

Archbishop Hovnan Derderian

*Nourish & Enrich
Your Spirituality*

Book of Sermons Vol. II

2013

During the Pontificate of
HIS HOLINESS KAREKIN II
Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos
of All Armenians

Dedicated to
MR. & MRS.
GREG & SETA TCHERKOYAN

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”

Matthew 5:7

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FOREWORD

Dear reader,

Presented in this volume are a series of sermons of His Eminence Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America. Archbishop Derderian's unique writing style is not only inspirational but it also allows the reader to take a glimpse at his captivating spirituality. The essence of the Primate's spirituality is most evident in his writings during the periods of the Great Lenten journey and the Holy Week.

The moving sermons date back to the early years of his Primacy at the Western Diocese. Carefully selected, the volume includes the Primate's Christmas and Easter Sermons, his Pastoral Letters to his fellow Diocesan clergymen, and his addresses at numerous Diocesan and external functions among many others. Throughout his pastoral tenure, His Eminence has been a staunch proponent of putting one's Christian faith to work and has often called on the flock of Christ to be the "Hands of the Almighty" in our earthly life. In his sermons, the spiritual leader of one of the world's largest Dioceses of the Armenian Apostolic Church alludes to humility as a virtue in the Christian faith.

The depth of each sermon is revealed through the Archbishop's love and passion for Christ, our Lord, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Motherland and the Armenian people. As evident in his writings, the Primate is not reluctant to address the contemporary challenges facing a priest in the Armenian Apostolic Church. However, he also offers his insight to better meet such challenges by calling upon his brothers in Christ to remain steadfast in their ancestral Christian faith, to lead prayerful lives and to incorporate the teachings of our Savior in their daily lives.

I hope that this collection of the Primate's sermons will not only nourish and enrich your spirituality, but will become a calling to serve Christ, our Lord and Savior with a renewed sense of commitment and humility.

In Christ,

Sergey Arustamyan

April 25, 2013

CHRIST IS BORN

As Christians we await the blessed birth of the Son of God with great anticipation. In the miracle of the Birth of Christ our Lord we envision the horizon beyond time and space. It is in the birth of Christ our Lord that we are able to be reborn spiritually.

Man very often experiences weaknesses and temptation in his journey towards God. The Birth of our Lord and Savior enables us to envision the light that shines on the path of Emmaus. It is this light that transfigures the life of mankind, reinstating our life once again in the path towards God.

One of the contemporary Christian writers Henry J. M. Newman inspires us with a wonderful spiritual reflection as he speaks about the search of God that explains the true meaning of spiritual rebirth in Christ. “So I say to you, seek God and discover Him and make Him a power in your life. Without Him all of our efforts turn to ashes and our sunrises into darkest nights. Without him, life is a meaningless drama with the decisive scenes missing. But with Him we are able to rise from the fatigue of despair to the buoyancy of hope. With Him we are able to rise from the midnight of desperation to the daybreak of joy. St. Augustine was right – *“We were made for God and we will be restless until we find rest in Him.”*

Christ is born. Blessed is the Birth of Christ.

For us Christians, the birth of Christ is the greatest miracle and the source of spiritual strength. Within the vast universe God is the source of inspiration for all mankind. In the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God descends from heaven to transform the souls of men and to deliver them from the perils of darkness, leading them to Himself in a spiritual journey and making men pacemakers and role models for the good life. This man, the creature of God, emanates the light of the Creator.

Our world is confronted with numerous challenges. Under the watchful eye of God we are able to achieve new accomplishments. Yet human suffering, hunger and thirst, both physical and spiritual prevail and the perils of darkness increase. The birth of Christ is the divine Grace that awakens in us the consciousness to walk with Him and to live the life that the Disciples of Christ and the saints of the Church lived. Faith in the Son of God will make it possible for Christ to be born within us.

The late Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin I of blessed memory says: *“They are not saints who refrain from entering life for fear of encountering evil.... They are not saints who remain in their individual isolation, motionless and idle, and reduce their lives, with the emptiness of their souls, to a desert where marshes do not exist because there is no water at all.... What saintliness is there in those hands that never touch life? While on the contrary, what sacred charm emanates from those hands that though are dipped sometimes in the mire of life but do not get soiled; they come out purified and more beautiful.”*

Christ is born. Blessed is the Birth of Christ.

The Birth of Christ becomes the blessing for spiritual joy only when we as Christians, the Church and the community of the faithful, make sanctity the purpose and mission of our lives. Our world thirsts for spiritual rebirth. Our ancestors have bequeathed us to uphold their legacy and to continue to live in God, led by the light that emanates from the Gospels; to stay in communion with our ancestors whose sacrifices for their Christian faith inspires us to live our life of faith anchored on the rock of Holy Etchmiadzin.

Dear faithful children of the Armenian Apostolic Church:

Let your hearts become the City of Bethlehem where Christ will be reborn. I urge you to enrich your new life with new commitments and vows, making the service of God the path of your lives. Let us strengthen our Diocese with unified efforts, with our many churches, schools, and national institutions, which are gifts from above and bridges that lead

us to God. Let us greet one another with warm hearts,
enriched with the mystery of Christ's Birth and with the love
to transfigure our God-given lives.

Christ is born. Blessed is the Birth of Christ.

Christmas, 2006

AND WHEN THE SPIRIT RESTED UPON THEM, THEY PROPHECIZED

These words are recorded in the Book of Numbers and speak to us about the elders of Israel, who were chosen by God to bear the burden of the people. The same words certainly can reflect the inner movement of our hearts and souls as we all witness the ordination of fourteen deacons into priesthood, who have responded to God's call. "And the spirit rests upon them and they will prophesize."

This very day marks a new beginning in the spiritual life of our candidates to the priesthood. Dear Deacons, through the ordination into the priesthood you are transfigured into a new life, a life immersed in God, a life immersed in Christ, a life which reflects the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Priesthood is the most rewarding gift from God. Those who respond to God's call become apostles in the vineyard of God, our Lord. They become the spiritual tools of love and miracle in the Hands of the Almighty in the life of humanity.

"When the spirit rested upon them, they prophesized."

Today the Holy Spirit rests upon Charles, Robert, Thomas, Abel, Melissa, Richard, Patricia, Ruth, Maria, Sarah, Andrew, Neil, Richard and Mary and enriches them with divine wisdom to lead their God-entrusted flocks and fulfill their duties and responsibilities with prudence and with the light emanating from the life of Christ our Lord. Filled with the power of the Spirit and armed with the light of Christ you are called to become prophets for your flocks. Prophets are those who bear the light and the wisdom of the Almighty God, the Creator of the Universe. Prophets are those who are able to enlighten the spiritual lives of mankind with sanctity and with the vision of the new dawn. Prophets are those who through their prayerful life are able to become the golden bridge between God and humanity.

The life-giving and inspiring words of the Psalmist will

instill a new spirit in your being: *“Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; Oh, deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man! For You are the God of my strength; Why do You cast me off? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? Oh, send out Your light and Your truth! Let them lead me; Let them bring me to Your holy hill And to Your tabernacle. Then I will go to the altar of God, To God my exceeding joy; and on the harp I will praise You, O God, my God. Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.”* Psalm 43

My dear fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, today, with the ordination into the priesthood, you are entering through the doorway of a New Life. I firmly believe that led with the power of the Holy Spirit the priest becomes the spiritual transformer of human lives in the life of the community, the source of true joy, and the inspiration through the services rendered to the members of the community, but above all, the messenger of the Good News, which will be attained by the people only when we live the messages of the Gospels:

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:4-9)

Christ our Lord is the good shepherd. Christ remains to be the spiritual strength for all priests who are called to serve

God and humanity. A priest's life cannot be different than the pattern of the life of our Lord: a life of service, a sacrificial life reflected in sufferings, a renewed life in the victorious resurrection of Christ. In as much as the ordination of our beloved brothers and sisters into the priesthood leads them into a New Life, today we all become partakers in the spirit of renewal. I firmly believe that ordinations also transform the life of Christ's church. With the ordination of our brothers and sisters the Church is strengthened in her mission and the name of God is praised and glorified.

My Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

You are called to live your lives with Christ and thus you are given the gift of the spirit. Remember the words of our Lord, addressed to you and us all.

“If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that you also should do as I have done to you.” (John 13:14-15)

St. Paul, the apostle, the illuminator of the souls and the minds of the pagans gave his burning and passionate love to the first Christians and through his martyrdom the same message of love penetrated into the hearts of the followers: ***“I have neither silver nor gold, but I give you what I have.”*** (Acts 3:6).

Priesthood is a journey of a unique life. Alongside during on our journey God is with us and is holding us high. A priest's spiritual journey is the most joyous and rewarding life. The priest is the life-giving spiritual presence, who is called to be an icon of Christ making real God's presence in the assembly of (His) people. During the journey you are all challenged with countless tribulations and temptations. In Christ alone we will endure them and strengthen our calling and commitment in the service of humanity with holiness.

Today we are witnessing in the hearts of our priesthood-candidates the miracle of change. You are changed to listen to God's call. You are changed to enlighten the life of the faithful. You are changed to create and become co-creators

to God. This change flares up in your being only where we learn to pray with Christ our Lord. Priests also need the prayers of their people, as Karl Rahner said it rightfully –

*“So, my dear friends,
Pray for him, carry him,
So that he might be able
To sustain others
By bringing to them
The mystery of God’s love
Revealed in Jesus Christ.”*

In closing I would like to thank His Grace Bishop John Bruno, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles, for providing me with this honor to be the humble preacher on the historic occasion of the ordination of fifteen candidates into the order of the priesthood. Bishop Jon Bruno has been an outstanding religious leader in the ecumenical family, a great friend of all with a heart full of outpouring love and compassion, and above all with the unifying spiritual strength in all movements. Today I congratulate you, my dear brother in Christ, on this blessed occasion of the ordination of your deacons into the priesthood. I also would like to extend my special greetings to the presiding bishop of the Episcopalian Diocese, The Most Rev. Frank T., Griswold, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church.

It is a fact that the relationship between our two churches, the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Episcopal Church, has been strong and cordial. Your recent trip to Armenia and the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin is also a reflection of the long-standing fellowship between the two churches. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, dear and distinguished religious leaders and faithful, this day will be earmarked in the history of the religious community with true joy and inspiration, as we witness the ordination of the fourteen deacons into the order of the priesthood. Let us all pray to God the Almighty to fill their hearts, souls and minds of the ordained priests with the power of the Holy Spirit,

strengthen them with good services rendered to their communities, grace them with the abundance of divine mercy, make them true apostles in God's vineyard, and grant them prudent hearts so that they may be able to live God and serve the community with a renewed spirit, but above all led by the power of the Holy Spirit may prophesize for the well being of their faithful.

January 16, 2006

CELEBRATING THE RENEWAL OF OUR CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Today's reception has become a tradition in the life of this Diocese, and is now expanding to the other parts of the Diocese as well. We are truly happy and thankful for the Ladies' Auxiliary of the Central area for taking this initiative in hosting the event for the 3rd time since my election as Primate of the Western Diocese.

The goal of this fellowship is threefold. The primary goal is to celebrate the renewal of our Christian spirituality with the birth of Christ our Lord. Second, to evaluate the past year's missions and projects of this Diocese, but above all to foresee the future of this Diocese.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Christ our Lord continues to be the foundation of our God-given lives. Our Christian faith is once again strengthened through this fellowship. It is the time to give thanks to God for our achievements of the past year in the Western Diocese. It will be literally impossible to enumerate the countless activities all of which are aimed towards strengthening the foundations of the Armenian Apostolic Church on this blessed soil of America. Our success was possible with the equal participation of the pastors, members of the Diocesan Council, and all those faithful who have worked hard and have given generously for a stronger Diocese.

However it is important to note that there is yet much to be done to be able to attain a Christian life in its fullest sense: educating our children and fulfilling our pastoral duties and responsibilities. For as human beings we will always fall short of perfection. St. Augustine has said, "*God Himself is perfection, and we are only relatively perfect.*" Therefore our lives are a journey towards perfection. God-willing the coming year will be exciting for us all. This Diocese will expand on many levels with the recruitment of new candidates and the

assignments of new priests to communities. This mission will succeed with true devotion and with generous and substantial donations by certain individuals and institutions. The construction of the Cathedral, the vision of the Diocese and her faithful for many years, has begun to materialize. The overlaying of the façade of the Diocesan Complex with Tufa stones is already complete, and in the next few months the actual construction will also begin.

Alongside the construction of the Cathedral, many new churches are being constructed within the Western Diocese: St. Gregory Church in Pasadena, St. John Garabed in Hollywood, Phoenix, Scottsdale, Palm Desert and Seattle.

Many church communities have acquired new properties and have launched plans for location to new and larger facilities. These parishes include San Diego, Arizona, and Las Vegas.

In the realm of expansion within the past two years a series of our newly established parishes have already begun to celebrate Divine Liturgy on a regular basis, including Burbank, Whittier, La Canada and Santa Clarita.

Religious education has taken new flight on a variety of levels. The Christian Education Council has undertaken the enhancement of our Sunday school curriculum. We have been able to reach a large number of faithful through religious education. Over 40 books have been published in the past three years and over 50 publications have been planned for the next two years. These are not merely words, but facts.

The subcommittees of the Western Diocese are working with exceptional devotion for the progress of their missions. They include the ACYO, the Ladies' Auxiliary, the Stewardship Committee, the Cathedral Committee, and many others. Some have already established new missions of their own. It is impossible to give a detailed account of the extent of our activities.

My dear faithful in Christ, I thank God for this fellowship and once again I commit myself to the service of this Diocese. I cherish the words of St. Paul "For me to live is Christ." Continue to live your God-given life with the faith of our

forefathers. Continue to uphold the traditions of the Armenian Apostolic Church. But above all reflect in your lives compassion and patience for the Armenian Apostolic Church, which during the past 100 years has traversed many turbulent years. We realize that the needs awaiting us are immense. We also realize that we have the obligation to respond to the many and countless issues challenging us. All of these will be addressed with true faith, genuine love, mutual understanding between the faithful of the Armenian Apostolic Church, but above all with patience.

Patience is a virtue. Remember well the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. as he addressed his people, *"I may not be able to see the peak of the mountain, but my children surely will."*

All issues pertaining to our church, whether liturgical, linguistic or other, will eventually be solved gradually. Certain issues will be addressed by the Synod of Bishops, however other issues will be addressed by the people themselves. Again, remember the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. "It is not what the world is doing for the African American, but what the African Americans are doing for their people."

Exciting times are ahead of us. It is rejuvenating and spiritually uplifting to witness the genuine interest of our people for change. Change does not happen with language alone. Change does not happen with the shortening of services. Change comes from the heart. Change comes when we partake and put our hands in the work of creating a new church.

Therefore I leave you all my love, my deep and sincere respect, but above all my willingness to always be there in your service for the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and for the glory of God.

February 11, 2006

SERVICE IS THE RADIANCE OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST

The New Year which begins with the Birth of Christ is a miraculous blessing and a challenge in the full sense of the word, to a New Life.

Dear children of the Armenian Apostolic Church, we feel a moral duty to share with you our contemplations on the threshold of the New Year, with a brief glance into our spiritual service during the past three years, in which you all have a part. Furthermore, we feel the need to share with you our vision and plans for the future, so that the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church prospers in her missions and becomes the foremost institution from the altars of which we preach the Gospel of Christ, the testimony of our forefathers, the lessons and messages that enlighten our present, the traditions of the Armenian Christian family, love towards our Mother Language, respect towards Armenian history, with the consciousness and fear of God to live our God-given life with utmost wisdom.

Since our election in 2003 we embarked upon the demanding journey that was entrusted to us, with the help and support of the clergy, Diocesan Council, parishes, Ladies' Auxiliary, ACYO, benefactors and the faithful.

We wish to point out only the main aspects which were particularly noticeable within the life of the Diocesan life: administrative delegations, appointment of clergy, religious missions, the establishment of new parishes, a continuous effort to raise funds for the Mother Cathedral, and a reorganization of official and ecumenical relations. We have provided detailed accounts of all these activities on a daily basis, both through the Mother Church newsletter and other forms of media. When we take a retrospective look upon what has been accomplished, we see more clearly that the field of service before us has expanded even further and that the

main points of focus lying before us for the upcoming year will be the following:

To prepare and train a large number of clergy, obtain permanent sites for our new parishes, the administrative reorganization of our Diocesan offices, the intensification of the spiritual and prayerful life on all levels, the expansion of new missions including the prison ministry and hospital visitations, the strengthening of the youth, and a closer and permanent relationship with the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

Glory to God for all the graces granted to us. Today we extend our warm words of appreciation to those individuals who have graced us with their service in the Diocesan Council for the past 25 years, who although have been acknowledged individually, have never been given the honor of a collective acknowledgement. We wish to mention the names of each of them so that together we may congratulate them for their service at the completion of this address with heartfelt applause. If the Diocese today has a character and identity, it is thanks to the clergy and members of the Diocesan Council who have served under the leadership of the former Primate. It is our heartfelt prayer that by the will of God you continue your service towards the Armenian Apostolic Church.

We wish to particularly remember also those who have served on the Diocesan Council but are no longer with us. We would like to emphasize that we have declared the year 2006 as the Year of Service so that we all dedicate ourselves to the prosperity of the Diocese. We extend our gratitude to the clergy of the Diocese serve who collectively, with the condition that one is for all and all is for one. We must endure, so that the spirit of collective service takes new flight and we may pull our parishes out of isolation and into an inter-community life.

Let us all live our God-given life with faith and prayer and turn the spirit of dedication into the symbol of our lives. Glory to a life that has become meaningful with the faith of our forefathers; glory to God for your love and blessed presence.

CHRIST IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD

“He is not here, but is risen!” (Luke 24:4)

“And you are the witness of these things.” (Luke 24:48)

The good news of the Miraculous Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ once again reaches us all as a beacon of light, as a call to the entire world towards faith and a new spiritual life; “And you are the witnesses of these things.” Truly the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ not only reawakens within our spirituality the consciousness to relive the mystery of the Divine Resurrection, but even more so, to become the witnesses of the life of Christ and especially His Resurrection. The Resurrection of Christ is the ultimate reality that adorns our human spirit, because as Paul the Apostle says, ***“If Christ has not risen, your faith is futile.”*** (I Corinthians 15:15).

“He is not here, but is risen!” (Luke 24:4) ***“And you are the witnesses of these things”*** (Luke 24:48). For the Armenian Christian, the Feast of the Resurrection is the feast of a “greater life.” Through our sacred religious rites the fundamental truth that the Resurrection of Christ is the new dawn of our spiritual life is further rooted within us, since “through his Resurrection he transcended sin, and all that having to do with this death.” Thus, the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ becomes true on the day, when not only our creed is rerooted, but above all when we become the witnesses of His Resurrection. This is precisely where emphasis is placed upon the Church. The Church, as the congregation of the Believers of Christ, as part of its presence and identify, has an obligation to speak of and preach the Resurrection of Christ; to unceasingly deliver the message of Christ’s Gospels, and to make certain That the life of the Christian individual and the community is a testimony of the Resurrection of Christ. We will become the witnesses of Christ’s Resurrection only when we partake in his sacrifices. In other words, when we

know how to fill our lives with sacrifice, turning our path of life towards Christ.

The miraculous Resurrection of Christ is the feast of the renewed church. The Resurrection of Christ is the dawn of a new life within every Christian. We are the ones who will construct the new church, with our own hands, so that we may give the testimony of Christ's Resurrection. Our individual life has the thirst for renewal, as is our communal life within the Church, our life of service, both national and to the Church. But, above all, our lives within the family, to raise our children entrusted to us by God, is nothing but the example of the life of Christ.

The miraculous Resurrection of Christ conveys to all of us the message to transfigure our spiritual lives through the strength of prayer and to embark upon the God-pleasing mission to cultivate our spirit. The God-pleasing mission to cultivate our spirit begins in our individual life followed by a unity of the faithful through love. The more the individual is strengthened in his life of prayer, the more passionately he testifies about the Resurrection of Christ. The more the Christian community love, the more that community becomes not only a strong testimony of the Resurrection of Christ, but above all a strong presence for all those who have strayed from the path of light and suffer in darkness. Our salvation and strength is in our spiritual life. The Church is obliged to constantly renew herself, thus becoming a presence that maintains pace with contemporary times. It is our message that the children of the Church remain firm in their Christian faith because our nation has been reborn in that faith by turning Christianity into the splendor of her spirit. For that same faith our nation has accepted the greatest divine gift, the Armenian Alphabet, and through it has eternalized the Holy Bible with Armenian words. The children of our Church, with this communion, have continued to live their God-given lives.

We have reached the point in history when even greater challenges have risen before us and now we have the obligation to overcome. We will continue to uphold, even at the cost of

our lives, the legacy of our forefathers, who have been sanctified through their martyrdom. The legacy of our Christian faith and doctrine, the Motherland and Holy Etchmiadzin, our language, our national heritage, culture, history, and most importantly our right for the recognition of the Genocide. The Armenian Church will be demolished when we are not able to pass these messages on to our youth.

The Christian faith cannot be anchored upon the testimony of the Resurrection of Christ if it is not rooted in our Motherland, Holy Etchmiadzin, as well as the sacred Armenian legacies, culture and history. These facets present themselves as a cornerstone of the Christian faith. In other words, they are God-given graces which strengthen our faith. They are graces in the sense of challenges, as to what extent we are able to live our Christian faith through our actions in order that we may become partakers in the crucifixion of Christ and to gain the right to testify about the Resurrection of Christ. The mystery of the Resurrection of Christ truly becomes a testimony when the Resurrection of Christ is expressed through our lives.

Dear faithful live the Feast of the Resurrection because its mystery is the mystery of the true life. This leads us to live life striving for perfection, as Christ himself says “...be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect.” The Feast of Resurrection is a day of pilgrimage. It is the doorway to eternal life. It is the feast of our renewed life. It is the breath of peace and the spring, which plant harmonious brotherhood among nations. It is the Feast of Holy Etchmiadzin and, finally, the day of the victory of the Christian faith.

“Christ is risen from the dead.” “He is not here, but is risen!” (Luke 24:4) “And you are the witnesses of these things.” (Luke 24:48)

February 28, 2006

ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

“The agony of the Armenian Genocide does not lack any evidence or any distortion.”

Arnold J. Toynebee

The commemoration of the victims of the Armenian Genocide is the spiritual reawakening of all Armenians around the world. We all live in a world where truth and justice is suppressed. However, the spirit to fight for freedom continues to be the destiny of our nation.

Today’s commemoration on the campus of USC and at all gatherings worldwide challenges us with the renewal of the spirit to embrace the vision of the victims of the first genocide of the 20th century. The author of the Book of Proverbs instills in the depths of our hearts and souls the strength to enrich our lives with the undying will to guard our identity: “Where there is no vision, people die.” Martin Luther King Jr. inspires us all with a similar vision, as he himself inspires his people with the undying hope and struggle for justice.

“I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that as a people we will get to the Promised Land.”

