

St. Vartan Church
650 Spruce Street
Oakland, CA 94610

Address Service Requested



The St. Vartan Voice

newsletter is published once a month by St. Vartan Armenian Church.

The deadline for all articles is the fifteenth of each month.

Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate
Rev. Fr. Hovel Ohanyan, Parish Priest and President of All Church Organizations
Parish Council Chair: Nazaret Jindoian
Parish Assembly Chair: Don Manoogian
Choir Director: Artin Der Minassians
Organist: Araks Aghazarian and Ida Mazmanian
ACYO Chair: Joseph Apkarian
Sunday School Superintendent: Janet Yeghissian and Karen Mener
Ladies Society Chair: Marlene Tolegian and Arlene Hovsepian
Cultural Society Chair: Liz Ojakian
Hokejosh: Nora Hanoian
Newsletter Editors: Arlene Hovsepian and Rachel Harger
Church Secretary: Rachel Harger
Altar Flowers: Carole Chang
Church Custodian: Wartkes Hagopian

Divine Liturgy Service—Sundays 10:30 a.m.

650 Spruce Street, Oakland, CA. 94610

Phone (510)893-1671

Fax: (510) 893-2102

Email: stvartanoakland@aol.com

Website: www.stvartanoakland.org



St.VartanVoice

The Newsletter of St. Vartan Armenian Apostolic Church

Rev. Fr. Hovel Ohanyan, Parish Priest

Սուրբ Վարդանի Ձայն

Ս. Վարդան Հայ Առաքելական Եկեղեցւոյ Պաշտօնաթերթ



Fr. Hovel Ohanyan

“God is Good, Life is Good...”

February 2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

It is time to commence a new chapter in both my life and in the life of our beloved parish. Change is good because it brings new opportunities for growth and for new achievements. Life is always changing, and everything, whether good or bad, will eventually come to a conclusion. In the changes ahead, all of us, myself included, are being called to deepen our faith and our relationship with the Lord. Big changes in life teach us greater detachment from the things and persons of this world and summon us to fix our gaze on the Lord and things eternal. Nothing in this life remains the same; only God is unchanging and constant in His love, at all times. In a parish and community life, from time to time, a new pastor is appointed, and the parish adapts to the new spiritual leader of the community.

Back in July of 2009, I was fortunate enough to become the seventh parish priest of St. Vartan Armenian Apostolic Church, following the great legacy of Fr. Bedros Hagopian, Archbishop Vartan Kasparian, Fr. Bedros Kassarian, Fr. Shahe Altounian, Very Rev. Fr. Levon Apelian, and Fr. Mesrob Sarafian. These were the priests sent by God for this community to be shepherds and to guide this church-community toward God. They mixed their lives with the life of this community by making it their own. With their tireless dedication they strengthened this community through the grace and with the peace of God. Of course, as clergymen, they differed from each other with their traditions and personalities. However, one true path existed for them all: to serve God and His children in this wonderful community. May God remember all their sacrifices and reward them in His Heavenly Kingdom. (Amen.)

My beloved brothers and sisters, when one or two priests need to move (for various reasons, such as retirement, poor health, etc.), the Bishop must try to assign the “right priest” to the “right parish” as best as possible. Please try to understand the great difficulty our beloved Primate Abp. Hovnan Derderian faces right now! Please pray for him and thank him for his ministry and leadership as the Primate of the Western Diocese.

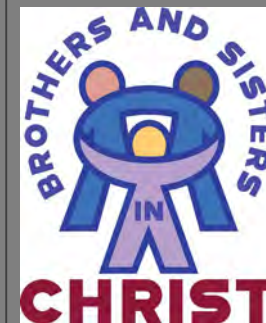
My beloved Surpazan, my spiritual Father and my mentor, my words are not enough to thank you for everything you have done for us all in the Western Diocese as a whole, and particularly for our St. Vartan Church. You always encouraged and taught me; you were always available to talk to me by phone and took the time to be sure that everything is fine here at church and everybody is doing well. On behalf of the entire St. Vartan Family, I thank you Surpazan Hayr. Please accept our wholehearted gratitude and appreciation for being such a great Spiritual Father and leader for all of us.

