

I greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and express my joy and gratitude to you for your constant support and service.

Our church, one more year, was able to meet the spiritual, cultural, educational and social needs of our community, especially to all those who made the effort to be with us, **attend**, **participate**, **help** and be **involved** in our church's life.

Yes, it takes more than mere words, eating Armenian food in this church, to experience the reality of God's loving presence.

Every year and every day God calls us to give him real service and not lip service. I am glad to see that 1/3 of all our families **do** exactly that. We still have to work very hard to bring the others too.

St. Augustine (a 5th century Saint) once was confronted by a man who showed him his pagan idol and said,

"Here is my God, Where is yours?"

St. Augustine replied,

"I cannot show you my God because you have no eyes to see him."

To which we might add:

"We cannot show each other our God."

God revealed to us in the life and teachings and the ministry of Jesus Christ - If we have no eyes to see him, it is because of **our own** misguided notions of who God is. No doubt, that the mission of the church is first of all to help you and me to find the true God and bring you and me closer to Him. All the other things that we do are secondary.

1.

In 1995, I have fully and to the best of my ability performed my religious and pastoral duties as it is mentioned in Article 42, ABCD 43,48 of our Diocesan by-laws, which is to say:

- I celebrated 49 Badaraks, followed by a proper sermon.
- Sick visitations were made by me, whenever I was notified. (Many times more than once.)
- Counseling and/or spiritual guidance was provided to those who needed it.
- Family visitations + visitations to the elderly + shut-ins were continued.
- I have presided over almost all the organizational, and committee meetings.
- Two days a week, I have tried my best to be here at the church to provide work for the secretary - doing most of the administrative and paper work of the parish.
- In 1995, I have performed three (3) weddings, four (4) funerals, and five (5) baptisms in our church and I have participated in a wedding at a Catholic Church. All in all, nine (9) sacraments and four (4) funerals. I also performed Mary Hovhannissian's wake service at the funeral home.

This year, again, I attended out-of-parish activities such as Diocesan Council meetings in NYC; Cathedral Renovation Committee meeting in NYC; Regional Armenian Clergy meeting, NY and NJ; Cooperation Committee meeting in NYC; Trumbull Clergy meetings; Trumbull Interfaith meetings, one of which I hosted.

- Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Service.
- Together with Ct. Armenian clergy I met with Senator Dodd's staff (in Hartford) in regard to the Turkish blockade of American Assistance to Armenia.
- Attended St. James' ground-breaking ceremony.

- Attended one day seminar on Armenian Patristic literature in NYC.
- Attended St. Vartan Camp and spoke on Armenian culture.
- Accompanied our ACYOA group during their Christmas Caroling.
- Attended special meetings at the Diocese to meet and hear a guest clergy or government official from Armenia.
- Clergy Conference and Diocesan Assembly in Chelmsford, Mass.

In 1995 we had a very busy calendar of events, even though we cut a few activities such as pre-bazaar dinners, the Madagh Dinner and the Wed. night Michink dinners. In addition to our regular activities, such as the Bazaar and Picnic or Palm Sunday Dinner, we had the following:

- 1- Fr. Oshagan's Concert in our church - 80th Anniversary of the Genocide (close to 200 people attended).
- 2- Primate's and Senator Lieberman's visit to our church in June (165 attended) with Maestro Khoren Meikhanedjian conducting the choir and a workshop on the previous day.
- 3- Raffi Svajian's talk and slide presentation on his visit to Iran.
- 4- Kim Kasparian's talk and slide presentation on her visit to Armenia.
- 5- Frank and Doris Jacoby's lecture on their visit to Armenia plus Rafael Petrosian's art exhibition.
- 6- One Saturday evaluating meeting 10:00 a.m. to noon.
- 7- Commemoration of the 80th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide with a requiem service in front of our new monument followed by Madagh, donated by the Fairfield

AYF.

8- In 1995, I started to hold regular bible study classes for adults and Armenian language classes for adults. They are held every two weeks with close to 15 adults benefiting. Both classes total 2-1/2 hours.

