

St. Leon Remembers Der Paree

Der Paree Metjian is an important part of the history of our beloved St. Leon Church (1975-1985). We share a few reflections for those who were not members of St. Leon during his pastorate.



Der Diran with a group of parishioners braved the wintry mix of snow and rain on Saturday, Feb 5 to attend the funeral of Rev. Dr. Paree Metjian. A letter from HH Karekin II and so many other official and personal letters, telegrams and words of sincere praise were shared –“loving, gentle, kind, a true man of God”. Barbara Hovsepian read a moving letter from Nancy Basmajian , ACYOA Executive Secretary, who worked closely with Der Paree at the diocesan level for Camp St. Vartan. Barbara also added her own heartfelt tribute. All were fitting, collectively paying Der Paree a well-earned tribute.

With a growing family and his third child on the way, he came from a very small mid-west parish to begin his pastorate at St. Leon in 1975. His youth and energy matched his visions for the growth of St. Leon. He and we were ripe for the challenges he created.

Building upon the firm foundation established by his predecessors, he inspired the creation of the senior citizens organization, a parenting group known as Care ‘n Share, Bible Study, and Vacation Bible School. He saw the need for a Church van and inspired the fundraising for the parish’s first van. The blue van with Armenian and English lettering became a familiar sight to Bergen county residents as he drove about making his visitations and transporting seniors and the youth. A Christ-centered soul, he placed an emphasis on the spiritual quality of every organization’s purpose and activities. Under his leadership the Women’s Guild began to hold annual retreats. St. Leon parishioners saw the realization of a long awaited dream - an attractive, spacious community center to provide for functions and a source of income for the growing needs of the parish. It was built under Der Paree’s leadership. He had an irresistible way of engaging people’s time, treasure and talent, inspiring the donors while at the same time using their gifts to benefit his flock. A true visionary, his crowning achievement was the founding of St. Vartan Camp whose seeds were planted in our midst.

Der Paree is especially remembered by those who played basketball, attended ACYOA, Sunday and Armenian Schools because his impact on them in their formative years with his own genuine spirituality was deep and abiding. They carry his legacy in their lives and contributions. In their mid-forties, many are actively serving our parish today. Ask any one of them and you will witness a smile and hear a personal anecdote.

Although by human measurement his years on this earth were not very long, they were richly blessed with a successful ministry and home life with devoted Yeretzskin Angel and children. An inscription on our official church stationery from those years reveals the essence of Der Paree’s life – “Encounter Christ with us. Reflect Him to others.” At the Hokijash, his son, Ara, lovingly eulogized his father, commenting, “My father often recalled his service at St. Leon, saying that they were some of his best years.”