As sons and daughters of the Armenian nation and the Church, we will get to the Promised Land only with a committed heart, with the vision to uphold the faith of our forefathers, with the vision to embrace justice, with the undying hope and love for our culture and history, with the vision of excellence in our academic life, with the zeal to become leaders of the world, leaders in the political and spiritual lives of world’s nations. Our voice will be heard only when we are strong in our fight, committed in our love for another, and firm in our Christian faith. God has graced us all with the Independent Armenia. The Church and the nation will only conquer when new stars are born in all domains of humanity, who will not only bring pride to the

nation, but will also inspire the new generations with the Armenian spirit.

As a spiritual leader and as a servant of God and my nation, I renew my calling to bring justice to the victims of the Genocide and I invite you all to make the vow to pass on the torch to your peers and the future youth to come.

Ninety-one years ago, the Ottoman Turks massacred a million and a half Armenians. Their memory is commemorated today. Decades ago, Martin Luther King Jr., in addressing to his own people challenged us all with the following words:

“I am aware of current events. I know everything you are telling me about what the white man is doing to the Negro. Now tell me: what is Negro doing for himself?”

Therefore, my dear youth, in the name of the martyrs I address you. Strengthened with your presence, I commit myself to the Armenian Question and call on you all to continue to live as good citizens of this blessed country and be the guardians of the Christian faith and the Armenian identity always remembering the words of the English historian Toynbee: “The agony of the Armenian Genocide does not lack any evidence and distortions.”

CHURCH UNITY BEFORE 2050

“The quest for unity drove me (as it has so many others) closer to the source of our faith: Jesus Christ, His Gospel and the constitutive tradition of His Church. As you draw closer to that source, the vision of Christian unity strikes you with great clarity...”

These most inspiring words reflect the faith, life and the vision of a distinguished church leader who for so many decades dedicated his life to the unity of the Church, firmly believed in the commitment to that cause, and inspired many with the same zeal. Throughout his life the late Catholicos Karekin I had been engaged in numerous ecumenical movements. During his training as a priest, and later as an ordained priest of the Armenian Apostolic Church, he was actively engaged in the ecumenical movement on an international level. With his own words the ecumenical movement and meetings have become the impact for the “profound conviction that the cause of Christian unity was inseparably linked with the renewal for the Church.”

As a servant of Christ I have always admired him, his ministry, and leadership in the ecumenical circles. For the past three decades, having been involved in the ecumenical life myself, mostly in the United Kingdom during my academic years at the University of Oxford, later a pastor and spiritual leader of the Armenian Church in Canada, and presently in the United States, at the Western Diocese, I continue to cherish the same spirit with the same conviction and the vision of being able to foresee that it is only through mutual understanding, respectable dialogue, and true Christian love that churches can grow as one body.

Therefore, to my understanding we can only achieve the unity of the Church in the coming decades when we have already embraced that vision in our lives. We cannot separate preaching from practice. Preaching the Word of God should

be deeply rooted in our daily actions and reflected in our relationship with our faithful and through our unconditional love, care and compassion for our brothers and sisters. It is not permissible for a Christian to say: “I can pray for you, but not with you.” The unity of the church is born in the fellowship of a prayerful life. Unity is attained only when the members of the church of Christ are able to grasp the significance of praying together, thus realizing the unity of the church.

The message of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ sets forth a direction for us all, which we should all adopt, follow and fulfill. “Go, therefore and make disciples of the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you,” (Mathew 28). Any move that threatens the unity of the Church should be addressed properly; especially in this age when Christianity is challenged every hour by such popular books as “The Da Vinci Code”. The Gospel should always remain for us the unifying force and strength as the sons and daughters of Christ’s Church. And all those who follow the messages of Christ our Lord should differentiate between the principles of the Christian faith from the interpretations of the Christian faith.

In my presentation, I will focus on the message of Christ, our Lord, which in itself reflects His life and ministry of presence. I will then make a short retrospective review of the history of Christianity, and finally focus on the challenges of today which threaten the foundations of Christianity.

I. The Message of Christ, our Lord

As Christians we all have the noble obligation to learn about the life of Christ, and His Divine presence in the life of humanity through the Incarnation. We all are called to live a Christian life in following and fulfilling the requirements put forth for the cultivation of our Christian character. Christianity is not merely a philosophy. Christianity is the way of life, which became the calling and the vocation of the Fathers of the church, who gave their lives as martyrs with the vision

and the understanding that the Incarnation of Christ, our Lord, has paved the way for us all to find our way to God. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ lived a very humble life. As the Son of God, He was approachable to all. He lived a holy life and inspired his Disciples and the people surrounding Him to live a similar life. He preached the Word of God and invited His Disciples to become the vessels of the Word of God. He preached in parables to make His messages more comprehensible, with images taken from daily life, thus making His Parables the mirror of life.

The late Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey an astounding religious figure, who has transfigured the hearts, souls and minds of thousands with his exemplary Christian way of life, has left us all an important legacy: how to be a Christian.

In his own words, “To be a Christian does not mean to be ‘on the side of’ Christianity, like one who supports a movement or approves a cause. It means the submission of self to Christ, and the sharing in the life of His family.

Christ is the vine, and you are one of the branches. Holy Communion, prayer, and the Bible are ways in which Christ can keep you united to Him; and these are wonderful gifts, involving stupendous demands. You cannot bypass the Church; you are part of its scandal, unless you are setting yourself to be part of its glory.”

This reflection in itself gives us a deeper understanding of Michael Ramsey’s perception of the Christian faith, whose vision for the unity of the Church has left a great impact during the 60’s and 70’s, and he, himself, became one of the spiritual components of the ecumenical life and facilitated many new bridges between East and West and amongst all Christian churches. His perception of the unity of Christ’s church was the result of his true Christian identity. He firmly believed in Christianity. He was not “on the side of” Christianity. He was source of the movement within the Church. He humbled for Christ, became one in Christ, and invited others to be followers of his credo.

Much could be said about Christ and Christianity. However the most important aspect to take into consideration is the notion of change. Christ came to this world to change lives, He transfigured in order that we may transfigure our spirituality. With this in mind, all other factors that threaten the unity of Christ's Church should be eliminated with wisdom, with the love of Christ, and with our faith in God.

To my understanding those who do not learn and practice the Christian faith in their everyday lives, are more inclined to be engaged in issues deviating from the spirit of the Gospels and the messages of Christ, our Lord. Christianity is the living faith. For 2000 years, generations have enriched their spirituality by nourishing their souls, minds, and spirits with the life of Christ and the messages emanating from the Gospels. Christianity should become the spiritual bread of life. We know well the importance of bread for the sustenance of our physical body, which gives the necessary strength to live. The same also applies to spiritual nourishment. Through our baptism, we are challenged to live with the vision of a life in Christ, a life with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, a life becoming a part of Christ's church.

Therefore one cannot possibly have the vision of unity for the coming decades without living a Christian life, without inspiring others to live a Christian life, without having the vision to become a spiritual tool for the unity for Christ's Church.

II. Retrospective Reflections on the History of Christianity.

Throughout history, Christianity has been challenged by countless circumstances, be it political, social, and above all theological. One cannot separate these circumstances. All theological arguments are somehow influenced by sociopolitical approaches. As we look into the history of Christianity we realize that with ongoing conflicts and intense struggles between communities, Christianity has paved the way for other religions to grow. If only we listen to the Word of Christ our Lord, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life," then

we would learn to be more careful, distancing our lives from circumstances, which not only weaken, but also threaten the foundations of the Christian Church. The first ecumenical councils, those of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus, clearly defined the credo, our faith in God. The more I have studied the history of Christianity, the closer I have been drawn to the Gospels.

When we look closely at the history of Christianity, we realize that philosophical approaches have always been traps for unforeseen arguments. Therefore seminars and conferences as such are important tools to reawaken in us the Christian spirit, the presence of Christ, and the commitment to live as Christians.

“The trend toward ecumenism has been a part and parcel of the church from its very beginning. In the deeply spiritual, extremely moving and tremendously challenging seventeenth chapter of the Gospel of St. John, we see its true source in one of Christ’s most moving prayers. In that passage, Jesus prays that His followers (in the first place the apostles themselves) may all be one...” (Catholicos Karekin I).

III. The Challenges of Today

“Today it is not the form of the faith that is in question. Today faith itself is at stake... the universality of the Christian faith is an intrinsic part of its nature. The ecumenical movement is our endeavor to bring that universality to life through the unity of our church.” (Catholicos Karekin I)

We live in the most challenging of times. The world in which we live poses a threat against the Christian faith. We are either engulfed in the flames posed by these threats, or we are adamant to respond and fight against all challenges, which depict the Christian faith as a dysfunctional religion.

In my final remarks, I urge all of us to be more united in our efforts to fight against all challenges, which describe the Christian faith as a dysfunctional religion. It is important to seek the reasons as to why the Christian religion is being uprooted in the communities we live in. First, personal wit-

nessing is important in our communal life of faith. If we are not able to make our lives the refection of Christ's love, if we are not able to create a Christian community, if we are not able to pursue Christian morals, if we are not able to become the torchbearers of our forefathers' faith and be the witnesses of Christ's life, then Christianity becomes solely a movement and the community is deprived of a strong sense of commitment.

I believe that true respect and genuine love between churches is the key element of success in achieving the long awaited unity. My answer to the question "Unity before 2050?" is positive. I do have the vision for a united church. I consider myself being part of the same church and I call on you all to have the same vision. Christianity is not a science. Christianity is a way of life, Christian unity is achieved only when we live as Christians, when we walk with Christ and become partakers in his sufferings, and ultimately in his Blessed Resurrection. Those who live with Christ and in Christ can certainly be the uniting spiritual strength and the force to expedite the unity of the Christian Church.

Christianity has the moral obligation to focus on the life of society, thus influencing the change in society's life. Christianity has the obligation to transform people's lives. As Christ's church the more we are focused on this aspect, the more we are united in Christ. A Church which has deprived herself from this type of important position is certainly divided within herself.

The late Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, challenged us with his profound thoughts about the ultimate role of Christ's church. "The Church is pledged to influence society and to criticize society. In this task the deepest influence should always be upon persons on their character as persons. Christ himself lived and died and rose again in a world full of social abuses, including appalling abuse of slavery. But Christ's chief method was not to attack institutions, but to transform people. And there can be no substitute for the impact of Christianity upon people at their deepest

level, always remembering that a person never lives in a vacuum; he is always a bundle of social relationships, both private and public. And these relationships all need to be Christianized. So the church's mission to change personal lives cannot be separated from its critique of wrong attitudes in society."

Therefore, I highly commend the efforts of the "Orientale Lumen Conferences" for what you do for the Christian community, thus facilitating new means for the members of Christ's Church to get to know one another better and to be engaged in fellowship, for the sake of the unity of Christ's Church.

June 15, 2006

THE JOURNEY OF TRANSFORMATION

“When we join the church, we are not joining an ‘organization’; we are embarking on a journey of transformation.”

Bill Peatman

Transformation – for a Christian who perceives his/her God-given life to be the most precious gift, the transformation of the inner soul is a necessity. If we are not careful to cultivate our spirituality then we lose the true meaning of life. Life itself should constantly renew itself with the knowledge of God, which in turn ought to be reflected in our relationship with fellow friends, amongst the members of the family, and vis-à-vis to all. A Christian who is not able to be with Christ and His Disciples, who went up to Mount Tabor where Christ was transfigured, cannot enrich the soul with the vision of a new life.

Therefore, all of us who join the Church need to understand and mature in the faith that the Church is the place where we meet God and are led to a spiritual transformation. Our daily life can be trapped in turmoil if we are not able to transform inwardly. I can attest to that in my own life, for I have met individuals, be they men of the clerk or of any other profession, who have inspired me by the strength of their faith, but above all, through their affirmation that the Church calls on us all to embrace a unique journey of transformation. Transformation for the human soul takes place when prayer mirrors our life.

July 29, 2006

“Ultimately, (though) there comes a time when we should unplug and actually talk to each other old- fashion style, face-to-face, uninterrupted by e-mail or cell phones or iPods

because without real human interaction, technology isn't worth much." Theres J. Borchard

We all live in an age where technology not only dominates our spirituality, but it actually threatens or normal relationship with God and friends. Technology should be used to the extent that it brings us closer to each other, without interrupting human interaction.

The Church is the place, which remains and continues to be the spiritual strength for all humanity to bond with and ultimately embrace God as family. As I watch and follow the devastating news in the Middle East, there I see not only the lack of Christian love, but also the abuse of technology, which distances people from each other. When we meet and talk, we are able to see that we are equal in the eyes of God and thus have responsibility to have mutual respect for one another. In the same way we surrender ourselves to God with total trust, we also need to embrace one another and surrender ourselves to each other with respect, but above all with the fear of God

July 29, 2006

"Jesus doesn't promise that we will never experience storms in our lives, whether external disasters or internal anguish. He does promise that he will take care of us." Bill Peatman

The life we live certainly mirrors the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Christ, our Lord, took upon himself all the burdens and the suffering for the salvation of the human soul. He also gave us the message through His own stormy life that the same also awaits for humanity. However, all of us who put our hope and trust in God, are lifted up and guarded. All those who endure suffering and storm in their God-given life are able to overcome internal anguish through the power of their faith. Christ's life is the promise of liberation

from sin, distress and all kinds of other afflictions.

As we put our faith in Christ, we are enlightened through His Transfiguration. As Christians, we also carry the Cross on our shoulders. This act deepens in our spirituality the sense of humility and total obedience to the will of God.

July 29, 2006

“Christianity is not about being served, but about serving.”

Bilezikian

Christ, our Lord, taught us to serve as He humbled himself from Heaven on earth. During His earthly life, He led His disciples to live a life of servitude. Today’s Church is in the dire need of service towards transformation. Humility and servitude need to be lived thoroughly. Those who lead a life of service towards humanity are certainly the ones who have embraced true joy. Hierarchy is all about servitude. The higher positions we hold in Church, the more visible our service should be. The ranks in the hierarchy ought to mark the level of maturity of serving others.

“Christianity is not about being served, but about serving.” The name of our Lord is glorified in a Church where the number of servants grows immensely. The more we embrace service towards others, the more we spread the love of Christ. Therefore, let us all be Disciples of Christ our Lord, who knelt and washed their feet, thus inspiring us all with the message of a glorified life.

July 29, 2006

“Active form of belief involves prayer, self-analysis, and directed religious energy which help people to gain control of their own lives.” Peale

We are all born to be the spiritual architects of our God-given lives. We embrace this honor of becoming spiritual

architects if only we are able to turn our belief into an active form through “prayer, self-analysis, and directed religious energy, which helps people to gain control of their own lives.”

The Bible teaches us the discipline of prayer in our daily life. Through prayer, we establish a unique relationship with God the Creator of Heaven and Earth. Once we establish a permanent relationship, we launch on a journey towards God. While on this journey, we also aim towards a life with the Lord in a Christian way of life. I have the firm belief that all those who develop this unique relationship with God can certainly inspire the people around them to follow God and become instruments of peace.

Life is an inheritance from God. We are entrusted to guard the gift of God with wisdom, and through the power of prayer, become the spiritual architects of a new life.

July 30, 2006

“A reinvigoration in the search of God.”

A Christian is born in the image of God. Through Baptism and subsequently by the power of prayer our lives become the reflection of the reinvigoration of the search of God. This path helps us to cultivate within us the Christian character. In summary, as we constantly use all the tools to reinstate Christ in our spirituality, we commit to live a Christ-like life.

The search for God is an important aspect of Christian spirituality. If the search is weakened, we lose God and tend to drift away from a God-pleasing life. The Church, the fellowships and forms of pious acts help us to better understand our Christian vocation and to perfect in us the very gift of faith, hope and love, which we have received through our baptism.

A reinvigoration of the search of God should ultimately be the destiny of all Christians.

July 31, 2006

“You can always get to somewhere when you start at nowhere.” Robert Schuller

These are challenging words addressed to us all. The birth of each human being can be classified as “nowhere” or the starting point. From then onwards, the journey takes on the hike through many steps: childhood, education, a life focused on a mission, etc. People who do not cherish any kind of vision and ambition in their life cannot become architects of a unique life, an act which is expected from all of us. Through education, patience, and hard work and above all, with a vision of excellence, we are able to build a life in fulfilling many responsibilities entrusted to us by God. Therefore, God calls on us to invest in the gift of life. Christ calls on us all to follow Him. Every prayer is the response to God’s call to live a committed life in the service of the Church.

July 31, 2006

A THANKSGIVING PRAYER

“It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to Thy name, O Most High” - Psalm 92:1

A life of thanksgiving to God certainly is the noblest expression of the human soul. It is indeed the way of life, vividly reflected according to the message conveyed to us from the Holy Bible.

“God created man in his own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be faithful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:26- 28)

“Let us make man in our image after our likeness...”

The fact that we are created in the image of God is truly the greatest gift, which in itself obligates us to live a responsible life. It also challenges us with a deeper understanding of partnership in the God-created world. Therefore, this honor bestowed upon us moves us in our prayerful life to be thankful to God. This inner feeling has been well reflected and expressed in the prayers of our liturgy, which clearly explains to us that God is the Creator of the Universe and all things.

“All things come of Thee O Lord and of Thine own have we given Thee.”

Much has been said and written about “Thanksgiving Day” in the United States of America. This wonderful tradition helps transform the spirituality of Americans in reawakening in their souls and minds the depth of allegiance to the Almighty God.

For in our thanksgiving prayer and praise to God, we firmly acknowledge the wisdom of God, from whom all things come.

Thus, thanksgiving prayer not only nourishes the hearts and the souls of humanity, but it certainly strengthens our

commitment to serve the Lord and humanity. Thanksgiving prayer and praise reminds us all that we are all blessed by the Almighty God with bountiful gifts. St. Paul the Apostle of Christ, in almost all of his pastoral letters reiterates this notion: *“I always give thanks to my God, who has blessed us with every blessing in Christ.”*

Our Church fathers found reason for gratitude for the most ordinary things in life. Today, in this country, we enjoy countless blessings and abundance.

Thanksgiving and praise to God for all the gifts and the abundance of blessings is the act of a noble heart. Therefore, we are gathered to acknowledge amongst us the presence of God and the fruits of the creation for the well being of all mankind. We are gathered in the spirit of true fellowship to render genuine respect and love for one another in sharing our gifts with our fellow brothers and sisters, especially with those, who are in need and desperation. The world, in which we all live, can become a better place when we all are reminded of our great responsibilities. In the life of the community religious institutions and spiritual leaders, together with their respective faithful, should have the vision to turn their lives into tools of change, peace and prosperity.

Our faith in God needs to be reflected in our actions. Fellowships are the most rewarding and inspiring environments which help us all individually and collectively to cultivate within us a sense of thanksgiving and praise. Fellowships create a sense of commitment for one another and humanity as a whole.

Dearest Brothers and Sisters, as George Washington once said; the purpose of thanksgiving should be lived with wisdom: *“As a day of public Thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many favors of Almighty God.”*

“Almighty God, we thank you for all the blessings of this life, and today especially for those who live in this free land; for the fruits of the soil, the resources of the earth; the opportunities for work and play and healthful living; for

liberty in speech and the written word. We thank you for these and all your mercies and pray that you will continue your goodness to us and make our nation great in the greatness which alone is pleasing to you.

CLAREMONT SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY ECUMENICAL SERVICE

Life is God's greatest gift. It is the breath of God in us. We should each live our lives in such a manner as if it is God who is speaking through us. Life is given to us so that we may offer it to God and to mankind for peace. Very often we fail, personally and collectively, to dedicate our lives, the very gift of God, to Him, and He constantly intervenes in various ways to bid us to renew our calling and to renew our course of life.

I have specifically chosen this passage – words which I have uttered years ago during a youth retreat. As I was reflecting upon a specific theme with which to address the University students and students of Theology at Claremont, I thought this would be a wonderful passage addressed to you with the thought that a University and educational institutions are specific places which help us to cultivate our minds, soul and hearts with the knowledge of God, in reinstating our spiritual journey in search of God and in true analysis of God's greatest gift – life itself.

My dear brothers and sisters, we live in a world where we are challenged by a multitude of issues: namely, the knowledge of past, with the consciousness of present day advancement and the progress of science, but above all with the uncertainty of the future. This has been the psychological state of the mind, soul and heart of humanity in all times. Therefore it is obvious that the human being has been the strongest responder to all challenges in all times, if only God has been the stronghold of his life. I say this with the good faith as the Fathers of the church teach us also, that as we are created in the image of God, we are able to create a new world to overcome all challenges, and be the guardians of the God-created world.

I am delighted to be here today to address the students of theology. I know that we don't all share the same faith, but it

is God that unites us all. Although we don't necessarily share the same history, traditions and culture, however having respect for one other makes us spiritually richer.

Today I am given the chance to give my personal testimony and the testimony of a nation which has accepted Christianity as a way of life and with pride we share our experiences with our brothers and sisters. I come from the tradition of the Armenian Apostolic Church, which has recently celebrated the 1700th anniversary of the acceptance of Christianity as a state religion. Throughout history, we have lived a life similar to that of Christ. As we have experienced suffering we have understood that we have become participants of the suffering of Christ our Lord, thus never losing the vision of the Resurrection.

As I address you, the students of the University, I would like to convey my love and respect to all those who have come from different religions and backgrounds, and also invite you all to join us one day and partake in our Divine Liturgy in one of our churches to better understand the life of a nation who chose to become Christian and has survived Genocide and many shattering encounters during its history. If we have survived, it is only through our Christian faith. If we have survived, it is through our commitment to continually walk towards God in search of our identity, and in service of humanity.

As students of theology, my wish and prayer is that your years of education turn out to be instrumental in your God-given life. You are here to educate yourselves so that God-willing when the day comes you will become the educators of the children of God entrusted to you. You are here to cultivate in your spirituality the Pastor of tomorrow to one day become the shepherds for the sheep who have lost God and have gone astray and become involved in things not pleasant to God. You are here today in this school of theology to become one with God and to illuminate in your spirituality the vision to share your God-given gifts with others, to share and experience your unconditional love with others,

and above all to make a promise to live a meaningful life. Therefore my humble message to you is that you constantly question your calling and vocation each and every day. My message to you all is that you turn this period of education into a spiritual transition, which will transform your life into an instrument of change in the life of humanity. This world can certainly be a better place when together we are able to understand our God-given vocation to guard the world in peace and prosperity.

In closing I would like to thank the Claremont School of Theology, and specifically President Dr. Philip Amerson, Rev. Dr. Soomee Kim, Rev. Dr. Emery Parcell, Rev. Marilyn Huntington, Rev. Dr. Kathy Black, and all those who have contributed to this event. I would also like to thank my two deacons Vahe Abovian and Mayis Shahbazyan, for their engagement in fellowship with this faculty.

May the Lord bless you all. May He give you the strength and the wisdom to live a meaningful life.

WHAT IS NEXT?

My dear youth,

I address you all with a warm heart and with the trust that this retreat and fellowship in Christ will be a special kind of forum for you as responsible members of the Armenian Apostolic Church who strive to continue your journey toward God.