Allow me to thank my brothers in Christ in the Bay Area, with whom I had a great privilege to serve God and our Armenian Community for over ten

Bible Readings

Feb. 2 John 6:15-21
Feb. 9 John 6:22-38
Feb. 16 John 7:37-52
Feb. 23 Matthew 6:5-15

But he replied to the man who told him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”
Matt. 12:48-50





years. May God bless you and grant you more patience and wisdom in your ministry. Always remember that you have a brother in the Motherland.

My beloved brothers and sisters of St. Vartan Armenian Church, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:2). In these days of farewell, my hope and prayer is that the Holy Spirit will continue to kindle the love of Christ which is in your hearts so that you may grow in holiness and bear witness to the presence of God in this world. We have been entrusted with a great gift: the gift of faith, the faith of our forefathers. May that faith grow ever deeper through prayer, service, and fellowship, so that you may always “keep your eyes fixed” on

Jesus Christ and help others to do the same.

As I reflect upon these past ten and a half years during which I had a great honor to serve as your parish priest, my heart is overflowing with gratitude for the gift you have been to me in my priesthood. I fell in love with St. Vartan parish immediately after my arrival, because of the exemplary dedication and commitment of the parishioners. I could see from the start that the people here were strong in their faith and in their desire to serve God and one another. I have often boasted of you and the privilege to serve in this parish: of the unselfish nature of your service in our community; of the vibrancy of your active faith; of the dedication of the members of our parish council, Ladies Society, Cultural Committee, Sunday School, ACYO, Men’s Group, my brother deacons, choir members and all the other organizations and the entire community; of the long tradition here of preparing food and feeding thousands of people during our Food Festivals, annual picnics and other fantastic events; of your openness to think strategically and to plan for the future. Know that I will always keep you in my prayers that the good work which is active in you will be brought to completion through Christ Jesus, our Lord.

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, the gifts that you have given to me in my pastoral ministry, and not only to me, but to all who have been witnesses to your love, especially my own family. Gifts of generosity and encouragement, gifts of hope and strength. I came to you ten and a half years ago as a young priest with my small family, with my Yeretsgin Anahit, three year-old son Vazgen, and our newborn baby girl, Nareh. I came to you with a little experience and with no gray hair on my face, and you have embraced us, encouraged and supported us to be successful in our family life, in my pastoral service and in all my projects here at St. Vartan. As someone once said: “May you be proud of the work you do; the person you are; and the difference you make.” We have put our hands and hearts into good work together in this past decade, and I am confident that I leave you as a community strong in faith. I am very thankful for the guidance and support of all our community members. I am pleased with the improvements which we have made to our church, in the sanctuary, parish hall, kitchen, downstairs, library, archive room, new offices for priest and secretary, dance room, parking lot, and many other big and small projects. Life on earth is a gift. The work which we do is also a gift when we see it as an opportunity to serve God and others.

St. Paul instructs us, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Colossians 3:23-24). Now my hairs are grayer, which I hope is a sign of wisdom and of a little more experience; our family became larger, we have two more beautiful girls Nazeni and Nraneh (both of them were baptized in our church); our immigration status changed from visa to citizens of the United States. On behalf of Yeretsgin Anahit and my entire family, from the bottom of my heart, I want to thank you for all your support and encouragement. I want you to know our hearts are filled with gratitude and love toward each and everyone of you. We will miss serving God with you at St. Vartan.

...To be continued in future newsletters



Our St. Vartan Church organizations would like to upgrade the video projector we use for many of our events. Our current projector has served us well for over 15 years, but its incompatibility to connect to several brands of laptops is a problem. A new permanent Multimedia Projector upgrade installed in our church hall would increase our digital capabilities and simplify its operation.

If you are interested in donating to this purchase, please send your check to the church office and memo the donation: Multimedia Upgrade. Thank you!



On December 22 St. Vartan Church celebrated Western Christmas with a Sunday School Nativity Scene. Armenian Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services were held on January 5 and 6, including a Home Blessing Service in the Church Hall on Christmas Eve.