9- Because the mini-bazaar was not as successful (financially) as the previous years, we brought a rug dealer in to sell rugs for one weekend. A net profit of \$1,500 was realized for the parish, without bothering a single parishioner.

10- I was happy to see that we were able to help the Armenian Athletes of the Special Olympics. The Parish Council and the Women's Guild spent \$700.00 to \$800.00 and bought a few things for them.

11- We recently received a letter from the Yerevan Diocese addressed to (Fr. Untzag and Nazareth Azarian (Hoki). Mr. Azarian personally delivered \$1,600.00 to that Diocese in 1994. They thanked us, our parish, for providing for fifteen (15) orphans. I would like to see that we continue to keep providing for these orphans.

We have an Armenia Fund in our parish, because the needs of Armenia will be there for the next 25 years.

Points of light in our parish in addition to our regular activities:

12- Kim Kasparian and Elisa Griego, ACYOA Srs. went to Armenia.

David Dikranian attended the Diocesan Internship Program.

Mary Day McGregor became one of our church's organists.

Heather Tarpinian and Nancy Quinn became active members of our church.

13- Pledge System - for the first time our pledge committee raised over \$24,000.00 (57 families gave the minimum of \$300.00).

14- On the occasion of the 65th anniversary I invited the Women's Guild to have a joint meeting with the parish council to discuss the burning of our church's mortgage. It was unanimously decided to raise \$50,000.00 and burn the mortgage on June 9, 1996 in the presence of our Primate. I am happy to say that within four months we raised \$27,000.00. I am sure we will be able to raise the other \$23,000 and burn the mortgage to save the church \$6,000.00 in expenses. (Margaret Manugian).

15- Last May, I asked Judy Gavoor and Heather Tarpinian to co-chair the Armenian Alphabet Monument project, after the Council's approval. The initial goal was to have 10 x \$1,000.00 benefactors. I am happy to say that we have twelve (12) as of now. This monument will be dedicated to the Youth.

16- 1996 is the year of the youth and it is the 50th anniversary of the ACYOA Youth Organization, founded by the late Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, founder, former Primate and well-known theologian of our church.

17- My '96 motto- **Նշանաբանս** "see the good, go after the youth" Three days ago I contacted some 40 young adults inviting them to attend today's event. I am happy to see some of them here today.

18- I don't believe that we are a small parish (how can we, when we have 8-900 Armenian souls). And I don't believe that we can't do this, we can't do that, we don't have money etc. Look at what we have done so far, give yourselves credit and think positive, act positive. After all this is a divine institution.

19- Our budget for 1995 is approximately \$130,000.

I am happy to say that when some of the states and the federal government and the Diocese are running in the red, our Holy Ascension parish has balanced her books for the past 12 years that I know of. And this is because of your generosity, understanding and cooperation.

I am fully aware of the hard and difficult road through which we have passed. And I also remember one our former treasurer's, Tom Garabedian's scary and negative statement in one of our parish council meetings some 7-8 years ago: "I have enough money to pay only two more weeks of our church's expenses." And this, at a time when the church mortgage was approximately \$150,000.

Glory and Thank God, today our mortgage is down to approximately \$25,000.00 and we have spent over \$100,000 for renovation projects and maintenance of our property.

I know that some paraishioners ask how do we run the church. We do a big activity/project to bring in income, cultural/spiritual nourishment and satisfaction. This is not a dying parish. Let us plan and think about the next generation also in whatever we do.

POINTS OF LIGHT

As long as we have people who would say:

- we will never let the doors of this church be closed (Sara Der Meg) there is hope!
- When you hear the youngets parish council member, a third generation American-born Armenian visit a founder of our church and bring food to her in the nursing home (Kim Kasparian), there is hope!
- When you see choir members go to NYC for choir rehearsal to sing during the Catholicos's liturgy (Hoki and Elisa), there is hope!
- When you see American born parents (Judy and Mark) bring their two children (son and

daughter) to Vehapar's liturgy and to the banquet later, there is hope!