The past almost three years that I've been in the Western Diocese, I have witnessed the many successes of our community, as well as its weaknesses. Consequently, I am challenged to serve you with a renewed calling and commitment. We live in times when humanity is challenged in general by advanced technology and media which, at times, leave no place for God in our prayers as well as our daily lives. It is at this time that we lose God and weaken in our identity the beauty of sharing our God given gifts with others. Today as you enter through the doorway of this retreat, I urge you all to take this step very seriously. Certainly you are called to learn more about God and to learn more about each other. In becoming the recipient of God's love you enlighten one another's life with the love of God. It is my wish that this retreat be an experience of spiritual transformation for each of you. It is also my wish thus that this retreat will be a new bridge between God and your personal life.

What is next? This question, even though very simple in nature, connotes the question, what if life? It has been my inner conviction and commitment to ask myself this question as frequently as possible. This kind of inner-move reawakens in us the requirements, duties and responsibilities, which are expected from us in the eyes of God. I pray that the weekend becomes a prayerful one. As a time of retreat, may it strengthen you as you progress in your faith-life. As we question our ability, our behavior, our doings and sayings we create a mirror for ourselves and help us correct our path, thus reinstating our journey toward God.

My dear youth and friends, we all share equally our God-given gifts. We are teachers and students for one another. The more we cherish each other, the stronger the community becomes and the name of God is glorified. Let this retreat, be a return to God for all of you. I know well that you have led your steps to this retreat with a good faith in the Lord, but I also understand that this retreat will ever strengthen your Christian faith, and commitment for to lead a Christ-oriented life.

My dear youth,

On the eve of your retreat I promise to keep you all in my prayers and to be bonded with you spiritually. I have no doubt the past two days have certainly been fulfilling and rejuvenating spiritually for each and every one of you. I am convinced that during the retreat, amidst the beauty of this natural setting, you have met God, the Creator of the Universe. From personal experience I know well that prayer and fellowship are milestones in our lives. As we are nourished with the power of prayer in fellowship we grow spiritually.

I remember the role of prayer, faith, and fellowship and their positive impact on my childhood, youth and pastoral ministry. I remember the solitary moments that have strengthened me and it was then that I was able to better understand the words of the Gospel that tell us about Christ praying at Gethsemane. The way I see it, this retreat has become for all of you the shield of faith, wisdom, and love that you have received not only from God but also from one another.

My dear youth, it is my wish and prayer that this retreat remains for all of you a source of inspiration. Remember well that in this very Holy place, you are encountered by God. Remember well that we, as Christians, are blessed one hundred fold by the graces of the Almighty God, by the life of Christ, our Lord, the martyrdom of the saints, and our church fathers, by our parents, and by the prayers of those who we know, and those we do not know.

In conclusion, I will be leaving you with a passage by a true Christian; a saint who has touched my heart and thousands more. Mother Theresa's spiritually comforting words

give us the message that humanity is the treasury wherein God has put His love. If we are willing to respond to God's call with willingness, then we are co-creators with God. The image of God is perfect in us.

*"People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered;
Forgive them anyway.*

*If you are kind, People may accuse you of being selfish;
Be kind anyway.*

*If you are successful, you will win some false friends,
and some true enemies;
Succeed anyway.*

*If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you;
Be honest and frank anyway.*

*What you spend years building,
someone could destroy overnight;
Build anyway.*

*If you find serenity and happiness, there may be jealousy;
Be happy anyway.*

*The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow;
Do good anyway.*

*Give the world the best you have,
and it may never be enough;*

Give the world the best you've got anyway.

*You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and God;
It was never between you and them anyway."*

Enjoy the weekend retreat and the company of your peers. Illuminate your soul, mind, and heart with messages radiating from the Gospels. You are the stewards of this Church. I expect from all of you to be exemplary leaders of the Armenian Apostolic Church. God bless and I leave with you my love.

*October 24, 2005
ACYO Senior Retreat*

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Dear Faithful:

It is with a joyous heart that I greet you on the eve of the New Year. The New Year grants us new life as we celebrate the Birth of Christ our Lord, who is the way towards God, towards spiritual reawakening and towards everlasting truth.

Our God-given life has the ultimate goal to fill our lives with prayers. The destiny of humanity is God. However, often we fail in our commitment to make God the destiny of our spiritual journey. The Almighty God then interceded into the life of humanity through the Birth of Christ our Lord, thus granting us spiritual rebirth to lead a holy life, worshipping God and enriching our God-given lives with faith and good deeds.

The Birth of our Lord is the source of spiritual strength, which helps us to renew our life and to also rebuild within us the image of the Almighty God. On the eve of the New Year and Blessed Christmas, we uplift our hearts to the All Merciful God with thanksgiving prayers for enriching our lives with the gift of faith and the vision of peace.

The year 2007 will be very significant for the Western Diocese as we prepare ourselves for the 80th Anniversary celebration of the establishment of the Western Diocese as a separate Diocese. The milestone represents a challenge of a new doorway to transform the Western Diocese into a stronger institution with new Clergy and Pastors, with new Parishes and with new Missions. Meeting these challenges ensures that the Motherland Armenia and the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin become the living message for the new generations.

The 80th Anniversary inspires us all as the members of the Armenian Community to foresee our role as distinct citizens of the United States of America where we live under the eyes of the Almighty God.

My dear faithful, renew your life with the blessed Birth

of Christ our Lord. May the Miraculous Birth of our Lord enlighten your spirituality and be the source of your spiritual rebirth in order that you may dedicate your life to God's service. Christ is born and revealed. Blessed is the revelation of Christ our Lord.

Christmas, 2007

THE ARMENIAN CHURCH IS THE ARMENIAN'S NOAH'S ARK

In the history of the Christian Church it was inevitable that our forbearers had a limitless ability to relocate and have settled in innumerable number of destinations. The Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America, a member of the great family of the Armenian Church, represents those Armenians who were disbursed geographically. The Diocese embraces the Armenian community by building churches and schools, establishing organizations and carrying out humanitarian missions, all deeds which pursue the light of the faith of our forefathers.

The 80th Anniversary of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America is an important celebration. The observance calls forth many celebratory events. Along with these, we presented a brief publication, a book of the history of the Western Diocese.

With heartfelt appreciation, we wish to express our words of thanks and blessings to the members of the editorial committee under the leadership of The Very Rev. Dajad Dz. V. Yardemian, The Rev. Fr. Vartan Archpriest Kasparian, The Rev. Fr. Sipan Archpriest Mekhsian, Deacon Allan Yeghia Jendian, Mashdots Jobanian, Nancy Arabian, and Deacon Matthew Ash whose exceptional care and meticulous approach and focused labor made the presentation of this book possible.

“History of the Western Diocese” is a worthy expression of that history and a wonderful initiative by means of which we also express our feelings of indebtedness to all those – clergy and laity who have believed in the mission of the Armenian Church and through humble service, have turned their lives into a dwelling place of God.

The Diocese's 80th Anniversary is a blessed and glorious occasion, enabling us to continue to keep the Armenian Apostolic Church as Noah's Ark for each Armenian. Through

the leadership of the Armenian Apostolic Church, we approach new challenges with brave spirits and God as the foundation of our life. Under the title “New Perspectives,” in condensed form, we have presented an overall picture of our plans for the future.

The Armenian Apostolic Church is God’s gift. Within her sacred walls, we meet the Creator and we communicate with the saints. We strengthen the present with the foundation of the eternal word of Christ, and with the vision of the future, we make a covenant to become spiritual architects of a new church in the Hands of God.

**THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
OF THE WESTERN DIOCESE
HOSTED BY
THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF LA**

“But the word of God is not fettered.” I Timothy 2:9

This is a glorified day in the history of both the Episcopal and the Armenian Apostolic Churches. The honor bestowed upon the Western Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the respective community on the historic milestone of the 80th Anniversary of the establishment of the Armenian Church reflects the cordial relationship between the two churches and the commitment of our faithful to take upon themselves the responsibility to preach the Word of God to armor their spiritual lives with divine light and knowledge.

When brothers and sisters share their God-given gifts, “the Word of God is not fettered”. We certainly have the moral obligation to strengthen the foundations of Christ's Church with unconditional love and respect not only for each other, but for all without exception. It is our duty to cater to the wellbeing and prosperity of our communities. The more we deepen in our hearts the calling to serve the Lord, the closer the members of our communities become. The more genuine respect we render for one another, the more graces are showered upon our children.

On this historic day, I extend my deep gratitude to a great leader of the Christian Church, Bishop of the Diocese of the Episcopal Church of Los Angeles, The Right Reverend Bishop Jon Bruno, whose friendship with the Armenian Church has left a unique impact with the members of the Church. My special thanks to all those who are closely officiated with Bishop Jon Bruno, Dr. Guibord, all pastors and lay leaders, who equally have shown the same weight of love and respect.

“The word of God is not fettered”. These are the words of St. Paul the Apostle, addressed to Timothy. The same

message is also addressed to all of us. We all have been given the calling to spread the Word of God. The more we are committed to the mission of Christ's Church, the richer we are in Christ's divine presence. The more we preach the Word of God in a world where suffering dominates in the hearts of mankind, the more joy we bring to the afflicted souls.

As Christian leaders, we would like to take this moment to convey our pastoral love to you all with a promise to serve you with a pure heart, with an unselfish soul, for the glory of God and in bringing joy and peace to the hearts of our faithful people.

Dear Bishop Bruno and brothers and sisters of the Episcopal faith, there lies a rich history of close collaboration between our two churches. For well over one hundred years, we have worked closely on all levels. You have also witnessed the survival of our nation, which has experienced Genocide. Your share in our survival has been significant as you opened your hearts and the doors of your Churches to assist us in growing as communities and Churches.

On this blessed occasion of the 80th Anniversary of the Western Diocese. I thank you and all the congregants. On behalf of the Clergy, Diocesan Council and the entire faithful, I present to each of you an Armenian hand carved cross in appreciation of your love and respect in embracing us with this special celebration. God Bless you.

EASTER MESSAGE

The Glorious Resurrection of the Lord is the most inspiring and powerful event in the history of the world, one which continues to challenge us to live our God-given life spiritually transformed in all circumstances during all times.

“Put on Christ” (Rom 13:14)

This is a message by St. Paul addressed to the Galatians, but equally to us all. These words enlighten in our spirituality the truth about Christ, our Lord. However, this message needs to be embodied and applied not only in our personal lives, but mostly in our communities.

“Put on Christ” (Rom 13:14)

The Resurrection is the culmination of the course of events which has taken place during the Holy Week. Christ’s Victorious Resurrection revolutionized the world, and paved the road for us all to enrich our spirituality and draw closer to God. Above all, the most significant event in history allowed us to follow the patterns of sacrificial life of Our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. The discipline of living a life with Christ brings us all closer to God, and closer to humanity, in rendering our pastoral services to mankind as a reflection of our Christian faith and love.

“Put on Christ” (Rom 13:14)

The Resurrection of Christ, our Lord, has inspired us all to transform and transfigure our spiritual life. The Resurrection of God has reawakened in us all a new sense of responsibility and commitment to cultivate our life of faith in a unique and effective way to alleviate all the negative aspects of our personal and community lives.

We live in a world where humanity suffers as a result of multiple wars, wherein humanity continues to fail in realizing a moral life. The true Christian, be a pastor or a layperson, cannot preach the faithful without fulfilling the deep instructions given by himself or herself. Those who live deep in their

hearts and souls the presence of Christ, cannot act otherwise than showing a loving, caring and forgiving heart to their brothers and sisters in Christ. Those who thoroughly live the presence of Christ and His Miraculous Resurrection in their hearts and souls are lead by the miraculous Resurrection are the ones who step closer to God.

The Resurrection of Christ our Lord renews our spiritual life, thus reawakening within our spirituality a firm commitment to live as true Christians. The Resurrection of Christ our Lord is the destiny of all Christian faithful. During the spiritual journey, which leads us to the Resurrection of Christ our Lord, we all experience hurdles, troublesome times, thus becoming partakers in the sufferings of our Lord. Similarly, as we walk through the journey of the Holy Week and celebrate the Victorious Resurrection, we then make the Resurrection the source of our progress, achievement and vision.

The Resurrection of Christ our Lord challenges our faithful and especially the youth to be loyal to the teachings of Christianity. The Resurrection of Christ our Lord challenges us to be truly dedicated and loyal servants of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin as the everlasting center of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The Resurrection of Christ our Lord challenges us to be engaged in the reform of the Armenian Church. We give thanks to God for the new generation in the life of the Mother Church led by His Holiness Karekin II, our beloved Catholicos of All Armenians. In the coming decades, undoubtedly we will be launching a new era with the ordination of many new candidates, through whom the mission of the Armenian Church will be strengthened.

Dear faithful in Christ, let us take heed to the message of St. Paul. “Put on Christ” and strengthen our faith with the vision of the sanctity of the Armenian Christian family, with the teaching of the Word of God to our children, thus turning our lives into tools of peace and love. The message of St. Paul is also addressed to all communities of the Western Diocese. In a time when we celebrate the 80th Anniversary of the Western Diocese, we remember in our prayers all the

departed souls of former Primates and servants who rest in peace. The 80th Anniversary will become meaningful only when we make the Church a vigilant presence in our Diocesan life. We ought to work hand in hand with the vision of instilling in the hearts and souls of our children the sanctity of the Christian faith.

Therefore, armored with this vision, let us pronounce the blessed Resurrection of Christ as the sole source and strength of our spiritual renewal.

“Christ is risen from the Dead, Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ our Lord.”

Easter, 2007

OPENING PRAYER FOR THE GENOCIDE COMMEMORATION AT LOS ANGELES CITY HALL

Almighty God, we praise and glorify Your name and thank You for the abundance of blessings bestowed upon us all. This hour of prayer enlightens our spirituality with a heart full of deep respect for the victims of the Armenian Genocide who lost their most valuable gift, life itself, in encountering torture suffering for the sake of their faith in God and their love of their homeland. The world has witnessed the first genocide of the 20th century, which took place in the year 1915. The annals of history are abundant with vivid pictures and testimonies, which witness man's inhumanity toward man.

For the past 92 years, survivors of the Armenian Genocide and their sons and daughters have timelessly fought for justice. We give thanks to God for the wisdom of many religious and political leaders who have reawakened in the hearts and minds of humanity the respect for human life. Martin Luther King warned the world in his words "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere... and whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."

The recognition of the Armenian Genocide in the City Hall truly reflects the vision of the leaders of this city and their understanding of history. Healing cannot happen all by itself, for healing needs sincere words, genuine respect, heartfelt prayer, but above all, true repentance. We are no longer mourning the victims of the Armenian Genocide. For us, they are martyrs and our lives are committed to achieving justice in respect of their memory.

Almighty God, nourish our hearts, souls, and minds with your wisdom and love that we may be able to continue to show compassion and forgiveness toward those of the Ottoman Empire, which committed the atrocities of the Armenian

Genocide. However, help us to perpetually remember the loss of 1.5 million Armenians who gave their lives in the name of God. Commemorations educate people to better understand the past and also to revere the sanctity of a God-given life. Almighty God, Bless the souls of the victims of the Genocide.

May their spirits strengthen within us our cherished values of respect for the family, a vision of brotherhood, a sense of social responsibility, true respect for humanity, and reverence for you, O Lord.

April 20, 2007

OPENING PRAYER AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF ARMENIAN BAR ASSOCIATION

Almighty God, You have blessed us all with the gift of life and all the necessary tools to bring peace and joy into the world. This weekend's Armenian Bar Association's Annual meeting is a vivid reflection of our appreciation of God's blessings. Our lawyers cherish and grasp their God-entrusted role and responsibilities in the service of society.

This blessed and largest organization of Armenian lawyers, judges, and legal scholars founded by Raffi Hovannesian and a group of his colleagues in 1989 has truly been the catalyst of professional leadership in the Armenian American community. Truly it has justified its mission in providing scholarships to law students, promoting and protecting the legal and civil rights of Armenian in the United States, has monitored attempts to defame Armenians as a nation and the historic fact of the Genocide.

God, our Lord, has enlightened the minds of mankind with life giving commandments as He responded to the Pharisees, one of them being a lawyer, who challenged him with the question: ***“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law”?*** Christ's response is the foundation of all the laws: ***“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest commandment. And a second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.”*** (Matthew 22:24-40)

Almighty God, bless the Armenian Bar Association, our judges, lawyers and scholars and grant them all the spiritual strength to educate and lead our youth with the same vision with which they have enriched their lives. Tonight, we particularly praise the memory of Hrant Dink, who will forever

remain as a hero for his fight for freedom of speech. The first Hrant Dink Freedom of Speech Awards which will be presented to distinguished scholars, professors Vahakn Dadrian and Taner Akcam are a tribute to the martyrdom of Hrant Dink.

O God you have blessed our nation with leading judges, and lawyers who bring pride to our community and inspire our youth to pursue higher education to better serve mankind.

“CSUN” GENOCIDE MEMORIAL EVENT

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you have learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred traditions-writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” 2 Timothy 3:14-15

We all are destined to be the truth tellers. Tonight’s gathering sends out a powerful message to the world. The young generation of the Armenian people is challenged to carry the torch passed on to them by their forefathers.

My Dear Youth,

When the memory of the victims of the Genocide is observed and commemorated by the young generation with a deeper respect for their memory and in appreciation of their martyrdom and their sacrifice in the name of God, their Christian faith, and love of Armenia, then you become the beacon of love and a source of light for our community. The best way to bring justice is to be enriched in your academic lives, for the more you are educated and spiritually enriched, the more the Resurrection of Our Lord and nation will be evident.

Remember the words of St. Paul the Apostle “continue in what you have learned and firmly believed”. Keep the legacy which you have inherited from your forefathers. They did not die in vain. They focused on Christ’s message. As Our Lord instructed to His disciples who then passed on the message to us all: Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot destroy the soul. They chose to die courageously, knowingly, and willingly with the vision that their martyred life will become a new beginning in the lives of future generations. Therefore, tonight’s observance and commemoration becomes even more meaningful when we are again affirmed

in our spirituality and commitment to learn our history and language, to guard our culture and identity, but above all, to respond to the question: what is the reason of our being?

Tonight's gathering is the reflection of our faith in God and the universality of pain and suffering as the result of intended injustice to our people as well as of others.

"We are all different; because of that, each of us has something different and special to offer and each and every one of us can make a difference by not being indifferent." Henry Friedman's message enlightens our minds and souls with the vision of deep and genuine respect for all nations, for all cultures and for all religions. Friedman's message instills within our being the desire of becoming tools of peace and workers of miracles.

Tonight's commemoration and observance is a vivid expression of understanding of our history, sufferings, but above all, our rebirth. ***"Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul."*** Our forefathers fought for their faith and for the love of their land, but never feared as they were killed. Through their martyrdom, they exemplified the strength of their Christian faith. What Jerry Costello has once said for the Armenians, the same also applies for the Jewish people: ***"With faith and courage, generations of Armenians have overcome great suffering and proudly preserved their culture, traditions, and religion and have told the story of the genocide to an often indifferent world."***

Good and evil coexist in this world. Both are acts of man and both are acts of choice. Tonight's commemoration and observance unites are all in fight of ***"Man's inhumanity towards man."*** Martin Luther King, an advocate of justice and peace reawakened in the nation's life a new era in his pursuance to secure respect for one another, for all nations and colors. In his words: ***"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere... whatever affects one directly, affects all equally."***

Whenever one talks of the Jewish Holocaust one cannot but recall the images of the gas chambers in Auschwitz and

the piles and piles of lifeless bodies. Likewise, one cannot but recall the images of the endless deserts of Der Zor, the graveyard of hundreds of thousands of innocent lives.

The following passage provides a graphic description of the horrors witnessed by those who were marched through the scorching deserts:

“...ferocity of the gendarmes apparently increased as the journey lengthened, for they seemed almost to resent the fact that part of their charges continued to live. Frequently, any one who dropped on the road and bayoneted on the spot. The Armenians began to die by hundreds from hunger and thirst. Even when they came to rivers, the gendarmes, merely to torment them, would sometimes not let them drink. The hot sun of the desert burned their scantily clothed bodies, and their bare feet, treading the hot sand of the desert, became so sore that thousands fell and died or were killed where they lay. Thus, I a few days, what had been a procession of normal human beings became a stumbling horde of dust-covered skeletons, ravenously looking for scraps of food, eating any offal that came their way, crazed by the hideous sights that filled every hour of their existence, sick with all the diseases that accompany such hardships and privations, but still prodded on and on by whips and clubs and bayonets of their executioners.”

As the grandson of a survivor, I have felt the pain and suffering as I first read the torturing of priests and members of my immediate family.

History can repeat itself if we are indifferent to the memory of victims of the Armenian Genocide, the Jewish Holocaust, and the Genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, and Darfur.

We live in a blessed land. The United States of America is the beacon of liberty, a staunch defender of human rights and above all, a lighthouse for justice. We cannot rewrite history. I wish we could. We cannot reverse time and revive those who perished. We are confident that the day will come when this great country will bravely stand tall by our side in

denouncing the atrocities of 1915 and rightly acknowledge the Armenian Genocide – for what it is, a genocide with a capital G.

Yes. We live in a blessed land, which has graced us all with all the necessary tools to uphold the memories of history, thus making history the roots of our life. A life deprived from the memories, is a life emptied from responsibilities and dignities. Tonight, as much as we observe the solemn memory of the victims of the Genocide, we also pay homage to the martyrs by celebrating life after Genocide.

A NATION WHICH REFUSES TO DIE

I would like to begin my words by extending homage to the innocent lives of the Virginia Tech massacre, a horrific event which shook this nation. We pray for the departed souls of the victims and pray for their families and their loved ones.

Much could be said about the Armenian Genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman Turks. Historical facts witnessing the victims of the Armenian Genocide are well documented by world teaching scholars and preserved in all international educational institutions, universities and in countless libraries around the world. It is most comforting and spiritually uplifting to be recognized by governmental, civic offices and religious organizations as the sons and daughters of the victims of the Armenian Genocide. Today's Remembrance ceremony by the City of Los Angeles to honor the memory of those who perished in the Armenian Genocide also extends tribute to the citizens of United States of Armenian descent, who have become an integral part of American Society. Citizens of Armenian origin have proven to be loyal citizens of this freedom-loving land. Over the past many decades political leaders and activists, ecumenical leaders and intellectuals have rendered tremendous respect for the memory of the victims of the Genocide.

"So let us call Genocide, Genocide. Let us not minimize the deliberate murder of 1.5 million people. Let us have a moral victory that can shine as a light to all nations."

Stanley Cohen, Professor of Criminology, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, has made a firm statement in support of the recognition of the victims of the Armenian Genocide:

In his own words Professor Cohen says: "*The nearest successful example, in the modern era is the 80 years of official denial by successive Turkish government of the 1915-17 genocide against the Armenians, in which 1.5 million people lost their lives. This denial has been sustained by deliberate*

propaganda, lying and cover-ups, forgoing documents, suppression of archives, and bribing scholars.” (Law and Social Inquiry, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Winter) 1995): 7,50).