ST. VARTAN LADIES SOCIETY TRADITIONAL BURGERS & BINGO LUNCHEON

Thursday, February 13, 2020

12:00 Noon

in the John Marukjian Church Hall

Featuring: BBQ Hamburgers,
Homemade Potato Salad, & Apple Pie

RSVP Deadline February 6, 2020

RSVP to Gail Kezerian at 925-890-7534 or
hyegail@pacbell.net

This is a joint luncheon with
St. John's Ladies' Society

Parish Council Update

Selection of a new Parish Priest

As you are aware, in November the Parish Council (PC) commenced various measures to ensure a smooth transition during the return of Fr. Hovel Ohanyan to serve our Mother Church Holy Etchmiadzin in Armenia and the assignment of a new parish priest at St. Vartan Armenian Church. The PC consulted with Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese, in December and again in January and developed a transition strategy.

A nine member Parish Priest Research Committee (PPRC) that was approved by the Primate includes representatives from various areas of the Church. They are Nazar Jindoian, Liz Ojakian and Edward Jamgotchian from the Parish Council, Marlene Tolegian and Nora Hanoian representing the Ladies Society, Sr. Deacon Vartan Berberian as liaison to the altar servers, Nataline Jindoian representing the ACYO and Sunday School, and Greg Tcherkoyan and Anto Cingoz as parish delegates. The PPRC met two candidates and continues its vetting process to ensure the best qualified individual is selected to lead our parish.

During this transition period, the Primate assigned Fr. Vasken Movsesian as the interim priest. Fr. Vasken will celebrate the Divine Liturgy for the foreseeable future, and also attend the General Assembly meeting on Sunday, January 26.

Ladies Society Update

Happy New Year to all of our Ladies Society members!

We had a busy start to 2020 working with the Parish Council on the Farewell Luncheon honoring Fr. Hovel on January 12. As Chairlady, Arlene Hovsepien, said in her closing remarks, “Here’s to the months that have turned into years, And the friends that have turned into family! You will always have family here at St. Vartan Armenian Church”. We are going to miss Fr. Hovel and wish him God speed as he returns home to Armenia.

The Ladies Society was happy to support the AGBU Young Professionals with their upcoming Convention in the Bay Area by donating 150 choregs for their event.

February 13, our traditional Burgers and Bingo Luncheon will be a joint luncheon with St. John Armenian Church here at St. Vartan. Please watch for the flier and note the RSVP DATE OF FEBRUARY 6.

2020 DUES: As a reminder, in order to be listed in our Ladies Society Directory, your dues must be received by January 31. For those who have not reached the milestone age of 80, please send your check in the amount of \$35 payable to St. Vartan Armenian Church, to Treasurer Nelly Kargodorian, at the church office or directly to her at: 420 LaCasa Via, Walnut Creek, CA 94598.



On December 20 the Armenian Relief Society Erepouni Friday Armenian School honored Fr. Hovel during their Christmas program.

St. Vartan Church Parish Council gratefully acknowledges the following donations:

Bride's Room, Church Entryway—Caroline and Stuart Arakelian

St. Vartan Ladies Society—Suzanne and Ed Vasgerdsian, Don and Lisa Manoogian

St. Vartan Voice—Isabelle Dokouzian

In Memory

† **Virginia Ratcliff**

Carol Rustigian, Ed and Suzanne Vagerdsian (Fr. Mesrob Sarafian Education Fund),
Diane, Jim and Sarah Conrad (Ladies Society), Marjorie Martiesian

† **Al Kaljian**

Jonathon and Lee Ann Williams

† **Mary Wardah Hagopian (Wartkes Hagopian's sister)**

Ed and Suzanne Vasgerdsian (Ladies Society)

† **Edward Kaprelian**

Virginia Madajian

† **Richard Demirjian (For the Richard Demirjian Athletic Fund)**

Jack and Mary Aslanian, Lori and Andy Hill, Edward and Sylva Manougian

† **Lodir Zeki (For the Orphan Fund)**

Rose Sagatelyan, Berc Eldemir, Vahe and Hilda Mener, Viktorya Artun,
Artin and Agavni Hamamciyan, Arto and Nadya Yagjian

† **Dikranouhie Sghomonian**

Lina Gurgonian (Orphan Fund)

ENDOWMENT FUND

In Memory

† **Virginia Ratcliff**

Richard and Judy Sharafian

2020 Altar Flower Donation Chart

Please sign up to sponsor flowers for a Sunday in 2020. The donation chart is located on the bulletin board in the church hall entryway.

