

REPORT OF PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN FOR 1989

Your Parish Council began 1989 in earnest wishing to address the desired goals it had set previously and setting forth a stable and accountable standard for St. James Armenian Church for its future needs. January began with a visitation from Larry Jones of "Feed the Children" who gave the Parish an inspiring message and showed vivid pictures of devastated Armenia. Rev. Jones gave Richmond community a pictorial accounting of the clothing drive which was accumulated here in December 1988 and sent through its organization to Armenia.

After the election of the new Parish Council on January 29, 1989 at the first meeting of this executive board each Parish Council members was given as an assignment a liaison position with the various organizations in the church structure. This method was adopted so as to create a closer link with the organization and to foster more structured relationship to the Parish Council. The budgetary concerns addressed by the Parish Assembly were discussed and in order to adhere to its mandate the only way to comply would be to reduce Der Hayr's salary, eliminate payment or Diocesan Dues, eliminate payments to organists, deacons, convention travel expenses and Sevan publication. To create a more vivid financial picture it was decided that dues had to increase if an appeal to the membership for more funds is not approved.

In March 1, 1989 the Parish Council chairman was informed by the Vicar-General that our pastor, Der Arsen Barsamian would be released from his duties as Pastor of St. James Armenian Church as of April 1, 1989 to fill his new position in Watertown, Ma. Assurances were given that there is an abundance of priest that can provide pastoral care on a visiting basis but at this time no official priest had been selected for Richmond, Virginia as a replacement for Father Arsen. This was confirmed by the Diocesan Council chairman. Subsequently his departure date was extended until the end of May and a dinner was given in his honor.

Realizing the void being created with this absence of a parish priest, the Parish Council began moving forward to create a more structured control of church activities. Immediatory attention was given to analysis of major activities of the parish; Food Festival, Rug Sale, Financial accounts, Pastoral needs of community, transferring of control to Parish Council of safe deposit box, funds, inventory of valuables and other important functions needing to be addressed.

The Parish Council made a commitment that given this situation choices for approach were rather clear. Many in the community had suggested that the Parish just wait and see what our Diocese would do for Richmond and since summer was approaching it was a good time to take a break and move forward sometime in the fall. Your Parish Council did not agree with this choice and in a determined manner moved forward to create a viable activity schedule immediately.

The Vicar General was invited in June so that he could personally see our community and assess our needs. This visitation set the tone for our approach. Meeting with the Vicar General, the Parish Council began making arrangements to establish a renaissance for the Richmond community. Not only would a priest be visiting but each visiting priest would give lectures on our faith, traditions and customs of the Armenian Church.

Scheduling then began in earnest and the Parish Council moved to other matters of concern. Even the Archbishop became interested in this approach and scheduled himself to visit Richmond in August and assigned this most controversial topic to his lecture.

The financial accounts had to be structured. There was not an acceptable policy or format for the various funds coming into the church. A procedure was finally established and the various income available to general funds was utilized. As a future enhancement, by laws must be established with clear guide lines for each fund.

The SEVAN needed to be our source of contact with the entire community with its many outside readers. A concentrated revitalization of the format was addressed and a standard of editorship was created. It needed to be informative, interesting and educational. This is only the beginning and future issues will only become better.

As visiting priests began coming to Richmond, the church attendance increased, interest in church functions began again and various organizations were stirring from complacency. Each organization was formulated under Parish Council guidance, encouragement and involvement. The Sunday School, The Armenian School, the Women's Guild, the Choir all began moving forward with new vitality.

Our Food Festival was one of the most successful. Our Rug Sale using new management approaches, even though sales were not a record, per dollar profit was the best ever. Dues were increasing and the accounting of financial reports reflected better our status.

See our new revitalization, the Diocese agreed with the Parish Council suggestion that perhaps a priest could be assigned to Richmond while furthering his studies. For months this idea was brought forward to the Archbishop and Vicar General. This concept was feasible since the Richmond area had many viable universities, seminaries and other learning institutions which could truly enhance any clergy willing to advance his educational level. Subsequently, the St. James Armenian Church received an official letter from Archbishop Manoogian on Nov. 28, 1989 stating that Father Oshagan Gulgulian would be assigned as an acting Pastor of our church as of January 1, 1990. The Parish Council wished to extend its appreciation to the Search Committee for its efforts in helping with this process. Appointment of a Parish Priest is not a formulated method with written guidelines

for Parishes to follow. Our Parish utilized every avenue available to secure our Priest and the Archbishop in his wisdom found us worthy of a priest. Realizing that there are still 17 parishes in the Diocese without a priest and many more mission parishes awaiting clergy guidance we in Richmond are most fortunate to be assigned our new priest. Hopefully this posture will not be abused and never should we allow complacency to take hold our Parish again.

During this year the Parish House was sold and a Pastoral Residence Fund was established to help defray the cost of housing for our priest. It appears that it is not in the best interest of our parish to provide physical housing for the priest. Rather it should be encouraged to allow the priest to purchase if they are so inclined in their own name. This way it will provide more security in later life after retirement

Also, during 1989 a Reserve Fund for major capital expenditures was established with an annual contribution to this account. The parking lot was resurfaced with funds from a non-interest bearing note provided by a parish member.

The rental schedule was revised granting greater savings for rental to those that are contributing as voting members. Many in the parish still do not contribute their fair share for the needs of the church yet are appalled with this rate as quoted. The community must realize that the budgetary requirements must be met and can only be accomplished by fiscal responsibility. This Parish Council is addressing these needs in a management oriented approach. As in the past, whenever an individual is financially unable to pay for any of the church related activities or rentals, the requirement for payment is always waived. This approach for waiver is made privately to Hayr Soorp or the Parish Council chairman and discretion is always maintained.

Traditional values, concepts and activities are most important in the Armenian Church. This Parish Council has made every attempt to further the true teachings and cultural enhancements of the Armenian Church and its national identity. On this matter there can be no waiver, We are the Armenian Church, We are the Armenian people and we are part of that International body. To these values there is no compromise. True there may be better methodology, or advanced technological approaches; but never severance from the values and traditions that are the foundation of what we are today.

To this goal your Parish Council attempted to discharge its duty. Many disagreed, many agreed, that is the way. Your Parish Council wished to thank all that helped during the year. Without the assistance of many, in no way could anything be achieved. It was most regarding, the cooperation received from the parish and community. It was most rare that anyone refused to assist in our endeavors. It is indeed a tribute to this

that it seems to rise together whenever the need comes forth.

Note that this is only the beginning. With our new Priest and with a new Parish Council many more goals need to be met and created. The Parish Council needs to remain administrative. It needs to be creative. It needs constant revitalization and needs to know its Armenian values and traditions. Our future looks good and will remain positive as long as we care. Apathy is our only enemy.

On behalf of the entire Parish Council, we thank you for granting us the privilege of serving our Armenian Church and people this past year.

Bedros Bandazian
Parish Council Chairman

"All over the world in every Armenian Church, every Sunday we sing the same Divine Liturgy, the same Holy Mass (Sourp Badarak), the same hymns, sharagans and the same prayers, which serve as a bond of spiritual unity among the Armenian people."

"The Armenian Church is the spiritual fortress for the Armenian people outside of Armenia--the center of our national culture and the golden bond which binds us with Holy Etchmiadzin and Armenia. As an example we may take a tree. If the branches are cut from the trunk of the tree, they will perish and die. Likewise, if Armenians in the diaspora are cut off from Etchmiadzin, from their roots and fatherland, they will eventually die.

Archbishop Sion Manogian