Honorable President of the Los Angeles City Council, honorable city councilmembers, and distinguished guests, it is truly gratifying to witness the commemoration of the memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide. This act alone challenges the society and our children to uphold firm in our hearts the legacy of the founders of this great nation, who put their faith in God. Our faith in God need to be reflected in civilized life in pursuance of higher education, with deepest respect for the life of our fellow citizens regardless of their cultural, religious and ethnic background.

May the Almighty God bless us all, keep us all united in our efforts to bring justice to the loss of the million and half souls, but above all, for the education of the younger generations to prevent intolerance, hatred and injustice in the life of all nations. Commemorations renew within us a new sense of responsibility for humanity. In this sense, the words of Mahatma Gandhi conveys to us all a special message: *“All humanity is one undivided and indivisible family, and each one of us is responsible for the misdeeds of all the others. I cannot detach myself from the wickedest soul.”*

Honorable president, honorable councilmembers, distinguished guests, through today’s commemoration we once again send out the message to the world that the Armenian nation refuses to die.

May the Lord bless the memory or the victims of the Armenian Genocide and strengthen us all in our calling and vocation to become the spiritual architects for a brighter future.

April 20, 2007

GENOCIDE MEMORIAL EVENT ORGANIZED BY JEWISH WORLD WATCH

Honorable Rabbi Harold Schulweis,
Honorable Mayor Mr. Antonio Villiargosa,
Honorable Mr. Armen Liloyan, Consul General of the
Rep. of Armenia in LA,
Honorable Rabbi Steven Jacobs,
Ms. Janice Kamenir-Reznik, President of Jewish World
Watch,
Ms. Tzivvia Schwartz-Getzug, Exec. Director of JWW,
Ms. Judie Cotton, President of VBS Congregation,
Honorable Rabbis of the Jewish community,

Dear friends,

We all are destined to be the truth tellers. Tonight's gathering sends out a powerful message to the world: "*The Genocide of Armenians...the lessons of the Holocaust must never be forgotten.*" Henry Friedman's words alerts us all to live a responsible life, a life with dignity, a life in rendering respect for the historical truths. As the founder of the Jewish World Watch, Rabbi Harold Schulweis ponders on the shameful historical facts of Genocide, Holocaust and all other genocides, and his remarkable statements deepen within our spirits a new sense of commitment to honor the memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide, and the Jewish Holocaust, the genocides in Darfur, Rwanda and the killing fields of Cambodia. In his words: "*To choose to forget what happened to the martyrs is an insult to their memory and a danger to our children...*" "*Every genocide is sinful. But a kinship of suffering unites us all.*" The vision of Rabbi Harold Schulweis brings us all together to pay collective homage to the martyrs of the Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holo-

caust. This action itself is the reflection of our faith in God and the universality of pain and suffering as the result of intended injustice to both our peoples as well as of others. *"We are all different; because of that, each of us has something different and special to offer and each and every one of us can make a difference by not being indifferent."* Henry Friedman's message enlightens our minds and souls with the vision of deep and genuine respect for all nations, for all cultures, for all religions in instilling within our being the desire of becoming tools of peace and workers of miracles.

Tonight's commemoration and observance is a vivid expression of mutual respect and understanding of each other's history, sufferings, but above all our rebirth. *"Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul."* Our forefathers fought for their faith and for the love of their land, but never feared as they were killed. They kept firm and solid the spirit as a gift from God and continue to enrich our lives through their martyrdom. What Jerry Costello has once said for the Armenians, the same also applies for the Jewish people: *"With faith and courage, generations of Armenians have overcome great suffering and proudly preserved their culture, traditions, and religion and have told the story of the genocide to an often indifferent world."*

Good and evil coexist in this world. Both are acts of man. Both are acts of choice. Tonight's commemoration and observance unites us all in our fight against *"Man's inhumanity towards man."* Martin Luther King, an advocate of justice and peace reawakened in the nation's life a new era in his pursuance to secure respect for one another, for all nations and colors. In his words: *"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere...whatever affects one directly, affects all equally."*

Pope John Paul II in his speech at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, said:

"The words of the ancient Psalm rise from our hearts: "I have become like a broken vessel. I hear the whispering of many -- terror on every side -- as they scheme together

against me, as they plot to take my life. But I trust in you, O Lord: I say, 'you are my God.' (Psalms 31:13-15)

"We wish to remember. But we wish to remember for a purpose, namely to ensure that never again will evil prevail, as it did for the millions of innocent victims of Nazism. How could man have such utter contempt for man? Because he had reached the point of contempt for God. Only a godless ideology could plan and carry out the extermination of a whole people.

Jews and Christians share an immense spiritual patrimony, flowing from God's self-revelation. Our religious teachings and our spiritual experience demand that we overcome evil with good. We remember, but not with any desire for vengeance or as an incentive to hatred. For us, to remember is to pray for peace and justice, and to commit ourselves to their cause. Only a world at peace, with justice for all, can avoid repeating the mistakes and terrible crimes of the past."

Whenever one talks of the Jewish Holocaust one cannot but recall the images of the gas chambers in Auschwitz and the piles and piles of lifeless bodies. Likewise, one cannot but recall the images of the endless deserts of Der Zor, the graveyard of hundreds of thousands of innocent Armenians.

The following passage provides a graphic description of the horrors witnessed by those who were marched through the endless deserts:

"The ferocity of the Turkish gendarmes apparently increased as the journey lengthened, for they seemed almost to resent the fact that part of their charges continued to live. Frequently any one who dropped on the road was bayoneted on the spot. The Armenians began to die by hundreds from hunger and thirst. Even when they came to rivers, the gendarmes, merely to torment them, would sometimes not let them drink. The hot sun of the desert burned their scantily clothed bodies, and their bare feet, treading the hot sand of the desert, became so sore that thousands fell and died or were killed where they lay. Thus, in a few days, what had

been a procession of normal human beings became a stumbling horde of dust-covered skeletons, ravenously looking for scraps of food, eating any offal that came their way, crazed by the hideous sights that filled every hour of their existence, sick with all the diseases that accompany such hardships and privations, but still prodded on and on by the whips and clubs and bayonets of their executioners.

The following is a translation of Dostoevsky's writings on the Armenian Genocide whereby he described the cruelty and perverseness of the Turk.

"At one instance, the Turk gendarmes created a game. They snatch a toddler from his shivering mother's arms and start entertaining the little child in a bid to win its attention. They succeed. They then place a loaded pistol in the little hands of the innocent being a few centimeters from his head, while the child cheerfully plays with its "new toy". Meanwhile the Turk gendarmes fervently and enthusiastically Salivate, waiting for the child to pull the trigger, blowing his little head into pieces. Only after they hear the bang, does their lust for death sink and they celebrate with utter joy for their ingenuity."

As the grandson of a survivor I have felt the pain and suffering as I first read the torturing of priests and members of my immediate families. The pain has not been less when I first visit Dachau in Germany, a place which reminds us all of a shameful act towards the Jewish people.

History can repeat itself if we are indifferent to the memory of victims of the Armenian Genocide, the Jewish Holocaust, and the genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda and Darfur. Tonight's commemoration and observance marks a new era in the life of both our communities. Rabbi Harold Schulweis words send a strong message to the world: "We dare murder Memories of Genocide."

We live in a blessed land. The United States of America is the beacon of liberty, a staunch defender of human rights and above all a lighthouse for justice. We cannot rewrite history. I wish we could. We cannot reverse time and revive those

who perished. We are confident that the day will come when this great country will bravely stand tall by our side in denouncing the atrocities of 1915 and rightly acknowledge the Armenian Genocide – for what it is, a genocide with a capital G.

Yes. We live in a blessed land, which has graced us all with all the necessary tools to uphold the memories of history, thus making history the roots of our life. A life deprived from the memories, is a life emptied from responsibilities and dignities. Tonight, as much as we observe the solemn memory of the victims of the Genocide, we also celebrate life after Genocide, life after Holocaust, to bring justice to the memory of the martyrs.

April 27, 2007

REMARKS AT GLENDALE ADVENTIST MEDICAL CENTER

“And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracle, then, healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues.” (II Corinthians 12:28)

Dear Board Members, Distinguished guests.

The words of St. Paul the Apostle certainly challenge us all to be responsible for all the gifts bestowed upon us by God. For the past 100 years, Glendale Adventist Hospital has truly been a beacon of hope and light for the past one hundred years for all those who have entered through its doors in search of care. All those who have put their heart and soul, their total dedication and services in this hospital, have truly understood the depth of the words of St. Paul: *“And God has appointed in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles...”*

You are challenged to continue to be workers of miracles in the life of those, who require help and care. The opening and dedication of the New Glendale Adventist Medical Center West Tower is the reflection of your commitment to serve the needs of society with all the necessary facilities, thus turning your lives into spiritual tools and becoming the Hands of God.

As an institution of care and mercy in this community, Glendale Adventist has also paid spent significant time in outreach to the Armenian population, for which I extend the gratitude to the members of the community and assure you that their engagement in the mission of this hospital will increase.

On this special and historic day of the opening and dedication of the New Glendale Adventist Medical Center West Tower, we remember the Pontifical visit of His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, who, in appreciation of your

commitment to improve the health and wellness of our community, has presented Glendale Adventist Hospital with a “khatchkar” - an Armenian Cross Stone. This “khatchkar” will always be the speaking tongue to us all in reminding us each time we enter into this building. “You are workers of miracles.” May God bless you and bless the wonderful mission you accomplish in fulfillment of God's will.

April, 2007

“LOVE IS THE MOST DURABLE POWER IN THE WORLD”

“Love is the most durable power in the world. This creative force, so beautifully exemplified in the life of our Christ, is the most potent instrument available in mankind’s quest for power and security.” - Martin Luther King

God has graced us all with the gift of love. Each time we pray to God, we rediscover within our spirituality the many gifts God has granted us. Amongst the many love is the most enriching. Love gives humanity the purpose and the vision to create while bringing peace into the world. As Martin Luther King states, Love is “so beautifully exemplified in the life of our Christ.” Therefore, just as the physical body is dead without the breathing process, so is the spiritual without unceasing prayer. Those who pray become one in Christ, thus making Christ the source of their spiritual life. The reward of a prayerful life is love, “the most durable power in the world.”

“Everybody can be great. Because anybody can serve. You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. You don’t have to make you subject and your verb agree to serve.

You don’t have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don’t have to know Einstein’s theory of relativity to serve. You don’t have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.” - Martin Luther King

The spirit of serving God and humanity is the key principle of life. Christ, our Lord, descended from heaven to serve humanity in its fullest sense. He humbled Himself to lead us to a transformed life. The true meaning of success is emptied in itself when the human soul is deprived of the gift of serving our fellow friends. When service is deeply rooted in the life of individuals, the world becomes a better place. In another message, Martin Luther King reminds us a different

aspect of the service and relationship to humanity.

“We are prone to judge success by the index of our salaries of the sizes of our automobiles, rather than by the quality of service and relationship to humanity. When an individual is no longer a true participant when he no longer feels a sense of responsible, the content of democracy is emptied.”- Martin Luther King

Participation is one of the most unique characteristics in humanity. Christ, our Lord, called upon ordinary men and challenged them with the sense of participation which in itself resonate within us a sense of responsibility towards our own life and that of humanity's.

In all sections of life participation and responsibility is of vital importance. Be it amongst friends, family, school or any other institution, humanity ought to charge itself with this unique characteristic of participation and responsibility, which generate success and stability.

July 1, 2007

THE BEAUTY OF SPIRITUAL LIFE AND THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

On the occasion of the 4th of July, this message is dedicated to all those who serve in the United States Armed Forces. May the Lord protect them. May God bless the departed souls and comfort their loved ones.

Christ, Our Lord, is the source of the spiritual life and spiritual world. A Christian who follows Christ in words and in deeds is constantly enriched with His divine presence. The strength we receive through the messages of Christ Our Lord transforms our spirituality with countless blessings, which in turn help us understand the true significance of the gift of life. A Christian, who is emptied of the presence of God, cannot bring joy and peace to the souls of others. A Christian, whose life is in search of God, has certainly perceived the beauty of the spiritual life and the spiritual world.

Christians, who gather in the name of Christ ultimately pursue a noble goal, namely to become “partakers of divine nature.” An Anthonite Monk explains how the Church helps us develop a unique sense of partnership in the divine nature of Christ:

“Today, through worship in the Church of Christ we can still participate in these events (Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection, glorification, Ascension and the decent of the Holy Spirit) and experience the Mystery of the Holy Incarnation, whereby the Word of God took on human nature, so that we human beings might become “partakers of divine nature.”

The beauty of the spiritual life and the spiritual world can be experienced, when we all participate in worship in the Church of Christ. Therefore, as we walk along the spiritual path, which leads us to God, we gradually experience the holiness as the true purpose of our God-given lives. A Christian who prays to God is tirelessly rewarded with inexplicable joy, which is the reflection of our inner state transmitting the message of spiritual joy.

TRADITIONS

“The traditions of a nation are the cementing elements of its identity, when ignored, forgotten or despised, the face of that nation loses its color, it becomes distorted and eventually its identity is tarnished and lost forever. Traditions serve as anchors for strength and durability. Take them away from the life of a people and the people will shake like reeds without roots and fall like leaves severed from a tree...” (Karekin I)

Traditions of a nation are so sacred that they should be kept and maintained with reverence. Traditions are not born instinctively. Traditions are the condensed wisdom and the vision of our ancestors. These traditions are developed throughout centuries and are rooted in the sanctity of the family life and in the life of the community.

“The traditions of a nation are the cementing elements of its identity.” The traditions of the Armenian Church are deeply rooted in the spirituality of our nation to the extent that we cannot differentiate two kinds of traditions. The word tradition has a strong Christian connotation. When used outside of the religious context, it no longer transpires the same message.

“We always hope and in all things it is better to hope than to despair.

When we return to real trust in God there will no longer be room in our soul for fear.” Goethe

Trust in God is the greatest gift graced upon us. A person who has lost hope cannot live a creative life. A person, who has left no room for God in the soul, lives a fearful life. God is the root of our hope and joy but above all, in God we find undying spiritual strength, which helps us to distance ourselves from despair and all tribulations.

Our trust in God is developed through our prayerful life.

Prayer is the water of our faith and our trust in God. The most enriching and meaningful journey is the journey into the depths of our soul. Our Lord himself paved the way as He went into the desert and prayed.

Each prayer lifted from the heart is a return to God, “the real trust in God.”

A REAWAKENING PRAYER

Mother Theresa's life has been truly dedicated to God and to mankind. We live in a society where charity has become a fashion and a source of pride. Those who wish to bring joy and peace to the world and to the poor should follow her example and distance themselves from lavish fundraisings. She humbled herself and served the most needy. And the words of her prayer truly reflect her genuine love and respect for human life. To me personally, the nourishing words of Mother Theresa have a reawakening spiritual strength. Her words help us open the eyes of our soul and mind and feel the presence of God.

*"People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered;
Forgive them anyway.*

*If you are kind, People may accuse you of being selfish;
Be kind anyway.*

*If you are successful, you will win some false friends,
and some true enemies;
Succeed anyway.*

*If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you;
Be honest and frank anyway.*

*What you spend years building,
someone could destroy overnight;
Build anyway.*

*If you find serenity and happiness, there may be jealousy;
Be happy anyway.*

*The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow;
Do good anyway.*

*Give the world the best you have,
and it may never be enough;*

Give the world the best you've got anyway.

*You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and God;
It was never between you and them anyway."*

Mother Theresa

STEPS TOWARDS EXCELLENCE

GOD'S CALL: RESPECT FOR HUMAN LIFE

Society is the fertile ground, which transforms the pattern of our life. Often, God works in mysterious ways in our life to set certain goals in our soul and in our minds thus enriching us spiritually. I consider my life to be a mission, which should be fulfilled through service and sacrifice for humanity. I have often witnessed the immeasurable joy of individuals who have served through sacrifice and with the greatest respect for human life. It was at that time and at that humanistic magnanimous moment when I felt God's respond to the call.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE PATTERN OF OUR LIFE

Transformation of the pattern of our life is conditioned with the service and sacrifice we render for humanity. Thus, humanity becomes the fertile ground, which challenges us to put our life in service. In other words the society cultivates within us the shepherd, the minister, the teacher, and reawakens within us the knowledge of God and all the consciousness of all gifts bestowed upon us. Therefore, God works in mysterious ways, through the hearts and souls of our fellow brothers and sisters, thus enriching us spiritually.

LIFE IS A MISSION

The vision to look at life and grasp it as a mission should be cherished. With this thought alone we will be able to fulfill our life through sacrifice and service for humanity. The lesson is better understood as we witness the immeasurable joy of those individuals who have served in societies and with the greatest respect for human life. We all are graced with a calling from God. However, it is only through the prayers lifted up from our hearts and through the inspiration

resulted in the sacrificial lives of our fellow friends that we are challenged to respond to God's Call. It is at this very moment that we feel deep in our hearts the spiritual transformation of our entire being and the beginning of the New Life.

“WHERE THERE IS NO VISION PEOPLE DIE”

Vision is the intuitive and spiritual energy of the human soul. People with vision are able to inspire the dispersed crowds and lead them to new levels of understanding God and their role in the life of society. Those who tend not to nourish their God-given gift of vision are stripped from the joy of enrichment in bringing the newness of life to others, in inspiring their fellow friends with excellence.

Throughout history, numerous outstanding leaders, thinkers, scientists and men of faith have become catalysts of peace and creativity. They have cultivated the minds and souls of people and have instilled in their hearts a unique kind of grace to better understand the true meaning of our God-given Lives. In other words, they have become the pontiffs of our lives, who have led us to God and graced us with the thought of sharing our gifts with our fellow friends.

Humanity has the God-given gift to create. Literally, to create means to share. Moreover, sharing is a virtue. Humanity cannot live without vision. Vision is a part of our human texture. We constantly search for a vision in our inner being. As a child, these were feelings which reflected my personality as I encountered the conditions, which were part of society's life. As I meet people in my everyday life, I see in them many gifts that challenge me spiritually. No man is an island. We all are part of a mosaic that reflects creation, beauty, relationship and other aspects of life. This very thought of being part of a mosaic graced with equal gifts from God helps us to better understand the mission of our lives.

October 10, 2007

2008 - YEAR OF PRAYER

Prayer is the root of an honest and righteous life. A constantly praying person would turn his life to an ever-flowing spring of goodness and righteousness. A person consistent in prayer, first and foremost, is a follower of Christ. He lives a life of prayer and is transformed by prayer, during his earthly lifetime. A person dedicated to a lifetime of prayer is permanently reminded of his God-given life and the blessings graced upon him. These heavenly gifts must be valued and rededicated to God even more gracefully.

On doorstep of the year 2008, we wish that our prayers would fill our spirits, since delving into prayer would cause us to persevere and hereby we preserve the flame of the Holy Spirit within us. ***“Do not quench the Spirit.”*** (I Thessalonians 5:19). A person enriched with prayer would discover within the self the innate God-given joy and thankfulness towards God. As the Apostle said, ***“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*** (Ephesians 5:1-2).

Dear faithful, enrich your lives with prayer. Open your eyes every morning with prayer. Incorporate prayer in your daily activities. Breathe peace into the troubled souls with your prayers. Connect hearts and souls with your prayers. Crown yourselves with prayers at the end of the day.

In the Western Diocese, the year 2008 is dedicated as the Year of Prayer. Thus everywhere and at all times, in our personal or family lives, in our communities, in our churches, we will be guided by the spirit of prayer, for prayer is nothing else but God’s guidance. Strive to learn the prayers of our Church and forefathers. Pray privately or in a church. Praise our Lord’s name. A prayerful man’s life is peaceful, indeed. A prayerful man’s face is radiant and luminous. A prayerful man’s heart testifies the Word of God.

O Lord, listen to our prayers. Protect us in peace and keep us away from all tribulations. Lead us to the path of peace and righteousness. Enlighten us with Your Holy Spirit. We praise Your glory everywhere, for ever and ever. Amen.

October 18, 2007

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

“And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
(Philippians 4:7)

In the Christendom, the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the peace of God. The blessed birth of Christ was the manifestation of God’s boundless love for mankind. It established a new refuge where his radiating peace, emanating from within himself, became the path of peace, life and truth.

The peace of God is the leading path of Christ towards God. It is the mystery of the life of Christ. It is the truth woven in the tales uttered from His lips. Thus in celebrating the birth of our savior Jesus Christ, we are born again. In other words, the Nativity not only demonstrates the boundless love of God, but also mirrors our lives. In the Miraculous Birth of Christ, we see our very more vividly. Consequently, miraculous changes occur in the lives of the faithful.

“And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

The birth of Christ is the most miraculous event in history. Our human mind is unable to comprehend the Mystery of Christmas, but whoever believes in it, will also experience the miracle of spiritual rebirth.

We live in a time when scientific achievements and innovations occur know no bounds. Though these innovations benefit mankind, the question remains whether these achievements draw humanity away from God. Thus, mankind is becoming increasingly decadent and loosing its moral compass.

The Birth of Christ is a miraculous blessing that turns our God-given lives into a celebration. One practical way for Christians to celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ is to reawaken within us the power of faith in God; remain true to the faith of our forefathers and to the vision of family as a sacred

sanctuary where our children are nourished spiritually.

Dear faithful, the year 2008 has just begun as a heavenly blessing. It is left to us to enrich the New Year with the labor of faith, thus perpetuating our lives as a testimony to our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us spread the peace and love of Christ and uniting the humanity as one heart, one soul.

“Christ was born and revealed, blessed be the revelation of Christ.”

May this statement become the cause of your unceasing prayer. Each time we recite our prayers, we take steps towards God. When we greet each other with the same prayer, we turn into ambassadors of peace and tranquility in our world and among our fellow human beings.

May the Birth of Christ enlighten our hearts, strengthen our love for God and bring peace among us. Let us rededicate ourselves to the Fatherland and the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, to the blessed land of the United States, to our Armenian Holy Apostolic Church and to her sacred mission. Let us remember and pay homage to our fallen martyrs. Let us be thankful for the bountiful offerings as we live our lives for the Glory of God.

May Christmas bring peace, health, and prosperity to every heart and soul, to every family and to the whole world.

January, 2008

A LIFE WITH GOD

The Glorious Resurrection of Christ our Lord is the single most magnanimous event in history. The Resurrection of our Lord reflects the divine strength. Christ our Lord resurrected from the dead and graced us with the message of everlasting life. As Christians, we celebrate the Resurrection of Christ, for therein lies the mystery of the New Life. The entire journey of Lent cultivates within us the presence of God, in order that guided by Christ, we may reject our old nature and put on the New Life in Christ.

- The celebration of the Resurrection of Christ our Lord compels us to enlighten our God-given life with the presence of Christ in our being throughout each day.

