

Pastoral Report 1978

The Holy Eucharist is the center of all our church activities and life. It is the main source of our consolation and was celebrated every Sunday except the week I attended the Clergy Conference and Diocesan General Assembly. A spiritual message relevant to the celebration of the day was given in English and in Armenian every week and also on other appropriate occasions such as weddings, funerals, baptisms, social/religious gatherings, meetings, programs, etc.

Visitations to the sick were extensive and also to shut-ins. Family visitations were done mainly to new comers to the community and also to our parishoners.

Because of the nature of my work, much time is needed for reading, writing and studying. This aspect of my ministry was greatly sacrificed due to the overwhelming workload meeting the physical and financial needs of the church and the lack of available manpower. This point will be more clear further on in this report.

During 1978 the following services were performed.....

5 - funerals; I also did a funeral service outside of our community

3 - baptisms

1 - marriage; 1 - marriage ceremony in Roanoke, Va. of non-church members; 1 - I assisted in a marriage ceremony.

I made arrangements for the celebration of and the entailing preparations for...

- (a) the five Major Feast Days and their traditional ceremonies
- (b) and other occasions that had dinner-programs such as Saint James Day and Martyr's Day

I spend an average of three hours a week seeing that the church is kept clean and in order because no one will take on that responsibility. This is in addition to that which the maintenance man does and that which Mr. Tatlian and Henry do. This time is double during the Major Feast Days such as Christmas, Assumption of Mary and Holy Cross when traditional ceremonies are held and tripled during Holy Week. The church is kept in a presentable condition at all times.

I presided over the meetings, of all the important meetings of our church organizations. Their decisions entailed responsibilities that at time I took upon myself when there was no volunteers and the work was important.

A regular reporting of the church's activities together with various donations and services appeared in the Sevan. Because of the lack of a secretary and those volunteering to do secretarial work the Sevan; General Membership Meeting notices and their postponements and other notices, records of baptisms, funerals, marriages, current inventory, and important correspondence that needed immediate attention were handled by me and also the purchasing of supplies for the office and church.

The Stained-Glass Window Project was completed except for the installation of the name-plates. This will be done in the near future. I took care of the collection of monies and payment of bills, and also all the correspondence which included acknowledgement for the donations. There was some criticism in regard to the list of donors being placed on a separate board in addition to on the window sills. This was unavoidable if just recognition was to be granted to all the donors. It was an old practice that has to be corrected. For example for over twenty-two years name-plates identifying the donors of the pews are in very conspicuous places for all to see whereas there is no identification for the donors of the chandeliers although the chandeliers are much more expensive. This is not right. I suggest that a committee be formed to look into this matter of marking of donations. I also strongly suggest that henceforth that there be no more name-plates or engraving of articles with the names of donors anywhere in the church or educational building and that all such donations be recorded in the Memorial Book at the entrance of the church. For that to be kept current it is *important* *that* someone do secretarial work.

I spoke at Grace Baptist Church and at St. Paul's Episcopal Church's Women Guild on our history and church.

I aided newcomers to our community and assisted others in seeking ways of bringing relatives to America be it by telephone calls, letter-writing, seeking jobs, medical aid, financial assistance or meeting with important ^{persons} influential in expediting there matters.

I've been counsellor and advisor to members, non-members and friends of our community in all different situations. This service in itself is an entirely seperate profession and career in itself requiring experience and special skills.

I participated in the meetings and ecumenical service held on Thanksgiving Day at Grace Baptist Church. I would like our church to be host to this event but our facilities are too small. Over 500 persons attended this year's service but it was sad to note that all the ethnic groups including ourselves were poor in attending although all of us have much to be thankful for being given the opportunity of living in this land.

I attended the Clergy Conference and Diocesan Assembly. Upon the instruction of the Primate, I presided at the opening of the Women's Conference. Together with your elected Diocesan Delegate, we submitted our joint report to the community in May.

The responsibilities of the library was left entirely to me. This entails checking in and out of borrowed books and writing letters, making phone calls to the delinquents. Most persons (which 90% of those who borrow books) kept their books on an average of two months although they gave their word to return them sooner. Some kept them for a much longer period and in some cases there is little hope in having them returned because we do not ^{know} the whereabouts of these people. They moved without leaving forwarding addresses. The situation will not improve until someone takes on this responsibility. I am thinking of closing the library to all borrowers.

Articles were written in local newspapers concerning our church, its culture and people - The Stained-Glass Window article and also the Letter To The Editor concerning the slaying of the Turkish Envoy's wife and relatives in Madrid, Spain allegedly done by Armenians.

I've attended and participated in Clergy Meetings that are held each month at the Greek Church in discussing a wide range of subjects. One of these informative sessions covered the construction of a special hospital in Cumberland dealed to cope with adolescent illnesses.

During the summer months I worked with 4 boys teaching them the deacon's part and also other young people the songs of the Badarak. These pratises were held twice and at times three times a week.

In an attempt to organize a sports program, I made a list of over 40 potential young men players from the ages of 18-35. I called upon five of our young men to help organize such a program. I've met with them privately and have called meetings. Only one of them attended a meeting and after that he showed no interest. Some girls have shown interest in a similar program but there again the interest is confined to others organizing and they particiapating at times. There is much benefit that we could derive from such a program but I can't do it by myself.

I invited a group of men who have had years of experience in church to discuss and hopefully begin a program to improve our financial and maintenance conditions which have been rapidly deteriorating. No postive action resulted from this except that which I did on my own. I made a list of our paid membership and what they paid in 1977 and their payment in 1978. I made personal contacts to those delinquents in 1977 urging them to make the difference. I made a list of persons who are potential stewards either to the Diocese or to our church.

I made personal contacts in this regard.

I brought the problem of finance to the membership at a special meeting held in November. The possibility of purchasing the house next door also was discussed. There has been no serious attempt to rectify the financial situation or seek improvement of the methods by which we derive our revenue, which leaves the purchasing of the house very questionable. Maintenance still remains a major problem with the finance.

I handle all the monies that are sent to the church during the week. I mark them together with the bills that we receive so that the Treasurer will have an easier job on Sunday Morning. I contacted the 1977 stewards to renew their pledges. 700.00 was realized through this program last year. Letters of acknowledgement were sent to donors. I kept current and handled the account of our Endowment Fund. I also aided in the Christmas List project which netted nearly 600.00 in 1978.

All arrangements for the altar flowers has been left to me since no one will accept that responsibility. I've had to devise another means of having the arrangements made through the florists. From now on, those wishing to have two vases of flowers will have to pay 18.00 and those wanting another vase for the baptismal font will pay 25.00. These donors will have the right to take the flowers with them. All lesser donations for altar flowers will be marked as donations for the altar flowers provided that there are flowers on those days but they will not be allowed to take the flowers with them.

I made arrangements for the Ani Kavafian reception. I had approached several persons whom I had thought were interested in forming a Cultural Committee to contact known artists, singers, writers, etc. so that at least once a year we could have a program of cultural significance for our community and the city of Richmond. None of those that I had talked to about this showed much interest.

I approached others knowledgeable in Armenian literature to help organize a program of our literary figures according to their own talents and abilities with the hope of having such a program at least once a year but again the response was negative.

Our potentiality is great but we can not accomplish ^{much} ~~little~~ by using the methods and means we have had for the last twenty-two years. There is no need for any mor ideas. There is plenty of that. We need people who will do. I give you the guidance but if the people do not have the will to do or even to try, then I have no alternative but to adjust to the given situation.

Prof. Arsen Benveniste