News From Our St. Vartan Family

Baptism and Chrismation



Matthew Derboghossian was baptized at St. Vartan by Fr. Hovel on January 5, 2020.

Matthew is the son of Albert and Hanna Derboghossian. His Godfather is Artin Der Minassians and his grandparents are Ruben Derboghossian, Hilda Ooughanian, Mahmud Bakhtiar and Fatemeh Farhadi.

Fr. Hovel baptized **Glen Aram Kalebjian** on January 11, 2020 at St. Vartan Church.

Glen's parents are Rose and Bradley Kalebjian and his grandparents are Greg and Laura Mazmanian and Dennis and Paulette Kalebjian. Avo Arikian is his godfather and Jamie Arikian is his godmother.

On January 9, 2020, Fr. Hovel performed the Holy Sacrament of Chrismation for **Jonathon Yenovkian** at St. Vartan Church. Jonathon's godfather is Mikayel Hovhannisyan.

On January 19, 2020 Fr. Hovel performed the Holy Sacrament of Chrismation for **Linda Ann Diers** and **Suzanne Gay Diers**. Suzanne and Linda's godfather is Donald Mayer and godmothers are Lorriane Mayer and Ann Jerahian.

Condolences

A funeral service was held by Fr. Hovel at St. Vartan Church for **Dikranouhie Sghomonian** on January 16, 2020. Our condolences to her children, Sako (Laura Karaboghossian) Sghomonian and Grace (Angelo Bozionelos) Sghomonian, and her grandchildren Hagop and Sofia. Dikranouhie is also survived by her brothers, Haig and Berge Kissoyan, and sisters, Leonie Piladjian and Ani Kaprielian.

Fr. Hovel conducted a funeral for **Richard Demirjian** at St. Vartan Church on January 17, 2020. Our condolences to Richard's wife of 67 years, Dorothy Demirjian: his children, Richard (Aida) Demirjian Jr., and Janet (John) Schmid; his grandchildren, Ara (Ani) Demirjian, Vahe Demirjian, Conner King, Madelyn King, Zack (fiancé Emily Johnstone) Schmid, Kayleigh Schmid, Alayna Schmid; great-grandson, Tobias Schmid; and all of Richard's family and friends.

St. Vartan Church Christmas Yughakin Donations

Suzanne and Razmik Abnous
Araks Aghazarian
Sylvia Alexanian
Rouben and Sofia Amirbekian
Yeghia Apkarian and Ana Dalmeida
Lou Aronian
Annie Avedissian
Garbis and Silva Baghdasaryan
Elizabeth Barsamian
Vartan and Ayko Berberian
Kegham and Roxanne Boghossian
Jack and Barbara Bousian
Seda and Charles Chavdarian
Kathleen Demerdjian
Brian and Cynthia Der Matoian
Bob and Sara Dermatoian
Margie Dorian
Jack Dorian
Satenik and Gary Eldemir
Ara Garabedian
Rosalie Gifford

Sylvia Gozurian
Alice Gregorian
Bruce and Gail Groefsema
Aylin Gulbenkian
Amy Hailozian
Nora and Harvey Hanoian
Frank and Sharon Higgins
Lori and Andy Hill
Edward and Armineh Jamgotchian
Aram Kaloustian
Janet Kamian
George and Jacqueline Kamian
Janet Yeghissian and Zaven Kanneian
Hermine Keshishyan
Charles and Dorris Kezerian
Donald and Lisa Manoogian
Edward and Sylva Manougian
Adik Mardirossian
Elizabeth and Zohrab Markarian
Vahe and Hilda Mener
Louise Metaxes