- The celebration of the Resurrection of Christ our Lord becomes a true feast when we are able to inspire the people to have faith in God.

- The celebration of the Resurrection graces us with New Life. In other words, we celebrate the Resurrection to fully grasp the depth of the words of St. Paul: “To me, Christ is life.”

- The celebration of the Resurrection of Christ, our Lord, fills us with the deeper respect for the legacy of our forefathers, namely the Church, which ought to continue to administer the Word of God as the spiritual bread for each faithful.

- The celebration of the Resurrection of Christ our Lord helps the faithful of the Armenian Apostolic Church to search for eternal life. For the faithful of the Armenian Apostolic Church, the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ offers the vision to embrace the Gospel of the Lord. The messages of salvation in the Gospel of Christ enlighten our minds and souls with divine love.

- Finally, the Resurrection of Christ our Lord is the peak moment in our spirituality when God enters into the depth of our hearts and elevates us to a new level of life – a life with

God. On the blessed occasion of the Resurrection of Christ, our Lord, we extend our best wishes to the zealous faithful of the Armenian Apostolic Church, the dedicated members of the Diocesan Council, Parish Councils and all Diocesan organizations: May the glorious Resurrection – the luminous faith – lead the lives of our faithful towards God, towards the Good and the Eternal.

On the blessed occasion of Easter, we also would like to extend the good wishes of the pastors and the faithful of the Western Diocese to our beloved Vehapar, His Holiness Karekin II the Catholicos of All Armenians. May the Good Lord bless him and strengthen him with the power of the Holy Spirit, so that he may continue to serve and lead his flock with the faith of our forefathers.

“Christ is risen from the dead, Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ.”

Easter, 2008

A SOUL GENERATED BY LOVE

“Everybody can be great, because anybody can serve. You don’t have to have college degree to serve. You don’t have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don’t have to know Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don’t have to know Einstein’s theory of relativity to serve. You don’t have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.” - Martin Luther King

I purposely chose these words for this year’s assembly. Through this message Martin Luther King transformed the spiritual lives of tens of thousands thus guiding them to make the inner search into the depth of their souls where they would find the God-given gift of love.

Our mission as dedicated members of the Armenian Church is clear: to serve God our Lord and during our journey of service bring the light of God to the hearts of the faithful.

The rewards of our service will be given to us by God. This perception will help us all understand that true rewards come from God alone and not from people, for we are all equal in the eyes of God.

The Ladies’ Society is and should be spiritually the most powerful presence in the life of our Diocese, for this group of selfless humanitarians has taken on the role of a mother in the life of the Diocesan family. The main mission of the Ladies’ Society will remain to be the Christian education of our children. I firmly believe that the Ladies’ Societies of all our communities need to rethink about this mission and to play a more active role in the leadership of the church. In order to succeed in our mission we ought to take important steps in our fellowship life in the coming years. They include:

1. To facilitate open forums for all the women of the community and lead them into faithful discussions for the benefit of the Church.

2. To establish closer relationships with the existing bodies of the churches.

3. To become the hosting committee for the churches on Sundays. Our church needs to become a Church centered on service. Our church needs to expand her services beyond her walls. Our church needs to be engaged in the life of the community. The Church is not an exclusive Church. To realize this, we need your help and guidance. Above all, we need your love – doubled with new members. The life of Christ our Lord remains to be the true example of service and leadership, as it reflects His unconditional love.

The words of Martin Luther King convey to us a challenging message: “Love is the most durable power in the world. This creative force, so beautifully exemplified in the life of our Christ, is the most potent instrument available in mankind’s quest for peace and security.”

If we exercise the grace of love within our community, we become the Living Church. I say these words with the firm belief that with you, the ladies of the Diocese, we can become the Living Church and move mountains.

Therefore, it is my request that we rethink about our mission and calling. Let us reach out to the members of our communities with new perspectives, with new methods, with a deeper love and with a renewed spirit of service. With an embracing heart and soul, we can bring all women of this Diocese into the life of the Church and entrust them with special tasks and responsibilities. The success of our mission lies in our hearts, in our frequent fellowships, in our in-depth relationship as was the case with Christ and His disciples.

In my closing remarks, I would like to thank God for the blessing of your service and love. My special thanks to the members of the Central Council, but especially to Mrs. Silva Katchiguian whose dedication and passion cannot be expressed with words alone. Her leadership in the life of the Diocese has been exceptional and exemplary.

On your behalf, I congratulate her for her accomplishment.

LOS ANGELES CITY COUNCIL COMMEMORATES ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

On April 18th, Abp. Hovnan Derderian, accompanied by a delegation from the Western Diocese, participated in the presentation of a proclamation commemorating the 93rd Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide from the Los Angeles City Council. The proclamation was presented by City Council President Eric Garcetti, and Councilwoman Wendy Gruel to clergy of the Western Diocese as well as community leaders on behalf of the Armenian Americans of Los Angeles.

The Primate in his remarks to the City Council said "The recognition of the first genocide by the L.A. City Council brings justice to the memory of the victims."

"All great things are simple, and many can be expressed in single words: freedom, justice, honor, duty, mercy, hope."
Sir Winston Churchill

These are the words of Sir Winston Churchill which embody the vision of the martyrs of the first Genocide of the twentieth century. They have sacrificed their lives for freedom, justice, honor, duty, mercy and hope. They knew well that the price for their vision would be the cost of their lives. However, they chose martyrdom rather than the oppression of the soul and the denial of their spiritual and moral values. Their martyrdom as the victims of the first genocide has a special message to convey not only to the children of the Armenian nation around the world, but also to humanity as a whole.

In the grace of your benevolence we turn our eyes to the future and give thanks. As Americans of Armenian descent we have not only lived, but have also thrived in the United States for generations. The true values of this country are democracy and freedom, two principles that contribute to a God-pleasing vision of universal respect for humanity.

Freedom of faith is a gift from God, which cannot be

taken away from us forcefully; justice prevails only where we all render unconditional respect for all; honor is the reward only for those who fulfill the promise of life; duty is the conscience of guarding spiritual values; mercy should be reflected in action in our daily lives; and finally hope is the ultimate virtue which helps us better understand that dreams are realized beyond the horizon.

The recognition of the first genocide by the L.A. City Council brings justice to the memory of the victims. They are remembered in our prayers with dignity and with the promise that history will always honor their martyrdom for their courage, who gave their lives for freedom, justice, honor, duty, mercy and hope. Though they were silenced, their vision for a more prosperous future is being fulfilled by us, the surviving generation, but never failed to cherish the dream of Armenia.

Almost a century ago, the United States of America embraced the orphans and the survivors of the genocide. This blessed country has strengthened in us the renewed sense of commitment to pursue our noble cause: the recognition of the first genocide of the twentieth century. The will of God will be fulfilled. This blessed land has become home away from home for our children. Their commitment for America is firm and genuine and their love for their ancestral land of Armenia symbolizes the love for the people of God.

Our journey of life in this country will be a journey of commitments, a journey of successful achievements, and a journey of resurrection that will bring justice to the memory of the martyrs of the Armenian Genocide.

April 18, 2008

THE KINSHIP OF SUFFERING AND COMFORT

Tonight's fellowship truly signals the reinforcement of the closer bonds between the two communities: Armenian and Jewish. It was only a year ago when Los Angeles witnessed a new momentum when the Jewish and Armenian communities joined together to commemorate the memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust. Last year's commemorative event was the brainchild of the Honorable Rabbi Harold Schulweis. He has pioneered the mobilization of the religious leaders, political activists, intellectuals and members of the two communities to voice a new and strong message throughout the world that the recognition of the Genocide must be perceived and pursued as a noble cause. Our journey tonight proves to be a sign of victory and perseverance for the cause of global justice. *"Together we will not forget"* is the leading thought. History demands justice and justice is a prerequisite for peace.

The honorable Rabbi Harold Schulweis, founder of the Jewish World Watch, is not only a spiritual leader of the Jewish community, but a leading figure amongst the leaders. He has a compassionate heart, whose love is the reflection of God's love for humanity, whose genuine respect for the victims of the Armenian Genocide has utterly rejected all political considerations. Rabbi Harold Schulweis upholds firm in his spirituality the vision of morality as he continues to inspire us with the reawakening challenge: *"Together we will not forget."* Commemorative events are vitally important for our young generations. A nation which refuses to respect the past and tends to ignore the scars of the past is doomed to perish. The ultimate significance of these events is one: to educate and illuminate the world with the notion of respect for the God-given life. Darfur and many other genocides are the result of the world's ignorance about the first genocide of

the twentieth century. Rabbi Harold Schlweis is the voice of the justice for the ignored Genocide. His voice is the reawakening challenge for the nations of the world.

On behalf of the Western Diocese and the faithful we extend a warm welcome to our beloved and visionary teacher the honorable Rabbi Harold Schulweis to salute us all with a special message, a message which inspires hope to our hearts, a new vision for the sons and daughters of the ancient Armenia which bears witness to 60 years of celebrations for the perseverance of the vision of the victims of the Jewish Holocaust.

May 15, 2008

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF SERVICE!

“As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you”

With these words, Christ our Lord, instructed His disciples to go into the world and become ambassadors of God's work.

On a special day when St. Peter Armenian Apostolic Church celebrates the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the mission in the life of the community and the Diocese, the words of Christ our Lord, renew within our spirituality the understanding of life as a mission on earth.

As Christ was sent into the world to change it, so are we, the representatives of Christ, to continue the mission of the Church and to do the work of God. For the past fifty years, St. Peter Armenian Church has taken upon herself the noble duty to teach our children the messages of Christ, which constantly transform our spirituality with the inner strength, pave for us the road towards God to live a Christ-like life, and to become a true follower of Christ in many ways.

The 50th anniversary is a milestone. Tonight we celebrate the history of St. Peter Armenian Church and her achievements. We celebrate and recognize the fulfillment of the mission of many who have worked hard for this church and have understood that their lives are special tools in the hands of God.

On this special day we remember with deep gratitude the leadership of past Primates and Priests, whose love and dedication for their work has helped the faithful to become shareholders in their house of prayers. We pray for the health of His Beatitude Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, who consecrated the church and for Archbishop Vatche Hovsepian, and fondly remember their selfless service to the Armenian Church. We remember in our prayers especially Bishop Yeghishe and especially Father Shahe Demirdjian and all the servants who led St. Peter Armenian Church with diligent pastoral ministry.

Tonight, we pray for you all so that we may all listen to the message of Christ and continue to be ambassadors of God in the life of the community in fulfilling all the noble duties and responsibilities which help the members cultivate in their spirituality the Christian spirit but above all, hold firm in the depth of their soul the image of the Almighty God.

In closing, I would like to commend the hard work of all those who have taken an active role in the celebration of the 50th anniversary activities including the parish council, the banquet committee, but above all, the dedication of your beloved pastor Archpriest Father Shnork Demirjian.

Let this celebration be a new beginning in the journey of St. Peter Armenian Church for the glory of God. Amen.

November 9, 2008

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

“... Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in the one body.” - (Colossians 3:15)

The Blessed Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ brings peace on earth. Peace is the reflection of the love of God. The peace which is being offered to us all, reawakens in us the wisdom to live a purpose-driven life.

The words of St. Paul, the Apostle on the eve of the New Year and Christmas nourish our spirituality with the divine presence of Christ, our Lord.

In today's world, the celebration of the Birth of Christ has been commercialized. Christmas is most of all a time of spiritual renewal. It is the time that the faithful of our church hold firm to the sacred traditions of the Church and make Christmas a special time for family reunions and sacred gatherings.

Our prayers become meaningful when we all reach out to those who are in need. There is no doubt that when we make the collective effort to lessen the pain of the poor, then the peace of the Lord rules the world and the hearts of humanity are united as one.

Christmas is a special time to relive our faith in God and to fulfill our duties and responsibilities. Christmas is a time to teach one another and especially our children the prayers of our Church. It is time that we relinquish our slavery of materialistic values and cherish the spiritual and moral values which are more enduring. My dear faithful, brothers and sisters, youth and children, we can grasp the true meaning of the gifts of peace, when we live a life full of good services and sacrifices. The fuller our lives are with good work, and sacrifices, the richer we are spiritually.

The New Year and Christmas is upon us all to live an insightful life, led by the love and wisdom of God. The world becomes a peaceful place for us all, when Christ unites us all

through His teachings. Christianity is not about science; Christianity is the way of life, which should be lived in pursuing the messages of God.

Therefore, let us preach the Word of God. Let us celebrate the blessed Birth of Christ, our Lord, and be mindful of the fact that in His birth we are spiritually transformed and called to become the Hands of God to bring peace to the world. Let us lead Christ-oriented lives in order that we may become co-creators in God's work.

January 6, 2009

CHRIST IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD BLESSED IS THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

The Resurrection of Christ our Lord, which provides spiritual strength in our lives as Christians, is the ultimate expression of God's Divine Love for humanity. This glorious triumph of Christ over death graces us continually with a renewed understanding of our Christian faith. This biggest miracle of all enables us to transform our God-given life into a renewed spiritual life. The Resurrection is the powerful presence of Almighty God in our lives.

The glorious Resurrection of Christ our Lord is the reawakening of the Church. Indeed, the ineffable divine power of Christ's Resurrection is difficult to understand in mere words or logic, but the miracle could be experienced in the spiritual life of each and every faithful and the life of the Church.

The Resurrection empowers us to live according to the Word of God, thus drawing us closer to God.

"Christ is Risen from the dead, Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ."

By proclaiming that Christ is Risen from the dead, we reject the deeds of darkness in our lives and turn our lives toward the empowering Light of God. Our forefathers have lived with this Faith and have taught us to live a life pleasing to God; a life that upholds the Christian faith protects the sanctity of family, builds houses of worship and schools. This faith is complemented with our dedication to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and Armenia, and above all, our country the United States of America.

The mystery of the blessed Resurrection of Christ our Lord ought to be reflected in the life of society. Inspired by the victorious Resurrection we are called to become the good hands of Almighty God with a strong vision. If humanity has

lost the vision of peace, the main reason is human greed and disrespect to our fellow human beings. The global financial crisis that societies all over the world are presently experiencing is but one dimension of this. As expressed by the newly elected head of the Russian Orthodox Church, His Holiness Patriarch Cyril: *“Today, decisions have been affected by attributes such as greed, loss of control over consumption, a bid to enrich oneself by all means and have as much as possible. The crisis began when people forgot true value.”*

The blessed Resurrection of Christ our Lord impels us to live a miraculous life, to create and to illuminate the souls of humanity.

“Christ is Risen from the dead, Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ.”

May the miracle of the Resurrection of Christ enrich our personal and communal life, so that we may put on the new person in Christ and walk with God, becoming co-helpers of God’s creation.

May the miracle of the Resurrection of Christ grant us the vision to become the living Church through the preaching of the Word of God, and to work hard for the revitalization of the Church.

Our faith in the Resurrection of Christ implies that we all are the living stones of the Church, thus we are challenged to begin a new life in making God the destiny of our life and above all, to see the new life beyond the horizon, in the Hands of God.

“Christ is Risen from the dead, Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ.”

A MESSAGE FROM MONTEBELLO

My dear faithful in Christ,

On this solemn occasion, as we gather to commemorate the memory of the victims of the Genocide, I would like to begin my message by sharing a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, a man who had the vision to see his people freed from bondage, to respect the rights of the people, and above all, to respond to God's call in his life.

“I just do God's will... I have seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the Promised Land.”

There was a time when April 24th was a day of mourning in the life of our people. Today it has become a day of celebration, a day to celebrate the resurrection and rebirth of our great Armenian nation. April 24th embodies in itself a new message. The survivors of the Genocide though were orphaned, but through God's grace received the vision to become the parents of new generations who lived in the spirit of freedom and have become the architects of the new Armenia. Today we celebrate the realization of the dream of the victims of the Genocide through the accomplishments of our lives.

This April 24th and every April 24th to come, is a call for spiritual rebirth, a call to be alert and know the history of the Armenian Genocide, the first Genocide of the 20th century perpetrated by the Ottoman Turks. This is the day which puts on us the moral responsibility not only to learn our history, but also to pay respect to the truth of historical facts, and pass on our knowledge to new generations.

A few hours ago, thousands lifted up their prayers in the desserts of Der Zor for the souls of the victims of the Genocide, whose bones are visible till this day, refusing to be worn away by the sands of time. Today, in many cities around the world, Armenians have become living monuments as they witness

to the world, and pay homage to the martyrs of the Genocide. Through their marching, they renew in their hearts a commitment to a creative life and demand justice for their cause.

The Los Angeles Armenian Community must strive to be a church-loving community, deepening in their hearts the faith of our forefathers, continuing to enrich their lives with the building of schools and community centers, preserving their language and culture, but above all being true, dedicated, law abiding, and exemplary citizens of the United States of America.

Today we are reading about new developments about the relations between Armenia and Turkey. At this point all we can do is pray that the route being sought by our leaders will lead to a just resolution to the Armenian cause and help us realize what we have been fighting for as a nation for decades. May God give us strength that in this, as in all things, we persevere, and remain united in our call for justice.

For our fallen ancestors, the Promised Land was Hayastan. For us, the Promised Land is the Armenian Church, and the Holy Traditions of our nation and forefathers. The sacrifice of our martyrs is the foundation of our life. Their blood is the call for constant rebirth. Their spirit is the journey and goal of our spiritual life, so that we may live with the love of God, faith in Christ while always holding firm in our hearts the vision of historic Armenia, a powerful Church, and above all, a prosperous young generation who will become the miracles of change and the future of our great Armenian nation.

OUR VISION IS THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CATHEDRAL

“The most essential elements of communal life are participation, the will to assume responsibility, volunteerism and having a sacrificial spirit.”

“May you hold soil and it turns into Gold; May you hold Gold and it turns into a Soul.” It is said, “Where there is a will, there is a way.” We would like to add by saying, “Where there is love, there are unlimited paths.” Karekin I, “Christian Armenia” 1997.

This miraculous message has the power to uplift the human spirit and to bring it closer to our Creator. As devoted members of the Armenian Apostolic Church, we lead lives of prayer in order to get closer to God. We are aware that our God-given lives require us to base it on certain moral principals. With time, we commit to abide by them to enrich our lives and become co-creators side by side with the characteristic of a true Armenian Christian - devoted to his Christian belief, his church, and the establishment of an Armenian family based on respect and high moral values. All this could be realized when our lives are enriched by the gift of giving and participation, assuming responsibilities and the spirit to volunteer and sacrifice.

Dearest faithful in Christ, each of us experiences different phases in our lives. We think of these phases as challenges brought to us by God so that by facing and overcoming these challenges, we become stronger and are able to better appreciate our lives. The same principal applies to our communal and church participation, whereby, from time to time, we are faced with challenges, sometimes historical ones, which test our resolve and invite us to turn them into missions - life missions.

The Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America has embarked on the God-pleasing mission to cons-

truct the Cathedral at its headquarters in Burbank, California. Throughout the past decades, the construction of the Cathedral has been a dream for our past Primates, Diocesan Councils and thousands of faithful. The Mother Church will become a standing symbol of the Armenian community in the Diaspora and a golden bridge between God and his faithful. The fundraising efforts throughout the decades have become the base upon which our Cathedral will be built. With God's grace, we will shortly embark on the construction phase of the Cathedral. Its success is preconditioned on the active participation of each and every one of its faithful. Participation is a mission. Each and every donation, regardless of the value, will have its impact on this project. Jesus, standing at the entrance of the temple, watched a widowed poor woman who wholeheartedly donated her two coins to the temple, thereby being awarded by a special recognition. Today, it is our turn to participate and to demonstrate our will to live up to the challenge of realizing our vision of constructing our Cathedral.

The Cathedral will become the cornerstone for all of our Diocese's Parishes, will strengthen the bond between the Armenian Church and its faithful, and will spread the Christian spirit that will become the guiding ingredient of our souls.

Beloved faithful in Christ, I hereby invite each and every one of you to partake in the construction of your Cathedral by placing your rock in its foundation. This Cathedral, which you will build, will become the landmark by which our children - our descendants in this part of the world - will associate with and stay connected to their past and their Armenian faith, culture and tradition. This Cathedral will bare witness to the strength of our faith, the same faith for which that our ancestors devoted their lives. Lastly, this Cathedral will pay tribute to the memory of the millions of innocent Armenians who sacrificed their lives to maintain their faith and identity.

Let us all commit to participate in this mission a calling for our souls, and volunteer service and sacrifice the expression

of our Christian devotion by which we will build our Cathedral.

“May you hold soil and it turns into Gold; May you hold Gold and it turns into a Soul.” Let us turn the vision of building our Cathedral into a mission by which our spirits will at all unite for the glory of God. The Cathedral will become the eternal home in which every Armenian will feel closer to God and feel His presence. This Cathedral will enable us to see beyond the horizon - to see the sanctuary in which our children will come closer to Holy Etchmiadzin.

April, 2009

THE 82ND ANNUAL DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY

“Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16)

Beloved delegates of the 82nd Annual Diocesan Assembly,
Dearest pastors of the Western Diocese and representatives
of our parishes,

We give thanks to God Almighty for granting us the strength and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to serve the Armenian Apostolic Church throughout the past three decades.

During the past six years, we had the privilege to serve the faithful of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church. Throughout the past decades, this Diocese was blessed by the service of seven primates, many clergymen and thousands of faithful who have firmly upheld the holy traditions of our church and our forefathers. We are humbled beyond measure and grateful for their unyielding service and commitment to this Diocese.

We also take this opportunity to pray for the departed souls of our deceased primates, clergymen and lay servants of Christ. We would also like to raise our prayers for all of our current volunteers and members who continue to serve this Diocese and support its many programs and projects. The time and effort you all provide is immeasurable and for that, we are extremely grateful.

Today as we start a new era of service, our souls are filled with one of the messages of St. Paul to the Corinthians whereby we pledge to serve this holy mission entrusted to us with more zeal and a strengthened faith in praise of our Lord.

Throughout the past six years, we were able to serve with the blessing of God Almighty and your collective dedication. Together, we have accomplished a great number of projects and have enriched the Diocese with many new programs. In the following section, we would like to lay out some of these key achievements.

Major achievements during the period 2003-2009:

1. Preparation of 14 new clergy candidates, of which 4 were ordained as married priests.

2. A new group of clergymen now serving at the Diocese with various assignments.

3. Establishment of new parishes and appointment of new priests.

4. The publication of more than 130 different periodicals and books.

5. The acquisition of new properties in various cities and regions. These properties are already being remodeled to serve as churches for many of our communities.

6. The construction of new sanctuaries has and will continue to be an integral part of the expansion of this Diocese. The construction of the Mother Cathedral, the Church building of St. Gregory in Pasadena, the church building in Portland, St. Apkar in Arizona and St. Garabed in the Desert mark the beginning of an era of new Armenian Churches that will enrich our Diocese and create houses of worship to our large and disbursed community throughout the Western United States.

7. We have also been actively engaged and participated in ecumenical fellowships and interfaith gatherings in Southern California, as well as in other areas of the Diocese. We would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every member of the staff of the Western Diocese all of whom serve their entrusted duties with utmost dedication and commitment.

