100 Years, Countless Memories, One St. Vartan Family

St. Vartan Armenian Church Celebrates 100 Years of Faith, Family and Community

It was an unforgettable evening filled with love, laughter, nostalgia and cherished memories as 225 parishioners, family and friends gathered on Sunday, November 15, to celebrate the Centennial of St. Vartan Armenian Church in Oakland, CA.

The room was filled with old friendships, generations reconnecting and stories of a church that has meant so much to so many over the past century.

The evening began with an unexpected and moving tribute as six members of the St. Vartan community surprised guests by standing up from different parts of the room to share personal memories and stories of their families' connections to the church across generations. Their heartfelt reflections set the tone for a very special night.

Hundreds of historical photographs rotated on screens throughout the evening, while photo displays around the room brought decades of memories to life. During cocktail hour, “Hye Jazz: The Sons of St. Vartan,” featuring parishioners Armen Boyd, Paul Rustigian, Jim Taylor and Mark Toomajian, set the mood. Entertainment included Barry Barsamian's spirited rendition of “Get Happy” and violinist Heghine Boloyan's beautiful performance of “The Dance of the Girls” from Aram Khachaturian's *Gayaneh*, both accompanied by pianist Araks Aghazarian. St. Vartan's Dance Ensemble, featuring young girls and women under the direction of Hasmig Gregoria, delighted guests with traditional Armenian dances.

Beloved KTVU Channel 2 anchor Gasia Mikaelian served as the evening's eloquent emcee, warmly engaging the audience. In one particularly memorable moment, she read a long list of St. Vartan milestones and experiences, inviting guests to stand and remain standing as each applied to them, from being baptized or married at the church to attending Sunday School, playing on church sports teams, singing in the choir and much more. As the list continued, more and more guests rose to their feet until the entire room was standing, a powerful and emotional reminder of the many connections shared across generations.

Guests heard remarks from Parish Priest Fr. Krikor Zakaryan, Parish Council Chairperson Nazar Jindoian and inspiring words from His Eminence Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, who traveled from Los Angeles. We were also pleased to welcome former parish priest Fr. Hovel Ohanyan from Armenia. It was also an honor to have all Bay Area priests in attendance for this milestone celebration.

Adding some humor and nostalgia, Dn. Steve Donikian, joined by Wartkes Avakian, led a playful time capsule skit, presenting memorable items from St. Vartan's past for consideration in the 2126 Time Capsule.

A touching tribute video, narrated by renowned sports broadcaster Matt Vasgersian, took guests through 100 years of St. Vartan history, featuring rare footage of the church's consecration, treasured memories and heartfelt messages from the parish's youngest Sunday School children, reminding everyone that the future of St. Vartan is in good hands.

As the evening drew to a close, the room dimmed as guests held glowing candles for a moment of silence, remembering the loved ones, clergy and generations of parishioners whose dedication helped build the St. Vartan we know today. Following this moving tribute, the St. Vartan Choir, led by Artin DerMinassians, brought everyone together in singing “Yerevan-Erebuni.” In a beautiful and fitting finale, the choir and entire audience stood together, candles in hand, to sing the “Hayr Mer” (The Lord's Prayer), filling the room with a powerful sense of faith, unity and love.

The memorable celebration was the result of months of tireless planning and dedication by the Centennial Committee, led by Annette Kevranian under the direction of Fr. Krikor Zakaryan. Their hard work and love for St. Vartan was reflected in every detail of the evening.
More than a Centennial celebration, it was a beautiful reminder that St. Vartan is not simply a church, but a family, a community and a legacy of faith, friendship and love spanning generations.

Our hearts are full as we look ahead to the next 100 years!

– *Submitted by Kim Bardakian*