he directed to his disciples and which he directs also to us today and always.

"Anyone wanting to be a leader among you, must be your servant. And if you want to be right at the top, you must serve like a slave. Your attitude must be like my own, for I, the Messiah, did not come to be served, but to serve".

Prayerfully,


Fr. Untzag Nalbandian,
Pastor