We would also like to highlight and acknowledge the important work being done by all of the subcommittees of the Diocese whose members take on the responsibility to advance the mission of their respective programs.

We are aware that all of our endeavors are short of perfection, as perfection can only be attributed to God Almighty. On the contrary, we will continue to serve with the recognition that much needs to be achieved as we embark on this new era of service. My dear faithful, the past six years

were just the beginning, as we spent time to learn about the Diocese, and the spiritual needs of the community. Our mission at the Western Diocese requires us to meet the needs of a very large community. Therefore, we would like to lay out a number of steps we have to take as we prepare to bring our Diocese to a new level of service as we prepare to meet the growing needs of our communities.

Step 1: In Search of God:

The search of God in our spiritual life should be one of the essential elements of the individual and community life. As Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King said: “So I say to you, seek God and discover Him and make Him a power in your life Without Him, all of our efforts turn into ashes and our sunrises into darkest nights. Without Him, life is a meaningless drama with the decisive scenes missing. But with Him we are able to rise from the midnight of desperation to the daybreak of joy. St. Augustine was right - we were made for God and we will be restless until we find rest in Him.”

Saturday and Sunday Armenian schools as well as the ACYO are the most fertile grounds in which we can cultivate the minds and souls of our precious youth. Educating the youth with the messages of the Gospel of Christ, our Lord is primary in our spiritual mission.

Step 2: The training of new priests:

The Stewardship program has been a great success and has devoted its time and effort in preparing young candidates for the priesthood. Last year, we witnessed the fruits of this program with the ordination of four married priests. This committee meets regularly and follows an agenda to secure the necessary funding and guidance for the candidates and newly ordained priests.

We call on you our beloved parishioners to become shareholders in this critically important mission to secure continuity and smooth transition throughout our parish network.

In addition to the training of the priests, we will be

establishing a special curriculum for the continued education for all practicing priests to refresh their training as well as to introduce them to methods aimed at better executing their pastoral duties.

We will also be establishing in-house training for potential candidates. These classes will serve as a transition before joining St. Nersess Seminary.

Step 3: Reorganization of Parishes and Dues Paying Memberships:

We need to acknowledge the fact that the structure of our parishes and the participation of our faithful in the membership drive require much attention and renewed focus. In the coming months and years this issue will be addressed properly and measures will be taken to formalize the concept of membership and the structure of a parish. We will also work with the parishes to clarify and redefine the geographic boundaries of our present parishes and the communities, which they serve.

Moreover, the most critical element in the life of the community will continue to be the praising and love of God Almighty.

Martin Luther King's definition of love inspires us tremendously. King said the following:

"Love is the most durable power in the world. This creative force, so beautifully exemplified in the life of our Christ, is the most potent instrument available in mankind's quest for peace and security."

Step 4: The reorganization of the Diocesan Administration:

In response to the increased volume of creativity within the mission of the Western Diocese these past six years, there will be a reorganization of the Diocesan administration beginning on May 4th, 2009. All positions and titles will be reviewed in the course of the coming six months to better meet the evolving needs of the Diocese and the community,

and a number of departments will be relocated to the new offices in the Cathedral structure.

Step 5: The Mother Cathedral and the construction of new churches:

While the construction of the Mother Cathedral will be completed next year, the development of new churches within the Diocese will continue with the purchase of new properties. We anticipate the completion of the Mother Cathedral by April-May 2010. God willing, the consecration of the Mother Cathedral will take place, in September 2010 by His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of all Armenians.

Step 6: Establishment of Mission Parishes Desk:

It is our goal to establish a new department that will be in charge of following up and managing the affairs of the so-called Mission Parishes of the Diocese. The responsibilities of the Mission Parishes Desk will be to work with the communities of these mission parishes to help them become fully established parishes with a permanent priest and church building of their own.

Step 7: The Reorganization of Diocesan Subcommittees:

Around 30 subcommittees currently serve to execute the many projects of the Diocese. As we had mentioned before, we are planning to reorganize these subcommittees and redefine their scope to make them more efficient in meeting the expanding needs of the Diocese.

We will also work on enhancing the communication network of the Diocese and making more use of audio-visual tools to facilitate the communication between the Diocese and the subcommittees in the various regions. These communication systems would also be used in linking the Diocese with the parishes, and the Diocese with various universities and schools.

Step 8: Strengthening of the Financial Position of the Diocese:

It is a fact that in the past few years, the Diocese has expanded on many levels. This also implies that the expenses have increased and the budget has almost tripled. Therefore, we have to seriously plan to search for new resources to fund the projects and secure their continuity and success.

Step 9: Expanding the Endowment Fund:

The Western Diocese endowment Fund has been able to attract a number of new contributions throughout the past few years. However, due to our focus on the Mother Cathedral project, we were not able to expand the Endowment Fund's resources to the degree that we had anticipated. Starting in 2010, we will refocus our efforts to raise awareness and encourage our faithful to make both large and small contributions to the Endowment Fund to benefit our Diocesan projects.

Step 10: Reorganize the Discipline of Ritualistic Life:

In the past few years, we have made many attempts to introduce discipline in our ritualistic life. However, due to our work overload we could not give it the attention we would have liked to. In 2009 and 2010 we will revisit this goal.

May 1, 2009

THE ACT OF PREACHING

“... We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, but Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (I Corinthians 1:23-24).

“... that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” (I Corinthians 2:5).

The act of preaching the crucified Christ our Lord is the reflection of the understanding of our Christian faith. To me, as a servant of Christ, it implies the surrendering of life into the Hands of God. When we preach the crucified Christ our Lord, we then proclaim that Christ, Himself, is the power and the wisdom of God.

Today we celebrate the feast of the Recovery of the Cross, which in itself explains the immense love of God and His sacrificial life upon the cross for the salvation of humanity. The cross therefore is the door, which leads us to the New Life, a life with Christ our Lord, a life filled with the wisdom of Christ, our Lord. As Christ was crucified upon the cross, we then are called to live a sacrificial life, a Christ like life.

We live in a world where the crucified Christ is not preached sufficiently and as a result humanity is emptied from divine power and wisdom. The purpose of today's celebration of the Cross becomes meaningful, only when we enter into the depth of our soul and therein meet the crucified Christ. It is at that very moment that we are transformed spiritually and stripped from all kinds of evil thoughts and deeds, which distance our lives from God and humanity. To preach the crucified Christ enlightens our spirituality with a new commitment, in order that we may live a life similar to that of Christ - just and humble while filled with sacrifice and God's peace.

Dear faithful, it is my fervent prayer that we may all

nourish our spiritual lives with the message of St. Paul. “... *that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*” God is the destiny of our lives. In God alone we are able to begin a new life. Our trust in God allows us and strengthens us to become architects of a Christian life. Our faith in God is vital, as it enables us to have the vision to look at life as a mission, which should be fulfilled with God-pleasing deeds.

Therefore, I commend you all to hold firm the grace of your Christian faith and continue to preach the crucified Christ, thus proclaiming, that Christ is the power and the wisdom of God. May the Lord fill you all with this divine love, and guide you all to walk in accordance with the message of the Gospel. Be imitators of Christ, and the Lord God will strengthen us all in our steps to bring changes to the life of the society, and joy and peace to the heart of the people of the world.

TEST YOURSELVES

“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? - Unless indeed you fail to meet the test.”
(II Corinthians 13:5)

My dear faithful parishioners of St. Gregory Armenian Church, today, I offer to you the words of St. Paul, so that you may take them as the spiritual bread of the day. It is my wish and prayer that these same words may be the prayer of your heart, but above, all the mirror of your soul and your spiritual life. As we read these words and make them the prayer of our hearts, we certainly are in dialogue with the Lord. For to me these are the words of the Lord and a call from Him, which reawakens within us a new sense of commitment to apply the message of the Gospel of our Lord in our daily life.

The Church is the most holy place, where we meet God. It is the place where we are transfigured spiritually, only if we become the ambassadors of the Church's mission. If we are able to concentrate all of our efforts to preach and spread the word of God, we are able to move mountains and instill in this edifice a new spirit of brotherhood, a unique spirit of unity, which would enable us to fulfill the long-awaited responsibilities for the well-being of our children, youth and the faithful, as we reach out to them with the spiritual and life-giving bread.

My dear faithful, each morning we dedicate a certain time to examine our physical bodies to just make sure that all the necessary steps are taken to maintain our wellbeing and our physical appearance. The same should also be applied for our spiritual life, for our faith life. When we pray we make God the mirror of our spiritual life. This Church and the community are reminded by the same test. The long awaited dream, namely the construction of the new church,

which shelters us all, has not yet been realized. We ought to work harder for the attainment of spiritual unity and the lessening of the financial burdens of the Church to pass the test and show the strength of our faith. The very words of St. Paul convey to us the truth about our faith and set forth for us the way we ought to cultivate our faith life: *“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? - Unless you fail to meet the test.”*

I also would urge you to read the remainder of the letter of St. Paul, which is equally important for the renewal of our spiritual life. *“Mend your ways [brethren], heed my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”* (II Corinthians 13:11-14).

With this encouraging message of St. Paul, I also convey to you all an account of witnessing of the Blessing of Muron. I wish all of you were present at the historic ceremony and have had the chance to experience the prayerful atmosphere, during which close to seventy thousand people were in attendance with a genuine desire to fill their hearts with the power of the Holy Spirit. The Blessing of the Water with the new Muron will enrich your spiritual life with the same passion of those who were physically present at the Blessing ceremony. It is my wish that we all armor our spiritual life with the gifts of the Holy Spirit radiating from the Holy Muron. As we become recipients of the Holy Muron, we then sanctify our spiritual life. We become true brothers and sisters in Christ, and we then are changed inwardly to offer our love, respect, and understanding for our friends. As Christians, we all are given these gifts. The challenge that the Church offers to us ought to be respondent with our calling to apply the message of Christ in our daily life and in our relationships.

My dear faithful in Christ, we reassure you all that we will continue to serve you all and love you all with the instructions of the apostle and the power of the Holy Spirit.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

“I AM THE VINE AND YOU ARE THE BRANCHES”

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he is it that bears much fruit for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch can withers; ... If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you.” (John 15:5-8)

These Words of Christ our Lord evoke an image from nature, which reflects a particular bond: the relationship between God and man. The vine is the anchor, or foundation, which holds the branches. The same applies to the relationship between God and man. Christ our Lord conveys to us the message that we ought to establish our lives in God and the words of God within our souls.

This is a prerequisite for us to become the disciples of Christ. The lesson that Christ conveys to us is simple and straightforward. If our lives are filled with the Spirit of God--in other words, if we have accepted God to be the true vine and established ourselves as its branches - then our lives are spiritually enriched. For a life emptied of God cannot enlighten the lives of others. God is the reason for all good thoughts and good deeds.

The words of Christ our Lord have been applied to the life of this church, St. Mary, which is in the eve of its centennial celebration. In my view, the sole reason for the continued success of the mission of this church is found in the dedication of its faithful to God. For as the branches have received their nourishment from the vine, so have our founders and leaders received their spiritual nourishment from God.

Today we are celebrating the Assumption of the Mother of God and the blessing of the harvest of your vineyards. The Feast Day of the Assumption of the Mother of God and the ceremony of the blessing of grapes lead us to understand two

important messages. The first message is conveyed through the life and labor of the Mother of God, in whom we find the role model for motherhood, embodied in her humility and faithfulness, which are the most appeasing offerings possible at the holy altar. The second message is conveyed to us through the blessing of the harvest. It helps us to deepen in us the understanding that we are all bearers of Divine gifts and ought to continue listening to divine commandments and living humble lives with offerings to God, thus rendering our lives as light in the world.

If this is not the course of our lives, we become like those branches which do not grow firmly from the vine, and resemble those which eventually perish. Therefore, the Feast Day of the Assumption of the Mother of God inspires us with the messages of humility and faithfulness, which ought to be applied in our daily lives. As we bless the grapes, this traditional ceremony helps us to deepen in our hearts and souls one very important message: that God is the source of all good tidings. This is the essence of all teachings of Christianity. It is with this thought that we bring the first harvest to this holy altar to renew within our souls the very thought that God is the vine and we are the branches. Therefore, the more we read the Word of Christ our Lord, the closer we come to God.

For the words of Christ, our Lord, call upon us all to live a life with utmost dedication, like the widow who put copper coins in the treasury of the temple. Her gift pleased God more than the gifts of those wealthy men who ‘contributed out of their abundance’ (Mark 12:41-44).

In our God-given lives, the treasury is the Church, which is both our house of prayer and our family. We ought to dedicate our lives to our family, the Church. God, the creator of the universe, will reward us.

My dear beloved in Christ, stay steadfast in your faith; adorn your souls with the Love of God and be assured that this coming centennial anniversary will serve as a gateway to a spiritually promising future for your church.

August 14, 2009

THE PRIEST AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

“Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory.” (I Peter 5:2-4).

“The Church needs priests who are holy; ministers who help the faithful experience the merciful love of the Lord and who are convinced witnesses of that love.” (Pope Benedict XVI).

The head of the Roman Catholic Church has this message for all priests who have accepted the calling of becoming shepherds of the mission of Jesus Christ. They must live an exemplary life devoted entirely to His service.

We live in a society in which people easily forget the omnipresence of the Lord in their lives and only acknowledge life’s material realities. We as a society forget what Jesus instructed us regarding material things in this life, ***“Do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”*** (Matthew 6:25).

Consequently, we priests and servants of the Church are faced with numerous struggles and challenges in society today. It is our duty to deliver the Word of God and guidance to society through the intervention of the Holy Spirit. Along these lines, the Apostle Paul writes: ***“Command and teach these things. Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Till I come, attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when***

the council of elders laid their hands upon you” (I Timothy 4:11-14). He further explains his thoughts with the following words: *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”* (2 Timothy 2:15).

These challenges and imperatives existed at the time of Jesus Christ, and when we read the Gospels, we see so many parallels with today’s society. A priest’s life is a constant and joyous struggle for the salvation of people. It is ultimately his duty to guide people’s souls to a spiritual path and thus to the Lord.

Priests and other spiritual leaders who face the challenges of contemporary society must be constant in withstanding the never-ending chain of political and economic challenges, through the orthodox preaching of the Word of God. Difficult contemporary issues, such as stem-cell research, child abuse, divorce, drug addiction, prostitution, globalization, and many others can be addressed only through the guidance provided by our priests in accordance with the Word of God.

A priest is an angel living on Earth, according to the expectations of the faithful. By following the example of Christ, a priest becomes the testament of love, the Good News in people’s lives. Through this love, he restores lost souls, mends jealous hearts, transforms lives, changes deceitful minds, and saves those who are entrapped in sexually destructive behaviors.

Advancements in modern science do not break our bonds with God. On the contrary, they strengthen our faith and prove His omniscience and almightiness. We must apprehend such innovations as another means of reaching God and strengthening our ever-delightful relationship with Him. King David celebrates this ability of ours as follows: *“The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.”* (Psalm 19:1).

Job, in his conversation with the Lord, receives this admonishment from the Lord: *“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have under-*

standing. Who determined its measurements – surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? Or what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone,” (Job 38:4-5). And at one point Job responds as follows: *“I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted. ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ‘Here, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.’ I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”* (Job 42:2-5)

A priest must be a brave and gracious shepherd who, through his faith, can condemn and ward off the wars, the injustice, the poverty, the child homelessness, the materialism, the drug addictions, the sexual perversions, and many similar vices mentioned in the Bible. Furthermore, we bear the responsibility of continuing the mission of Prophets and Apostles whose essence was undeniably that of Jesus Christ.

Pope Benedict XVI explains this as follows: “To be a Christian does not mean being ‘on the side of’ Christians, as one who supports a movement or approves of a cause. It means the submission of self to Christ, and the sharing in the life of his family. Christ is the vine, and you are one of the branches. Holy Communion and prayer, and the Bible are the ways in which Christ keeps you united to Him; and these are wonderful gifts, involving stupendous demands, unless you are one getting yourself to be part of its glory.”

A clergyman is the preacher, the educator and the organizer in his respective community. And by doing so, he is ultimately satisfied and sustained by the Lord. Therefore, his teachings cannot differ from the teachings of Christ our Lord, as commanded in the Holy Bible: *“teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”* (Matthew 28:20).

The presence of the clergyman in the community signifies and represents Christ Himself. This aspect of the Priesthood

engenders tremendous responsibility, as noted by the Apostle Paul: ***“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”*** (I Corinthians 11:1).

A clergyman is the preacher of God’s Word. In this regard, the Apostle Paul has the following message for us: ***“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths. As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”*** (2 Timothy 4:1- 5) A priest is the voice of God and his heart has absorbed the Good News. The words of the priest are no longer his own. Therefore, the words are delivered to those entrusted to him, to soothe their wounded souls.

Like Jesus Christ, a priest must live a life of prayer and holiness in order to shepherd his flock. The Apostle Peter says: ***“but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct.”*** (1 Peter 1:15) By leading a prayerful life, a priest is guided to live a holy life, thus becoming capable of leading his flock to live in holiness. By doing so, he also becomes immune to sinful behaviors such as deceit, theft, malice, sexual perversion, and other vices, which exemplify man’s lack of respect for life. The Apostle Paul had this to say to the Galatians regarding the vices of mankind and the fruits of the Holy Spirit: ***“I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”*** (Galatians 5:21)

A priest must also teach the honest lessons of life, which are rooted in the Good News of Christ our Lord and Savior. It is also a priest’s responsibility to deny and reject the scientific indulgences, which might cause the destruction of life and humanity. Pope Benedict XVI has genuinely addressed

this issue when talking about our respect for life. He has said, *“If society does not respect human life from its conception to its natural end, if human conception, gestation and birth are made artificial, if human embryos are sacrificed to research, the conscience of society ends up losing the concept of human ecology and, along with it, that of environmental ecology.”*

In this lecture, we intend to address a few pressing issues that are prevalent in contemporary society and which beg clear answers from the Church. The first topic that we will discuss here is the evolution of work in the new context of economics.

In 1996, the U.S. Conference of the Catholic Bishops issued a statement regarding the state of the economy, titled “Framework for Economic Life,” which in part reads as follows: “the economy exists for the person, not the other way around...Economic choices and institutions must be judged by how they protect or undermine the life and dignity of the person, support the family and serve the common good.”

Economic policy must be formulated in a way that the life and dignity of every individual in the society is guaranteed. The right of every person to adequate housing and basic needs, as well as the protection of the environment, must be taken into consideration in policy making.

When it comes to labor issues, economic policy must protect and respect equal rights for all workers. Such policy must provide equal opportunities for everyone in order to prevent extreme economic inequality in society. Inadequate compensation and lack of job security result in crushing anxiety and psychological pressures for the workers, resulting in negative ramifications for society as a whole. The Holy Bible provides guidance for solving all of life’s problems in all times. The Holy Bible grants us the necessary wisdom to tackle all of the problems highlighted in this lecture. Not all of the problems we are faced with today are literally discussed in the Holy Bible, of course. And the solutions that today’s society embraces are not necessarily in harmony with the Holy Bible. When the Holy Bible becomes the rock and the

foundation of our faith and morality, everything else is set right in our lives. We will discuss the aforementioned issues one by one and present you with our own understanding of these issues, in light of the Biblical teachings to which we refer during this lecture.

The more deeply we investigate the Holy Bible, the more we become aware of these facts: Man was created in the image of God, and man is a temple where God dwells. This understanding about the nature of our existence should prompt us to live a prayerful life, listen to His call, and follow His instructions, in our attempts to comprehend various aspects of modern life.

Reading the first chapter on the first page in the first book of the Holy Bible, we realize that God is the Creator and the Lord of the heavens and earth (Genesis 1:1). We refute all of the arguments made by the followers of “dualism” concerning the heavenly reign of God and the earthly reign of the evil one, as if these two forces are in some sort of equilibrium and equal to each other. The Holy Bible speaks not only of the creation of the world by God, but also of His continuous involvement in this creation. According to Christ our Lord: ***“My Father is working still, and I am working.”*** (John 5:17)

The crown jewel of God’s creation is, of course, man. King David has the following words to say about this issue: ***“What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him? Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor. Thou has given him dominion over the works of the hands; thou has put all things under his feet”*** (Psalm 8:4-6). ***“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it”*** (Genesis 1:28), says God. This means that we need to be stewards of the environment, since we are the unique creation of the Lord. ***“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’”*** (Genesis 1:26) Making, in this context, connotes crafting; thus the creator is deeply and intimately involved with the primary creature of His creation. Another

important concept is the “like father, like son,” idea, which calls us to justice, holiness, and truthfulness. Thus man is called to spread the Peace of Christ on Earth, and not peace of man. ***“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”*** (Matthew 5:9)

On the other hand, our mistreatment of the environment continues because of the disobedience of Adam: ***“thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plats of the field.”*** (Genesis 3:18) Such disobedience continues to this day. We live in a world in which scientists conduct many irresponsible experiments and then paradoxically cry out that our planet is in peril.

In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul states this a little differently: ***“For the creation was subject to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope.”*** (Romans 8:20- 23)

A priest is the important educational figure in any society. He must freely and confidently preach and advocate for freedom and human rights. According to Christian Doctrine, he must deliver Christ’s message of love.

From the Old Testament to the New Testament, the Lord’s purpose is clear: to free His people from the oppression and slavery of sin. This is exemplified in the exodus from Egypt. God heard the cries of the oppressed people and acted through Moses to lead them out of Egypt. This was likewise the case when God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. Jesus said: ***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release of the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord.”*** (Luke 4:18-19) It is the duty of the Church and its servants to be like Jesus and to continue His works.

In his “Caritae in Veritate” pastoral address, Pope Benedict XVI states: “Practicing charity in truth helps people understand that adhering to the values of Christianity is not merely useful, but essential for building a good society and

for true integral development.”

A priest, in his important roles as a preacher, a teacher and an organizer, must make his life an example through which he can lead people to God.

Today’s priest must be aware of the pressures in contemporary society to get rid of the “image of God” in man.

Newspapers, television, the Internet, and all other forms of media which facilitate the destruction of the temple of God in man must be held accountable. When Christ walked into the Temple in Jerusalem, He witnessed that His Father’s House had been turned into a marketplace. Christ angrily turned over the tables of the merchants. His rage was demonstrated through His spiritual legitimacy and authority. A priest is likewise an individual who wields spiritual legitimacy and authority. The Apostles and the Church Fathers also exercised the same authority when they were martyred. “The blood of the martyrs is the foundation of the Church,” the Church Fathers rightfully exclaim. We witness how modern science refutes life under the guise of beneficial scientific experiments and actually destroys lives in their premature stages of existence. The Holy Bible provides a clear answer to these practices; they are condemned and regarded as sinful as murder.