- When you see that some of our parents are willing to send their kids to New York to see Vehapar even after the blizzard, there is hope!

- When you see a senior member of our parish, giving you real service and not lip service by giving you her \$4,000.00 to the church's mortgage fund. (Margaret Manugian), there is hope.

- When you see a retired parishioner building the back over-hang for the week to save the church \$500-600, there is hope!

- When you see the Parish Council chairman vacuum the hall or be the last person to leave after an activity (Gary Donoian) there is hope!

- Or the church secretary, Maragaret Azarian, who never leaves the office on time but works overtime every week and every day that she works, there is hope!

- Or when you see that 60-70 parishioners are willing to give to serve, to teach and bring their participation in the church service, there is hope!

- When you hear that the average participation in '95 church services was 67, there is hope!

- And last, but not least, being the Pastor of the church, and knowing very well that, in addition to my day to day responsibilities, every day my phone rings - and somebody is looking for the services of the only Armenian priest.

- Please, let no one put a tomb stone on this parish.

- Let us stop asking how, let us roll up our sleeves and do something, participate in every way we can and encourage those who don't.

POINTS OF LIGHT '96 in addition to our regular activities.

- Ordination of Tbirs (June 9).

- 65th Anniversary
- Burning of the Mortgage
- Unveiling of the Armenian Alphabet Monument
- Visit of Krimian Lyceum
- Holy Scripture Seminar
- Two one-day retreats (Saturdays during Lent)
 - 1- Teenagers
 - 2- Youth
- Every 5-6 weeks meet with our school children.
- Visit the youth, young couples, newly married families.
- Find a capable editor for the "Ani" Newsletter.

If any one of you can come up with a new or different or with better fund-raising ideas, please let us know, e.g. Judy's idea of a "Golf Tournament" could be a fund raiser. I'll bring this to the attention of the parish council.

Last but not least, today, there is a new reality out there, for us Armenians living in the diaspora. We are not alone here in Fairfield County. We are not only part of our Diocese, but also part of the Armenian nation, Armenia.

Armenia belongs to all Armenians. All Armenians belong to Armenia. Visitations to Armenia and also important, old Armenian or historically and culturally rich Armenian centers such as Jerusalem should also be on our agenda. Recently, I received such an invitation from the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem who was saying come to Jerusalem.

In conclusion, I thank each and every one of you for giving to your church your moral and

financial support.

I thank each and every organization, committees, Land Committee, teachers, deacons, altar servcers, and the choir for their previous service.

I thank the 9 parish council members for providing the leadership with the pastor in 1995.

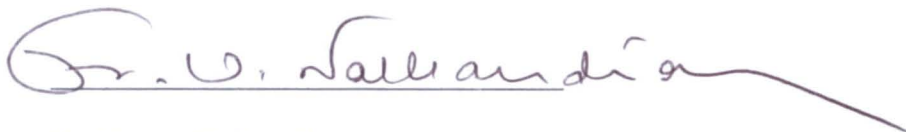
They were as follows:

- 1- Gary Donoian, Chairman, vacumns the hall!
- 2- Darwin Jamgochian, Treasurer, hours of work!
- 3- Margaret Azarian, Secretary, paid but works overtime!
- 4- Sharyn D'Urso, Vice Chairman
- 5- Richard Kalfaian, Assistant Treasurer
- 6- Garo Garabedian,
- 7- Nicky Taraian
- 8- Elsie Chaghatzbanian
- 9- Kim Kasparian

In accordance with keeping to our Parish's tradition, at this time I would like to present Garo Garabedian with a precious gift, the Holy Bible, Armenian Church's edition for serving six (6) consecutive years on the council.

May God bless you all and your loved ones. And may this year, the 65th year of our parish be the brightest in every way in the history of our parish.

Let forever live our Holy Ascension Church.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Fr. Untzag Nalbandian". The signature is written in dark ink and has a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Fr. Untzag Nalbandian
Pastor