

ANNUAL REPORT

1996

Today, by the Will of Our Lord I ended my second year as the Pastor of this community. The Annual Parish Assembly is a special day to reflect upon the past of our community life and strive for the betterment. As I always say there is no perfect community with a perfect priest. Perfection belongs to God. We strive for perfection and with our weak human nature we endeavor to fulfill our task; that is, to feed and nurture you with the Word of God.

Here are the activities that we enriched in our community:

The year 1995 was a year of the Holy Bible in the Armenian Church. For this reason, Ginna Dalton and myself planned a lecture series about the Holy Scripture. I assigned her as the leader of the Bible study lectures for adults. We had 25 attendants and it became the most successful educational program. I like to thank Mrs. Ginna Minasian Dalton. We really are lucky to have her among us. We designed a special Bible study classes for our teenagers as well. I assigned Isaac Sahhar in charge of the Bible Study for Teens. They completed their program in December. We will continue in March 96. Ginna Dalton and myself are in charge of the Bible Study program.

St. James Armenian Church is lucky to have an educated secretary. Ginna Dalton agreed to help me in the office. Her first task was to improve the Sevan. I assigned her as the editor to work towards the betterment of Sevan. Our Sevan will be published every month. Those who are interested to assist her are most welcomed.

I also improved the Church choir. I met with them every Thursdays for rehearsals. At this moment we have 10 members. They are learning the hymns for the Holy Week. Thanks to Sussanna Arnold for participating every Sunday to play the organ.

As you know, our Primate made a special visit to our parish last year. The purpose of his visit was to ordain 7 young teenagers as Tbirds of the Armenian Church; one Sub-deacon and one deacon. They are a part of ACYOA. I am very proud of them. They are very active in our community. I am certain that they will continue to serve their church with pride. I hope others will follow their examples.

The existence of the Armenian School was vital. In October 94, we started Armenian School. I assigned Dr. Diran Bezirjian as the Superintendent. Today, every Friday I supervise the school. This year we have 8 new students joining the Armenian school. Two of our teachers Mrs. Zabel Garabedian and Hovig Souleymanian were send to New York last summer to participate to the Teachers' College at the Diocese. I am thankful to God for sending us Mrs. Ann Markarian to our community, who willingly agreed to cover all the expenses for the Armenian School. We need people like her in our community.

We continued the gatherings of our Seniors Group. This is the most successful organization. I encourage everyone to partake in their activities. There are 25 attendants in this program and I must say that I really enjoy their company greatly. My sincere appreciation to Rose Soghoian and Victoria Jamgochian, for leading and organizing the group.

My sincere gratitude is extended to the Parish Council Members, whom I respect greatly. In the Parish council we have are dedicated and experienced members. Working with them was a pleasure. I like to recognize the efforts of John Baronian, the chairman of the Parish Council, and all the Parish Council members. I hope that we will continue to have understanding people like you in the Council. The parish Council always supported me whenever I was in need.

Thanks to the Women's Guild Members. The Women's Guild is very active organization in our community. Lilly Thomas was in charge of the Women's Guild and she did an excellent job in leading them. They organized many activities and she worked hard for success. Currently we do not have an executive committee of the W.G. Soon I will be calling for another meeting to elect officers.

I would like to recognize the efforts of Meline Kerneklian, who is the superintendent of the Sunday School; especially for bringing the children all together as a group, and teaching them christian values. Meline succeeded to bring the young adults of St. James to teach at the Sunday School. Allow me to thank Mrs. Issabel Vranian who has been covering all the expenses of the Sunday School. She will continue to support us. Mrs. Vranian is one of the dedicated members of the Armenian Church and her presence is always pleasure for us.

This year we were fortunate to have three great cultural events. We solemnly celebrated for the public for four days the 80th anniversary of the First Genocide of the 20th Century, the extermination of nearly two million Armenians by the Ottoman Turks in 1915. It was a four days of historic event for our community. The Vicar General, V. Rev. Fr. Haigazoun Najarian was invited to celebrate the Liturgy. Then we hosted the Little Singers of Armenia who electrified the audience with their angelic voice. In fall, we celebrated 125 anniversary of Gomidas with 125 choir members. 25 of them were from Richmond. Both events were sponsored by the Baronian Cultural Fund. Thanks to Mrs. Elizabeth Baronian for establishing this very important fund to educate culturally to our community members.

Special thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Jack Tootelian, a dedicated members of St. James. They always support our church spiritually as well as financially. We are fortunate to have you in our community.

I had the privilage to meet some dignitaries in Richmond. Of course there is no doubt that Bedros had to do something with that. I was invited by the Richmond City Council for the invocation. I was officaily invited to The Virginia Democratic Party to provide the invocation in front of 1000 people.

I participated to the Clergy Conference and the Diocesan Assembly in May 95 with the chairman of the Parish Council John Baronian and the delegate Azniv Amirkhanian.

As a member of the Richmond Area Clergy Association, one of our meetings took place here at St. James. The Women's Guild sponsored a luncheon.

By the request of the Armenians in North Carolina, I paid a special visit in Durham and celebrated a Divine Liturgy.

With the assistance of Yeretgin of the St. Mary's Church in Washington, we organized a youth weekend. 12 ACYOA members participated from Richmond. I lectured there about the importance of the Divine Liturgy. That Sunday I celebrated the Badarak at St. Mary's with the assistance of our young Tbirds, and Fr. Vertanes came to Richmond for the Liturgy.

In July 95, by the order of His Eminence, I escorted 15 college students to Armenia. This was a mission program organized by the Diocese.

In January 96, I went to NY to welcome Our new Catholicos His Holiness Karekin I. Then John Baronian and myself were invited to Washington D.C. as special guests to greet the Catholicos of All Armenians.

Besides my trips and pastoral duties, I am a student at the Union Theological Seminary working on my doctorate degree. Hopefully I will be fulfilling all the requirements in January 97 and then start writing my dissertation.

I am very optimistic for our future. I see a tremendous difference in two years. I am thankful to God for granting me wisdom and power to serve to this community. There are still many tasks to be accomplished. We still need the participation of our young adults in the life of our community. We must continue to encourage them as well as pray for them that someday they may feel proud of who they are. I urge the parents to continue to encourage their children. They need to find their identity. They need to feel the spiritual thirst in their life. It is my task to give them the Living Water.

I pray God that the year 1996 will be a successful year for our community and we will continue to grow as true Christians having the love of Christ and the peace of His Divine Grace upon us, so we may be able to answer His question "What do you seek"? By borrowing Jesus' word I would like to tell everyone "come and see." May God bless our community.