How one should understand the words of the Prophet David as he states, ***“For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother’s womb.”*** (Psalms 139: 13-17) The Word of the Lord tells Jeremiah ***“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.”*** (Jeremiah 1:5) There are many answers to the pressing issues of modern life in the Holy Bible. Although these issues may be contemporary in nature, the answers remain the same. Jesus characterized the last days as follows, ***“For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark.”*** (Matthew 24:38) Therefore, let us remain in the Arc – the Church – ultimately established by the shed blood of Christ. Let us remain true to our teachings especially to those who taught us. Let us look

to Jesus Christ, our Savior, who is the truth and the life. Science has good things to offer; however, as the Apostle Paul writes, ***“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.”*** (I Corinthians 8:1) Let us learn first and foremost from God’s teachings. Consequently, it is not by coincidence that when our Church forefathers translated the Bible to Armenian, they translated the following sentences first: ***“That men may know wisdom and instruction, understand words of insight”*** (Proverbs 1:1-2), and the continuation of this thought, ***“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.”*** (Proverbs 1:7)

Hence, while science brings pride, faith fortifies. Let us remain true to love, the greatest gift of all. As the Apostle Paul says, ***“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I gain nothing...Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”*** (I Corinthians 13:1-13)

October 15, 2009

“THEREFORE BE PERFECT, JUST AS YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS PERFECT”

This divine commandment calls on us all to deepen in spirituality the very nature of our Christian identity, the depth of our faith in Christ our Lord, the extent of our Christian love for humanity, the respect we render for God’s creation. Above all, it is the commandment which challenges us to change the course of our God-given life thus leading it towards God.

St. Gregory of Nyssa, the fourth century saint and an inspiration for many, speaks of the Word of God as “*the unattainable commandment*.” The saint puts forward the following instruction: “For in the case of those things which are good by nature, even if men of understanding were not able to attain everything, by attaining even a part they could yet gain a great deal.”

“Therefore be perfect, just as your Heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48)

I have intentionally chosen this message, for in it, I find the ultimate purpose of the mission of our church. The Church is the holy place, where we enter into the presence of God our Lord and therein we surrender our lives and the whole being into the hands of the Almighty to set a new beginning in the course of our life. As we all become the true members of Christ’s body and the living church through our prayers and thoughts, we question the kind of race our spiritual journey has been set on and evaluate the results of our week-long life in our workplace, in our relationships with our family members, as well as our friends. Therefore, the Church gives us the chance to renew our callings and vocation to become imitators of Christ and think of the “unattainable commandment” to consider becoming God’s friend.

“Therefore be perfect, just as our heavenly father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48)

My dear brothers and sisters, this commandment of our Lord challenges us all to become beacons of light in our communities. It gives us the spiritual strength to exercise certain steps to share our God given gifts between friends and especially with the members of this community thus strengthening the foundations of this small church. Though this church is considered small through the number of the faithful engaged in the life of the community, you are spiritually rich with the measure of your Christian faith. For you have shown in action the zealously of the Christian life and that you have the noble goal of virtue *“to become the friends of God.”*

My pastoral visit to you and this church reawakens within my spirituality a few thoughts and practical steps that I owe to exercise in the coming week. And I invite you all to join me in taking similar steps in the course and the race to increase within our spirituality the *“unattainable commandment,” “the Perfect life.”*

We all can and should take a moment to structure our Christian life by exercising our spiritual gifts between the members of our community. And the steps that we take and adopt do not necessarily need to be major ones. Simple actions on our part will bring cheer and change in the life of the community, which will grant us all the immeasurably comforting feeling – the very presence of God, which unites us all, and enables us all *“to move mountains.”*

Therefore, let us all take these few exercises and at the end of the week we will see and enjoy the good results of our actions, which will bring us closer to God.

a. Enlighten the life of a friend with a letter, with a phone call or a visit.

b. Share your visions and your faith life with a friend. This will help you grow spiritually and increase within you the sense of accountability.

c. Research the life of a saint, who will be the source of

your inspiration.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I thank God for bestowing upon me the gift of serving you all. Nothing could equal to my joy than witnessing the strong presence of St. Gregory Armenian Church. Soon you will be celebrating the centennial of the building of this church. Throughout the past decades generations have lived the love of God through their sacrifice. This Church has become a beacon of divine light and will continue to enrich the lives of your children and grandchildren. The harvest celebration brings holiness to your life. The pastoral ministry fulfilled by Fr. Yeghia and our services for this church and the community is certainly the most unique way to praise God. Moreover, the ordination of the two deacons Brian and Daniel instill within our heart the hope for a new dawn in the life of this church.

May the Lord bless you all, grant you all with the abundance of spiritual gifts, so that you may continue to listen the Word of God, which encourages us to see within our spirituality the ability to elevate ourselves to a higher level of faith-life and lead us all closer to God.

“Therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly father is perfect.”

November 8, 2009

**“BEFORE I MADE YOU IN YOUR
MOTHER'S WOMB, I CHOSE YOU.
BEFORE YOU WERE BORN,
I SET YOU APART FOR A SPECIAL WORK”**
(Jeremiah 1:5)

These are the words of the Lord addressed to the prophet Jeremiah. “I chose you,” says the Lord. The prophet was chosen to lead the people of God. His prophetic mission was to call his people to become partners of God’s work and His creation. “I set you apart for a special work,” says the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah. His “special work” was to preach the Word of God and teach them the God-given laws.

Today, on this historic day of the consecration of St. Apkar Armenian Apostolic Church, the Lord once again calls on us all who have become Church builders and partners in the work of God.

“I chose you. I set you apart for a special work,” says the Lord. We all are blessed for having engaged in the building of this magnificent church. We all are charged with the divine command to dedicate our lives for the maintenance of our Christian faith and heritage. We all are chosen to serve the Lord and our Church in many ways. And the special work, which has been entrusted to us all, has been the construction of St. Apkar Armenian Apostolic Church. Truly, the real spiritual mission and the journey toward God begin today. This Church will become the pride of your community and of the Western Diocese as we grace one another with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In his Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul conveys to us all a very special message:

“You are members of God’s very own family, citizens of God’s country, and you belong in God’s household with every other Christian.” (Ephesians 2:15)

The vision of the Armenian Church of Arizona and the community has been the brainchild of former Primate of the

Western Diocese, Archbishop Torkom Manoogian and present Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem. Their mission was carried forth by our former Primate, His Eminence Archbishop Vatche Hovsepian, when the Melikian Cultural Hall was built and served as the sanctuary for many years.

We give thanks for the generosity of the Hosepian Sisters and of all of our godfathers and donors who together have realized the construction of St. Apkar.

Today, we celebrate the labor of many who responded to God's call. I have made numerous pastoral visitations to this community and I vividly remember all assemblies and divine liturgies which have strengthened within us our commitment to serve and to strive for victory. Some of you have taken a lead role and others have shown your commitment in different ways. This new church will challenge us to take turns and share the burden of service under the able leadership of Fr. Zacharia, your beloved pastor.

Building a Church is a noble cause. However, the missions of the Church will only be fulfilled when we become strong in spirit and cultivate a God-shaped community. I trust that this Church will become the pride of the Western Diocese with all of the good deeds being accomplished by the faithful members of St. Apkar Armenian Apostolic Church. I myself have witnessed the incredible dedication by members of the Parish Council, past and present, by Ladies Society members past and present, and all auxiliary bodies. Scottsdale is a strong community in which the members have shown their loyalty to this country in a most unique way. Their services are dedicated in tribute to the victims of the Genocide and in memory of all American soldiers who have heroically given their lives for this freedom-loving country.

St. Apkar Armenian Apostolic Church embodies the spiritual message of a miracle brought to life in this community. This Church will be a living spiritual message that can change lives as well as history. Therefore, my dear and beloved faithful in Christ, your faith in this Church will be a spiritual message for your children and for future generations. You

have become ambassadors of Christ and partners of God with the construction of this church.

This church will become a beautiful creation of your faith and devout commitment and a vivid reflection of your prayer. Today, we celebrate a new Pentecost in our spiritual life, the reawakening moment of the divine gifts of the Holy Spirit. We praise the Lord, our God, for this historic day and answer to His divine call: ***“Before I made you in your mother’s womb, I chose you. Before you were born, I set you apart for a special work.”***

God has chosen you and all of us. Exercise your faith fervently and passionately. Continue to be a partner of God’s work with this church. The Church embodies the blessed work of Christ. In you, I see the living Church. May the grace and the blessings of our Lord be always with you and with us all. Amen.

CHANGE THROUGH CHRISTMAS

“Christmas itself does not change. It is we, who change, and the nation and the world in which we live.” Fr. Richard P. McBrien

In an article entitled “A Christmas meditation for 2009,” Fr. Richard P. McBrien, the Crowley O’Brien professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame conveys to us an inspirational message which calls on all nations to bring change in their spiritual life.

Change is a virtue. True change moves into our lives with the faith in Christ. And the Blessed Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as the reflection of God’s love for humanity has the divine strength which transforms our entire being and spirituality, only when we make the commitment to live with Christ and set a new beginning in our God-given lives.

The gift of the Birth of Christ, our Lord, is the most valuable offering from God for the salvation of human soul; a gift which challenges us to change the course of our lives; a gift which unites us all with the Creator, a gift which unites the nations of the world together into one big family; a gift which reawakens within our spirituality a real sense of responsibility to reach out to those who are deprived of joy and basic necessities of human life; a gift which helps us to better understand the depth of the divine messages radiating from the Gospel; a gift which has become the mirror of our inner soul, wherein we see the hidden and dark side of our spirituality; a gift which enriches us all with the task of transforming our whole being and turning our lives into a spiritual tool, namely into the Hands of the Almighty God with whom we enter into partnership in the Creation of the world.

Therefore, Christmas sanctifies the New Year and grants us the vision of bringing change in our spiritual lives. Change leads us all to joy and peace. Change is a necessity for which

we all should strive for. Change gives us the moral right to celebrate the new life in Christ. There cannot be the newness of life without change. “Christmas itself does not change”. Rather, Christmas changes the nature and the character of life to fulfill duties and responsibilities that ultimately give us all the right to become the adopted sons and daughters of the Christian Church.

The Incarnation of the Son of God in the human form is the greatest lesson which ought to shatter the course of our lives and bless us all with divine wisdom to share our love with all people without exception.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16). Therefore, let us quench the thirst of our spirituality with the same words of the Good Samaritan woman: ***“Sir, give me that Water, and then I shall not be thirsty, nor have to come all this way to draw.”*** (John 4:15).

Draw your life near the living water and celebrate the Birth of Christ, which will empower us all to change and live the spiritual rebirth, a gift from God.

December 30, 2009

LIFE: GOD'S MOST PRECIOUS GIFT

God's biggest and most precious gift to us is our life. We are called to transform ourselves by living according to God's will and by devoting our life to Him. We should not be indifferent to our God-given life, but transform our life into a spiritual journey in the path of God's commandments.

Our sincere wish is that each of us begins the New Year with this understanding of faith. Let us begin our days with prayer, so that our life is filled with God's love. Let us transform through divine love our human weaknesses into a source of inspiration for others.

The New Year is significant for Christianity because it marks the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Christmas is the expression of God's infinite and immeasurable love for mankind. Indeed, if the Son of God came down from Heaven, took human form and humbly dwelt among people, as an expression of utmost sacrifice, we too are called to sacrifice no less than the widow, whose example Christ pointed out as an invitation of awakening to those who were emptied of spirituality. ***“Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for they all contribute out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all the living that she had.”*** (Luke 21:1-4)

Human beings have the moral obligation to live a creative life in which total dedication is a prerequisite. All of us, whether parents, professionals, educators, leaders or students, should emulate the example of the poor widow in order to make our lives meaningful. All our duties are entrusted to us by God. They are God's work and we are obliged to perform them with complete understanding and sacrifice.

Let us resolve to live the year 2010 in ways that would transform the shortcomings of last year. Indeed, in order to turn our God-given life more beautiful and fulfilling, we need to entrust our life to God with complete devotion and faith.

“THE CHURCH IS A MYSTERY BORN FROM THE LIFE OF CHRIST”

“To what extent we have chosen to heed God’s call, to become partners with God in realizing His dream?”

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Life is a calling that God has granted to each one of us. If we approach life with this understanding, we will automatically become God’s partners to realize the Truth of the Christian Church and to fulfill the mission with which He has entrusted us. The more people get involved in the activities of the church and live by its teachings, the more will their lives be filled with peace and understanding as they feel God’s presence in each other.

In our message published in the 2010 Diocesan calendar, we declared this year to be the Year of the Church. We call upon the faithful of our Mother Church to open their minds and hearts every morning at dawn with a special prayer and to ask themselves a basic question: how and in what ways can they become a true presence in the life of the Holy Church.

In our New Year’s message, we delivered the following passage with regard to the mystery of the Church: “The Church is a mystery that has its roots in Christ’s life, the truth of which is embodied in our spiritual life, in our daily life full of love and forgiveness for one another.”

This point has a crucial significance to which we will turn our thoughts and the path of our spiritual life.

The Church is a mystery that has its roots in Christ’s life.

Therefore, when we talk about the mission of the Church, we clearly understand that the faithful followers of the church feel the presence of Christ, starting with His Birth among mankind to His sacrifice on the Cross, and eventually through the path of eternal life granted to us by His Resurrection.

The truth of the Church is embodied in our spiritual life as well as in our daily life filled with love and forgiveness for one another. Faith is a God-given gift. However, faith commands the love of Christ, the pinnacle of which is forgiveness. A Christian has failed, if his faith and love are not revealed through forgiveness. To create and develop the Church and to be able to live a rewarding life, it is important that its members embrace life with a forgiving spirit. Otherwise, the Church we have built will crumble, destroying its own foundations.

Therefore, let us heed to God's calling and turn our lives into a spiritual tool to build the true church and continue to preach God's teaching from its Holy altar, thus transforming our human weaknesses into strength in service of mankind and His glory.

We hope that our spiritual message will act as a calling for every individual to respond favorably to God's call. If we take the right step and realize that life is a God-given gift, we will not only become His partners, we will also lead a God-pleasing life which will culminate in church-building endeavors.

Let us, therefore transform our life into an expression of prayer and faith. It is only then that the entire world will become one vast Church, where mankind will follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ from His Birth to His glorious Resurrection.

January 2, 2010

LET US BUILD SPIRITUAL CATHEDRALS

It is high time that the Church reclaims its proper place and role in our public life. Present day societies, to which we all belong, have departed from the Church's truth. As a result of the absence of the church from our life, our social life is filled with immoral practices and dealings. Hence, for that very reason, people have lost respect for one another. This seemingly very simple fact causes people not only to keep a distance from each other but also to be distanced from God.

Therefore, it is time that spiritual cathedrals be built in every community, so that, with the creation and organization of the churches, we unite the children of each community, enlighten them spiritually and impart on them God's love and Christ's Gospel. It is necessary that the Church returns to its roots, otherwise, the trends and affectations of the outside world will erect a wall between God and man.

If we speak of building spiritual cathedrals, it is not something implausible that we're talking about. On the contrary, by lending our lives into God's sacred hands, we will find ourselves becoming very active participants. Hence, by creating spiritual cathedrals and religious organizations we will definitely unite our dispersed people and share with them spiritual nourishment.

The mystery of the Church is of outmost importance. Born from the life of Christ, this mystery imparts to us the basic message so marvelously expressed by Bishop Desmond Tutu: "We can be human only together." Therefore, as a family of believers in Christ, the Church inspires and strengthens our conviction that the thing most important in a person's spiritual life is being together. For man is called upon to share his life and his graces with every one generously and without discrimination. By uniting in Christ and by sharing with each other our God-given graces, we will

surely strive to achieve a humane morality.

The more we build the spiritual cathedrals, the more we become aware of God's power in our lives. The more we build those spiritual cathedrals, the easier we can stay away from all those unfamiliar mysteries, wickedness and wars, and all kinds of abominable customs, for the church is the golden ring and the knot which binds us to God.

January 3, 2010

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

“For to me to live is Christ.” (Philippians 1:21)

The Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the ultimate reflection of God’s immeasurable and eternal love for humanity. It is through this blessed miracle, the Birth of our Savior, that we perceive the value of God’s most precious gift of life bestowed upon humanity.

Christianity is neither a science nor a philosophy. Christianity is God’s path leading towards the truth. It is a calling which we have received at birth and are obliged to live thoroughly.

Furthermore, as we celebrate the Birth of our Lord and Savior, we call on those who follow His path and spread His Word. The relationship between God and man is conditioned by a covenant. The Birth of Christ, our Lord, consolidates within us this covenant which we have received through the Baptismal Font. The covenant needs to be reflected in our daily life in exemplifying the Life of Christ with a peaceful spirit, a vision of brotherly love, a fruitful yet humble lifestyle, the respect for God’s creation and all other Christian moral values which make life a true blessing.

We are on the doorsteps of 2010. As the year 2009 draws to an end, we must reflect on our past year’s accomplishments and evaluate the scope of spirituality and success of our lives.

The Church is God’s enormous gift to us. It is strengthened with the reawakening of our faith. Consequently, we announce 2010 as the “Year of the Church.” In 2009, church constructions throughout the Western Diocese had reached new heights. These churches became sanctuaries for our faithful. They served new communities and delivered His Word. More importantly, they guided our youth to the faith of our forefathers.

The Celebration of Christmas for a faithful is a new rebirth in Christ. When we celebrate the Blessed Birth of Christ, we are not only celebrating the Epiphany of the Lord but also His everlasting presence in our lives. In the Birth of Christ, we see the Rebirth of humanity, our motherland, the Call to Peace and the prosperity of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

Dear faithful of the Armenian Church,

Let us celebrate the Holy Birth with the purity of the heart of a child. With the joy of His Birth, we will meet all of life's challenges especially during the financial crisis. Let us strengthen our faith during these challenging times and let the source become the Blessed Birth of our Lord.

As we celebrate the Blessed Birth, we free ourselves from our flaws and sins. In addition, we set ourselves on the path to righteousness. Therefore, this miraculous event fills our hearts and spirits with joy. God's love for humanity is reflected in the Birth of our Savior. There cannot be a greater gift than the Blessed Birth of His Only Begotten Son into this world. Moreover, as we attempt to fathom the magnitude of His Love, let us prove our worthiness of being called His own. Let us devote our lives to serve Him.

Dear faithful,

Fill your lives with God's Love. Let the Birth of Christ become a rebirth in your lives. Let us love one another as He loves us. Let our churches strengthen your bonds with God. May God bless each and every one of your families, with its rich and holy traditions. Let the Blessed Birth become a new beginning and a new awakening in your religious lives.

Christmas, 2010

CLOSER TO GOD

The Great Lenten spiritual journey guides our lives for a return to God which is conditioned through prayerful life and fasting. Throughout the Lenten period, our Church offers spiritual readings and prayers which clearly explain the role of prayer and fasting as special tools which cultivate our spiritual life with the Love of God. In deepening within our identity is the consciousness that all humanity is blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew teaches us about prayer and fasting. These inseparable acts aim to lead our lives towards God. ***“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”*** (Matthew 6:19-21)

Some 25 years ago, I read a book entitled “Christian Morale” authored by the late Archbishop Sion Manougian. In it, I met passages dedicated to prayer and its vital importance. I would like to share these reflections with the reader.

Prayer is the breathing of the soul. As we cannot live without breathing air, the same concept applies to our spiritual breathing. Without prayer, we are spiritually exhausted.

The purpose of prayer is to live in the presence of God, to converse with God and to be filled with divine strength.

One who is guided by prayer becomes conscious. Prayer helps us to better recognize our inner self; enables us to see the essence of our spiritual life, our egoistic feelings, our fears and doubts. Prayer cultivates within us the feeling of responsible life, but above all, humility.

Therefore, based on the thought of many as well as the reflections of the late Archbishop Manougian, we can clearly state, that prayer leads the human being to “see” God. This

grace of prayer is granted to us all without exception. However, it is important that our prayer be unceasing in nature, for prayer strengthens our spiritual life in making God the destiny of our life.

Unlike previous years, this year we have chosen to share weekly messages rather than daily reflections which were communicated to our readers on our website. Each week, we will have one specific theme. Our message for the first week of the Lenten journey is “Surrendering into the Hands of God.”

To me personally, the person who commits the self to prayerful life and fasting is in a way surrendering the self into the Hands of God. Putting our trust into the Hands of God should be and is the ultimate goal in surrendering to God. For a person who craves the epitome of spiritual life needs to take three important steps.

Step one: fleeing from the ordinary life into a desert place.

Step two: the attainment of solitude and silence.

Step three: conversing with God. Any person, who is able to follow these three steps, certainly feels the presence of God. God becomes the mirror of our spiritual life.

This exercise helps us to see the depth of our true being. This is also the moment of transfiguration or spiritual transformation. Christ, our Lord, exemplified this lifestyle in paving the way for humanity towards God.

The Great Lenten period is the call for humanity to return to God. Throughout the Lenten journey, let us take courage to read the Holy Bible in a more disciplined fashion; to make the prayer of our forefathers the prayer of our heart and to exercise fasting. These steps will also help us to be the new person in Christ. St. John Chrysostom conveys to us an inspiring message in stressing the importance of change in our spiritual life, not in a sporadic fashion but in an enduring manner. “But we must see that it is not for a few days that we are required to change but rather for a whole life.”

Dear faithful in Christ, I wish you a spiritually uplifting journey. Let each day of the Lenten period be a step in

bringing you closer to God. This will be the time for spiritual preparation when we mature in our faith to be able to see and grasp the ultimate destiny of the Lenten journey...the Victorious Resurrection of Christ, our Lord.

February 15, 2010

PARTNERING WITH GOD

The second Sunday of the Great Lenten Period which is namely known as the Sunday of the Expulsion can be entitled “Engagement in God’s Work / Partnering with God”. I have purposely chosen these titles with the thought that humanity needs a Return to God. Furthermore, by building churches, being involved in humanitarian projects and in many God-pleasing projects, we exemplify engagement in God’s work. By taking on these glorious tasks, we are responding to God’s call. In other words, God is seeking to enter the hearts of individuals but above all, He is showing His love and care for mankind.

The Sunday of the Expulsion is remembered in our Church with a specific reference to the first Adam who was expelled from Paradise due to his sinful life. However, during the course of the same day, the prayers of our Fathers and Gospel readings remind us that God is compassionate. Additionally, we are given the chance to be reinstated in our adoption as sons and daughters of the Almighty God through confession and repentance.

On the first Sunday of the Great Lenten period, we focused our thoughts on surrendering into the Hands of God. On this second Sunday, we wanted to focus on partnering in God’s work. The Sundays of the Great Lenten period are the steps, which head our lives toward God. Each Sunday has a specific theme with specific Gospel readings. As we participate in all of the religious services and traditions established by our forefathers, we are able to cultivate our minds and souls to live a Christ-like life. In other words, the entire period is a time of spiritual preparation, which leads us to the Victorious Resurrection of Christ, our Lord.

In our concluding remarks, I would like to share with you brief a thought by Bill Peatman which gives us a clear understanding of what it means to be engaged in God’s work.