Karnig & Santoukht Mikaelian
Edward Minasian
Barbara Morjig
Cheryl Minton and Paul Ohanesian
Elizabeth and Ron Ojakian
Alene Rudy
Carol Rustigian
Edward and Karen Sarafian
Hermina and Simik Sarkis-Kelly
Richard and Judy Sharafian
Ray and Reyhan Shepherd
Mary Ann Sievers
Donald and Virginia Tafjen
Jim Taylor
Greg and Seta Tcherkoyan
Marlene Tolegian
Lisa Vartanian
Suzanne and Ed Vasgerdsian
Hasmig Vasgerdsian
Chris and Lucy Yaldezan



On January 10 Bay Area clergy met to say good-bye to Fr. Hovel. The clergy present were Fr. Smpad Saboundjian, St. Gregory, Archpriest Rev. Fr. Datev Harutunyan, St. Andrew; Fr. Hovel Ohanyan, St. Vartan; Fr. Mesrob Ash, St. John; and Fr. Yeghishe Ksachikyan, St. James.



On December 29 St. Vartan Church welcomed Fr. Krikor Zakaryan who joined us in celebrating the Feast of St. Stephen.

Daughters of Vartan Tea
The Daughters of Vartan, San Francisco chapter, Araxi Oyttag, presents its Annual Spring Tea on Saturday, March 21, 11:30am - 2:30pm. We are excited to announce our guest speaker is Beth Rustigian Broussalian who will be speaking about her role as founder and executive director of Homeland Development Initiative Foundation-USA. The event will be held at the John Marukian Hall at St. Vartan Armenian Church.
Interested guests are invited to join the event. Please contact Hasmig Cingoz for more information and reservations, hasmig.cingoz1@gmail.com.



Sunday, January 12, 2020
St. Vartan Church Armenian
Christmas Celebration
and Fr. Hovel
Farewell Luncheon



St. Vartan Armenian Church Rockin' New Year's Eve



Fr. Hovel Farewell Luncheon

On January 12, over 300 parishioners said goodbye to Fr. Hovel at a farewell luncheon in the church hall sponsored by the St. Vartan Church Parish Council and Ladies Society. Fr. Hovel was honored by the attendance of His Eminence Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, who spoke at the event. The Parish Council presented Fr. Hovel with a beautifully framed photograph taken of Fr. Hovel during Badarak. Speakers included Janet Yeghissian and Isabel Eknoian, St. Vartan Church Sunday School, Arlene Hovsepian, St. Vartan Ladies Society, Archpriest Rev. Fr. Datev Harutyunian, St. Andrew Armenian Church parish priest, Rachel Harger, St. Vartan Church Assistant, Nataline Jindoian, St. Vartan ACYO, and Nazar Jindoian Parish Council Chairman. The guests were honored by Fr. Hovel’s heartfelt remarks, and his beautiful singing.

Excerpts from Some of the Messages to Fr. Hovel

Dear Fr. Hovel,

With this letter, we express to you our commendation and wholehearted gratitude for your exceptional pastoral service which has spanned for over a decade. With a patriotic spirit and the resolute faith radiating from Holy Etchmiadzin, you embraced your pastoral ministry, leading the faithful on the path to righteousness and bridging their hearts and souls to the spiritual center of our people.

For the Armenians, Holy Etchmiadzin is the holy of holies. Forged in faith, the sacred site engulfs the souls of the faithful with the divine love of God.

Years after having embraced your pastoral mission, you return to the Motherland, to Holy Etchmiadzin, to continue your dedicated service. Undoubtedly, you will continue to cater spiritual nourishment in the Motherland with the same enduring affection. Your years of experience will indeed come in useful in your new capacity as the vice-dean of Gevorkian seminary.

Dear Fr. Hovel, we wish you all the best. May a renewed sense of pastoral courage equip you to serve the flock of Christ with graces bestowed upon you by the Almighty.

With love and blessings. Prayerfully,
Archbishop Hovnan Derderian,
Primate of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America

Dear Fr. Hovel,

On behalf of St. Vartan Armenian Church, Oakland, CA, thank our for your loving service to our parish and community. Thank you for the sermons you preached, the prayers you lifted up, your vibrant energy, supportive positivity, your wise council, your words of encouragement — for teaching, guiding, inspiring, and up-lifting. Thank you for your vision and drive to steer St. Vartan Church into growth and prosperity.



Most of all, thank you for your sacrifice and service. You are indeed a reflection of God’s love and we want you to know how grateful we are for all that you have done. You are a wonderful example of God’s love at work. In you, God gave us so many wonderful blessings. We truly appreciate all you have done in our parish over the past 10 years. May God bless you abundantly for the many ways you serve, with caring and devotion, touching the lives of so many.

With Love and Heartfelt Gratitude,
St. Vartan Armenian Church Congregation

“And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” 2 Corinthians 9:8

God Has a Plan

God had a plan for Fr. Hovel when he came to St. Vartan Church over 10 years ago. St. Vartan was hurting, sad and adrift, without a shepherd to guide the church. It was God’s plan to bring Fr. Hovel, a young, enthusiastic, loving priest full of ideas and plans to us at St. Vartan. And Fr. Hovel realized those plans. He came to us struggling with his English. In fact, he wrote in his first annual report that congregants should call the church and if he wasn’t available, Rachel would give him his “massages”. Well he didn’t get any “massages”, but he did receive many “messages”. His English has improved so much, that now he speaks with American slang, writing me a text recently, in which he stated, “No worries.”

Fr. Hovel leaves us with a remarkable legacy. We have already heard today about the many tremendous improvements made to the church and hall under Fr. Hovel’s watch. But Fr. Hovel has an even greater legacy here at St. Vartan, and that is all of you, his family here at St. Vartan Church. Fr. Hovel has welcomed all of us into the church and become part of all our families. He has suffered with us with all of our troubles, when a family member has died, when we have lost a job, had serious illnesses or injuries, had conflict within our families. But he has also rejoiced with us at our greatest joys, the birth of our babies, our marriages, baptisms, family celebrations and new jobs.

Now God has a new plan for Fr. Hovel, where he will serve God as a dean at the seminary in Etchmiadzin, training new, young priests. And God also has a new plan for us at St. Vartan Church. He will send us a new priest who will serve the church with love and faith, as Fr. Hovel has for over ten years.

We will miss you Fr. Hovel, but we rejoice in your new opportunity to serve the Lord.



Rachel Harger,
St. Vartan Church Assistant

“Never Say No to your Der Hayr!”

How many times have most of us heard that over the last 10 years — whether along with soliciting donations, or to persuade us to take executive positions in our church organizations?

Well for me, it started very soon after Fr. Hovel’s arrival to St. Vartan Church. He stopped me in the downstairs hall and asked why we didn’t have portraits of our past priests posted anywhere in our church?! A very long pause followed and then I realized this was a directive, not a questions...and there it was—“Never say no to your Der Hayr!”

Fr. Hovel came to us over ten years ago with a beautiful wife, Yeretzgin Ahanit, and an adorable son, Vasgen, with his long hair, and infant daughter, Nareh. Since then we have watched his family grow and he has encouraged St. Vartan Church to grow, as well,

- New doors for the entrance to the Church
- New vessels for the altar
- A katchkar placed at the entrance to our church, with Genocide memorial
- A new curtain for the altar
- Cushions for the pews
- Renovation of the hall, along with additional new tables and chairs
- Re-landscaping of the church yard
- A new Baptismal Font for the sanctuary
- Renovation of the bride’s room and vestibule and finally:
- Complete renovation of the church kitchen.



And somehow he found the time to go to school and earn his Master’s of Divinity, author two books, and become a United States citizen.

Over these ten and a half years, Fr. Hovel’s love and support of the St. Vartan Church Ladies Society has been CONSTANT, and for that, on behalf of al the Ladies Society Members, THANK YOU FR. HOVEL.

Please everyone, raise your glasses and please join me in the first of many toasts to our Fr. Hovel: “Here’s to the months that have turned into years, and the friends that have turned into family!”

You will always have family here at St. Vartan Armenian Church. Thank you.

Arlene Hovsepian, Ladies Society Co-Chair



Dear Rev. Fr. Hovel Ohanyan,

On behalf of the Council of Armenian American Organizations of Northern California, keeper of Mt. Davidson Cross, we would like to extend to you and your family our well wishes for your new assignment in Armenia. Your spiritual guidance, community support and charm will be greatly missed in our community.

Sincerely yours,
Sevag Kevranian, Chairman CAAONC