“God appears to be looking for partners who will share in the saving work of the Gospel. God’s invitation is available to us all – not based on merit or performance. God accepts us. What’s in question is whether we will accept Jesus’ invitation to join him.”

February 21, 2010

PRAYING FOR FORGIVENESS

The third Sunday of the Lenten Journey is known in the Armenian Church as the “Sunday of the Prodigal Son”. The lesson of the day deepens in our spirituality many important thoughts such as confessing our wrongdoings and flaws, but above all, praying for kindness and forgiveness.

Confession and forgiveness are two virtues that ought to be applied in our lives. There is not a single day that passes without failures. However, the Christian faithful ought to evaluate his day with a confessional prayer to God. This truly is the defining moment and is the special time when we once again put on Christ and live with love. The Almighty God embraces us once again with love and kindness, with a forgiving heart, reinstating us in our original right.

This is the very lesson that all of us take from the lesson of the day, as we read the parable of the Prodigal Son. The parable mirrors our life. The Prodigal Son represents humankind with our spiritual turmoil, while the father represents the ever-presence of the Almighty God. Therefore, let us always be forgiving in nature and be Christ’s Hands to change the lives of those who have prayers of confession.

“Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. You are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion for the world is to look out; yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good; and yours are the hands with which He is to bless us now.” Teresa of Avila.

February 28, 2010

EVALUATING THE COURSE OF OUR LIVES

The fourth Sunday of the Lenten Journey offers us the special time to evaluate the course of our life. According to our Church tradition, we are offered the parable of the unjust steward, which mirrors in its broader scope, our relationship with God. Often, we fail in our responsibilities to live a life with God, and often forget to apply the messages of Christ, our Lord, in our every-day life. However, we are challenged to set a new beginning as we make the firm decision to change the course of our life.

We are all stewards in the vineyard of the Almighty and are entrusted by God to bring the good tidings to the world. Moreover, we all tend to go astray as we cease to be messengers of God's Word. However, as we are called with a rebuke and warned to be stripped of our privilege, we ought to acknowledge that the hour of decision is at hand to evaluate the course of our life.

For a Christian, change has a unique significance. It connotes to our connectedness to the Creator and our return to God. Christianity is all about living the Word of God and becoming the "salt" and the "light" in the life of the world. Surrendering into the hands of God, partnering with God, confessing to God and praying for forgiveness are all courageous acts of faith. Furthermore, they require from us the firm commitment: the hour of decision. God calls on us all to be His Servants. This honor and the privilege from bestowed upon us by God leads us to spiritual transformation.

"Make your life a mission – not an intermission".
Arnold Glasgow

March 7, 2010

PRAYING TO GOD

Praying to God is the ultimate message of the fifth Sunday of the Great Lenten Journey. The Gospel reminds us of a certain widow confronted by an unjust Judge, who has continuously ignored her case. However, the widow's tireless and unceasing prayers led the judge to change his ignorance. Additionally, he became ashamed of his behavior. What we actually see in the commitment of the widow is the reflection of divine strength. God chose her to be an ambassador of changing the hardened soul of the public servant.

Certainly, we all acknowledge the fact that we are Christians and thus, are the followers of Christ. However, ambassadorship requires solidarity with Christ. Our Lord has constantly prayed in the presence of His disciples. He taught them how to pray and cultivated in them a sense of continuity in their prayer life. The journey towards God requires certain spiritual discipline. Prayer is the most important spiritual discipline, which needs to be applied in our daily life if we are eager to become ambassadors of Christ.

“We are Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.” (2 Corinthians 5:20)

March 14, 2010

BECOME AN IMITATOR OF CHRIST

The sixth Sunday of the Great Lenten Journey is known as the Sunday of Advent. Truly, as we walk through the journey with the prayers of our fathers and discipline our Christian lives with certain traditions of the Armenian Church, we then grasp the essence of the Incarnation of the Son of God to be the reflection of God's immense love for humanity.

Incarnation conveys to us all the message of humility. The Son of God humbled himself from Heaven to be amongst the people thus paving the way to God. All of us need to be the embodiment of Incarnation in our own ways, humbling ourselves for our beloved one, sacrificing our lives for the wellbeing of our families, friends and the community. Those who are able to live the depth of the Incarnation can also be able to be a shareholder in the life of Christ, especially from the Victorious entry into the city of Jerusalem, through the crucifixion and finally the glorious Resurrection.

Therefore, let us eagerly continue our spiritual journey till we reach the doorsteps of the Holy Week.

March 21, 2010

“PEACE BE UNTO YOU, IT IS I, FEAR NOT”

The glorious Resurrection of Christ bestows upon us the gift of peace which humanity will enjoy when we realize with intense belief the enormity of the miracle.

To experience the Holy Resurrection, it is imperative that we renew our spiritual life. Otherwise, the human mind and reasoning are unable to pierce through the folds of the mystery of the Resurrection and find a new path of life leading to Christ, our Lord. For, after the Resurrection, when Christ approached his disciples, He not only greeted them saying, “Peace be unto you, it is I, fear not,” (Luke 24:36) He also made a specific statement, that only through Him was peace possible to mankind in the world.

On the blessed day of the Holy Resurrection, the Christian faithful greets one another saying: “Christ is risen from the dead,” with the earnest belief that His Resurrection becomes the way of light for those walking in the dark. The Christian who utters this greeting hears, deep in his soul, the message of Christ: “Peace be unto you, it is I, fear not,” and with that we confirm the rebirth of a new spiritual life within ourselves. Hence, to celebrate the mystery of the Holy Resurrection without this renewal in our daily spiritual life would probably mean that we have not fully understood the meaning of the Holy Resurrection. An insightful Armenian clergy of the 20th century has defined the Resurrection of Christ as follows:

“The Resurrection of Christ should be transformed within ourselves into that unending spiritual power, which sheds light in the dark, inspires hope in despair, perseveres with faith in the face of fear and doubt, combines humility with joy, includes others in our personal benefits; in short, it permeates everything with the strength of love and governs us with the desire and vision for immortality.”

Therefore, the celebration of the Holy Resurrection of Christ defines the spreading of the heavenly light in our spiritual life. To celebrate this holy day means to find within us the hope of new visions. The Resurrection of Christ delivers to us the message to lead a humble life. In short, the Resurrection of Christ bestows upon us the love of God, so that we transform our life into a sacrifice and a gift to God's Sacred Altar.

Christ's message is: ***"Peace be unto you, it is I, fear not."***

This is a call addressed to us all, to come into communion with the mystery of the Resurrection of Christ, and to be transformed and be draped in light and transmit holiness.

"Peace be unto you, it is I, fear not."

This is a call addressed to us all, so that we become witnesses to the Resurrection of Christ, by suffering with Him, and filling our lives with sacrifices.

"Peace be unto you, it is I, fear not."

This is a call to the new covenant, so that we beseech a new prayer to God and live our life under His guidance and become the expression of His Heavenly Love.

For two millennia, the mystery of Christ's Resurrection has enlightened and enriched people's lives. Its heavenly power, glowing through the mystery of the Resurrection, has bestowed upon humanity the understanding to turn to God, our Creator. The time is now to fill ourselves with the spirit of the Holy Resurrection, act according to its vision and carry the miraculous torch of Christ's Resurrection to future generations.

"Peace be unto you, it is I, fear not."

Let us turn Christ's message into a prayer in our heart and live as true Christians. Let us walk in His way and seek and see purity and goodness in every person. Let us strive to fill our soul with creative activities and finally, let us feel the inexplicable that we have transformed our life into a source of light, from whose trenches glows God's Word, the water of life that gives everlasting life to all those who partake it.

"Christ is risen from the dead."

"Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ."

April 3, 2010

THE CHURCH IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD

“Blessed are the Church Builders”

This is the message conveyed to us by the forefathers of our Holy Church who have dedicated their entire lives to spread the Word of God. Throughout the one hundred years, the holy presence of the Almighty God within the walls of St. Gregory filled and captured the hearts of the Parish priests, deacons, and the faithful alike. This sanctuary of Fowler is witness to the transformation and the spiritual reawakening of its faithful.

The Church is God’s residence and we are the tenants. We must carry on the mission of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church by committing ourselves to spread the glory of the Good News. The Church is the pathway of leading Christ’s flock to the Heavenly Kingdom.

Dear faithful of Christ, on this occasion of the centennial of St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church, it is our wish that you fill your lives with seven messages of Christ, our Lord.

“The Heavenly Kingdom is like a precious stone for which one can sacrifice anything”. This is the first message. The Church, the body of Christ and our spiritual sanctuary resembles the blueprint of the Heavenly Kingdom. As our Church forefathers have devoted their lives to the Church and have made her the essence in their lives, we also welcome that invitation. Many of the faithful of St. Gregory have welcomed this invitation throughout the 100 years with open arms.

“Love God with all your heart.” This is the second message. It is through this message where we commit our lives entirely to God for He is the source of Love. Therefore, let us show our appreciation for His Heavenly Love with our good deeds.

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” This is the third message, which exemplifies our love for God. We, as the mem-

bers of the Body of Christ, must share the Love with those around us as we were made in His own image.

“Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you.” The fourth message is the Golden Rule of the Gospel. Humanity is in desperate need of following this rule.

“Come to me, you weak and burdened ones for I will bring you rest.” The fifth message is an invitation. We must strive to listen to God’s voice, for He is the ultimate Truth.

“He who is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink from the fountain of the Heavenly Kingdom.” We, as the followers of Christ, are obliged to follow this beautiful message.

“He who believes in Me shall not walk in darkness.” The seventh message unites us with Christ for He is the Light of our lives.

Dear faithful, for one hundred years, you have listened to the Word of God from this Holy Altar. These messages provide us with spiritual nourishment we need. The centennial celebration is an invitation for a reawakening to live the life of Christ, to fill our souls with faith, to pray for the departed souls of the clergy and the lay whose souls are in the bounty of His Heavenly Kingdom. Let us pray for those who continue to remember this church in their prayers.

We wish to convey our sincere wishes to Rev. Archpriest Fr. Yeghia Hayrabedian, the Parish Council, the Ladies Society, the Deaconate, all auxiliary bodies and the faithful. For hundred years, you have collectively maintained this glorious Parish of the Western Diocese. Let us remember the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, the place where St. Gregory the Illuminator became the holy forefather, the first Catholicos of our Holy Church.

From that day forth, the number of Armenian churches grew, as did the faith of our people. The small community in Fowler exemplifies great faith. We are confident that many generations will sustain the faith of our holy forefathers.

Dear God, keep this church. Keep your faithful from all evil and enlighten their lives with the Holy Spirit so that they may turn to You and glorify You. Amen.

THE 83RD ANNUAL DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY

“Being a Christian, or follower of Jesus Christ, requires much more than just having a personal and transforming relationship with God. It also entails a public and transforming relationship with the world.”

Richard Stearns

My dear brothers in Christ, priests and pastors of the Western Diocese and distinguished delegates, I have no intention to read my annual report, as it has been distributed to you. What I would like to do is share with you few thoughts, which I believe are important for the renewal of our faith in God and for the rejuvenation of our spirituality as we continue to be engaged in the life of the Church, as agents of God and as spiritual architects of our communities.

The aforementioned words are chosen from the book “The Hole in the Gospel” authored by the president of World Vision. These words are addressed to us all, as we all aim to dedicate our lives for the mission and well being of the Church. We all know well that we have embarked on a quest to be model Christians. In order to complete this ideal lifestyle, we need to transmit the love of God to the people of God. This certainly challenges us to have the “personal and transforming relationship with God, cultivating within us a pure soul, a heart full of divine love and a mind led by divine wisdom. The message however, very clearly conveys to the Christian believer a special requirement much more than just having a personal and transforming relationship with God, it also entails a public and transforming relationship with the world. The world is represented manifold - the family setting, the Church community and the extended community at large. As ambassadors of Christ, we need to exercise our faith and bring the light into the world. Christ our Lord, in addressing to His disciples, commanded them saying: “Let

your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

I urge you all to take heed to this message, and apply it in your Church and community life. All of us fulfill our duties in some ways, specifically or solely within our respective communities. The mission of our Church and the Western Diocese however, requires that we broaden the spectrum of our dedication and vision for the entire family by extending a helping and supporting hand to one another. Then only the name of the Lord will be praised and glorified. For the past seven years, much has been accomplished with the participation of all priests and lay leaders. The result of our work would have been hundredfold if only we would have reflected our interest and love, support and helping hand for the newly trained priest, for the newly established Parishes and for the missions and projects initiated at the Diocesan level.

My dear delegates, the Lord has blessed us all with numerous gifts, which grant us the spiritual strength and challenges us to share them with all. We, as the delegates of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church, are on the verge of a new era. This new era requires from all of us the urge to re-evaluate the mission of our Church, to study the needs of our churches and the faithful, to seek the tools for reform, to constantly dream of a renewed Church in addressing the contemporary issues facing us today, but above all, to understand the divine nature of our mission.

The Western Diocese of the Armenian Church is represented by this distinguished Assembly. This Assembly is called to progress and grow spiritually. It is time that this Assembly and the respective members respond to God’s call with constant prayer and richer faith, thus, becoming the hands of God in the work of the Church. This Assembly needs to become the source of spiritual transformation, for it takes transformed people to transform the world. No vision and hope will be accomplished if we are not compelled to do the work of God with His love. The basis of all success is the

divine love, which ought to be lived thoroughly and transmitted with humility. What we do and realize in our Diocese is only the ordinary. What is expected from all of us is the miracle, the unthinkable, the unexpected, the renewal of our souls, the empowered faces of our community with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. As a humble servant of Christ, I pray for you all and ask the Almighty God to grant us all the wisdom to do His will for the spiritual enlightenment of the Church and the faithful.

May the inspiring words of the president of World Vision and the message of our Lord instill in our hearts the courage to respond to God's call with greater responsibilities and to serve Him with a sincere love for all.

THE 58TH ANNUAL LADIES' SOCIETY ASSEMBLY

“Becoming a follower of Christ is a life-long process of growing, learning, and changing. It is also a process of surrender.” Richard Stearns

Dear Ladies,

I first would like to greet you all with a heart full of love and gratitude. For what I have continuously seen and witnessed through your dedication, is your commitment to be “a follower of Christ” and “an agent of change” in the life of our Church. The words that I have chosen from Richard Stearns’ article truly reflect your faith life, for you have been a follower of Christ. Your deeds are the reflection of your Christian faith and love, which has been applied in your family life and the unselfish services you render to the Church.

“Becoming a follower of Christ is a life-long process of growing, learning, and changing. It is also a process of surrender.” To me personally, you are the ambassadors of Christ, agents of change, who have surrendered their lives into the hands of God. The task that is entrusted to you as dedicated members of the Armenian Apostolic Church is immense. We need to better understand that the success of the mission of the Church requires a process of surrender, putting our lives into the Hands of God and becoming the agents of God in applying the messages of the gospels in our daily life and in the community.

The tradition of assemblies is the resemblance to the fellowship of the apostles with the Lord. The apostles became followers of Christ as they committed their lives to the preaching of the Word of God. As in previous assemblies which have become a source of spiritual renewal in your God-given lives, I have no doubt that this assembly will once again raise basic questions in you such as who we are? To whom we serve? Why we serve and how we serve? We all are agents of the

Lord, the Church, who are called to serve our Church and respective communities, to reflect our Christian love with humility.

Dear ladies, through this assembly, you all are called to renew your vocation. As followers of Christ, and leaders in your respective communities, you need to continue to grow in God, to learn the Word of God and be the agents of change in the communities. I as well as you know that the work and the sacrifice you offer for the Church aims to cultivate the faith life of children but above all, the members of the community. The institutional Church and all organizations which function under the umbrella of the Church need to apply the divine love in abundance. It is time that we constantly pose ourselves the basic questions of our existence and seek the right answers. The more we ask these questions, the more the Church institution grows. The more we surrender our lives into the Hands of God, the more we succeed in our many missions. Assemblies need to become forums of spiritual transformation with the noble purpose to transform the souls and minds of the people.

My dear ladies, we all work together as a team. Our goal is the same - the rejuvenation of our Christian faith and the Church, for it is the most valuable legacy from the fathers of the Church. I have no doubt that you all will continue to work hard for the Church and the community. However, it is also the right time for evaluation of our commitment, as to how and in which manner we can fulfill our duties to better serve our children.

To me personally, Church organizations that work hard should focus more on the spiritual aspect as well as the creation of true Christian families. Churches and organizations should invest more their earning of the missions of the Church, especially in times when we are challenged by irrelevant religious movements and social aspects which harm the image of God in our spirituality. You certainly have the spiritual strength to bring change and transformation in the life of the Church. The change will become the reality with us all as we become followers of Christ through a process of growing, learning and changing, and especially surrendering.

MESSAGE TO LOS ANGELES BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Dear Supervisors,

The action taken by the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors to recognize the Armenian Genocide and honor the memory of the victims of the first Genocide of the 20th century is a noble and just initiative.

This year, Armenians around the world commemorate the 95th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide and urge all nations to recognize the Genocide. The act of genocide perpetrated with premeditation is a vivid crime against humanity. The past 95 years have been years of victory for the sons and daughters of the Armenian nation who have continued their struggle in preserving their faith and culture. However, it is also important to pay homage to all those nations and countries that have supported the survivors of the Genocide and have shown their respect to the memory of the victims.

We are no longer a nation of mourning our losses. On the contrary, we are celebrating the Resurrection of our nation. In the words of His Holiness Karekin I, the late Catholicos of All Armenians, - *“Armenians die but the Armenian spirit lives on. A nation that refuses to die lives forever.”* (Karekin I 1995-1997). However, the current progress of our young generation does not and cannot permit us to lessen within our conscience the obligation to carry on the surviving spirit of the victims of the Genocide and above all, the recognition of the Genocide.

We are here today, with dual responsibilities as Armenian Christians who ought to guard and cherish their God-given gifts and we are also here as citizens of the United States of America filled with the spirit of the founding fathers of this great nation to become exemplary leaders of our communities.

May God bless you and protect you all.

MESSAGE TO THE WOODBURY UNIVERSITY “ASA”

My dear youth,

I admire your approach of commemorating the 95th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. Truly, the Armenian Genocide is the reflection of the firm commitment of our ancestors for their land and faith, who were brutally massacred by the Ottoman Turks. However, to me personally, the commemoration clearly symbolizes the Resurrection of our nation, and it could no longer be considered a day of mourning. On the contrary, it is a day to celebrate the rebirth of the Armenian nation. One factor is certainly the vivid expression of the victory of our nation, namely the tens of thousands of Young Armenians who presently pursue their higher education in universities around the world. In this sense, I am spiritually comforted to see that the Woodbury University ASA has taken the next step in promoting the education of the next generation, with the introduction of scholarship for young Armenian students.

No doubt, the Armenian cause being a just cause will always be a constant reminder to render our respect for the victims of the Genocide. However, it is time that we take the new steps and methods to further strengthen our position and pursuance of the recognition of the Genocide. And the most effective approach is the education of our youth. The vision of establishing scholarship for the youth is the best approach that paves the way for our youth, to advance and progress in higher education and eventually reach a leading position in all domains of public life. In an e-mail letter addressed to us, Gagik Mkhitarian wrote these words, *“Woodbury ASA would like to not only commemorate the Armenian Genocide but provoke the cause of Armenian success after the Genocide. Thus, this year we are going to give out a scholarship to one of Woodbury’s students, as one of the New Scholars for this*

age. Furthermore, it defines the successful paths Armenians have taken after the Genocide.”

The Armenian Genocide is a historical fact. Modern time politics cannot in any way subdue the historical truth. The Diaspora is the product of the Genocide and the deportations. Millions of Armenians around the world will continue to pursue the recognition of Genocide with a clear message that the first Genocide of the 20th century has been well-documented by authentic historians whose voice is heard and recognized. Time will never be a factor in distancing us from historical facts. God has blessed us with the rebirth of our nation especially with the wise, intelligent and dedicated young students, who have the noble cause to progress in their higher education and become the light into the life of the world. They will honor the blessed memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide as well as for all Genocides, which have hurt the dignity of humanity. Therefore as survivors of the Genocide, we will not only commemorate the memory of the victims but also stand firm in our commitment in supporting the New Scholars, who would certainly become the pillars of peace and justice of humanity. This is the message we learn from the most inspiring step initiated by the Woodbury University ASA.

God bless the memory of the victims of the Genocide and God bless all and strengthen us all in our calling to serve the youth in all of our communities.

MESSAGE TO “ADAA”

On behalf of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America, I extend a warm welcome to the members of the Armenian Dramatic Arts Alliance and the associated artists. Tonight’s performance is entitled “Celebrating Armenian Victory and Creativity”, and is aimed to honor the memory of the victims of the Genocide. I commend the new approach to commemorate the martyrdom of our ancestors, which sends to the world a message of hope and resurrection, victory over death, but above all, the vision and the passion to become leaders in all domains of the community in which we live.

ADAA leads an important mission in the life of the Armenian-American community, whose aspirations are noble. Moreover, the close collaboration between the Church and the ADAA is vital, for as it has been recorded in a recent communiqué sent out from the Diocesan office, I consider “art as the other word for faith”. The person who exercises the gift of faith in the God-given life, that same person certainly records a creative life.

My special thanks to the ADAA, their leader Bianca Bagatourian and to all participating artists who have graciously accepted to realize tonight’s performance. They will be acknowledged at the closure of the event and thanked once again. My special thanks to Dr. and Mrs. Simon and Lena Simonian for sponsoring tonight’s unique event. I now invite you all to enrich your spiritual life as you start a journey with young and talented artists, who I trust will inspire us all with their performance of art as the reflection of their unwavering faith.

April 27, 2010

THE CATHEDRAL . . . A REALITY

“God loves a cheerful giver.” (II Corinthians 9:7)

We cordially welcome all of you to the Victory Ball with a heart full of Christian love and spirit. With your kind presence and participation, you exemplify your true dedication to the mission of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church.

Indeed, we encountered numerous obstacles and challenges during the progress of the construction of the Cathedral. However, we endured them all collectively. Today, we are witnesses to the fruits of our labor. We vividly recall the memories of the initial stages of construction of the Cathedral including the Groundbreaking Ceremony, which was presided over by His Holiness Karekin II during his Pontifical Visit to the Western Diocese in 2005. The construction formally commenced in May 2008. On June 28, 2009, we consecrated the cross of the Main Dome in the presence of the Diocesan clergy, high-ranking government officials and the faithful.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the Godfathers, Benefactors, donors of the doors and the stain glass windows, and everyone who generously contributed to the Cathedral. We offer our special thanks and deep appreciation to the esteemed members of the Cathedral Building and Fundraising Committees, who selflessly dedicated their precious time to realize this magnificent and God-pleasing project.

The Blessing and Dedication Ceremony (Trnpatsek) of the Cathedral will take place on August 14, 2010 at 6:00 p.m. This joyous event will allow the faithful to witness the magnitude of this monumental structure firsthand. We extend our deepest gratitude to His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians who graciously accepted our invitation to consecrate the Cathedral during his Pontifical Visit.

On Saturday, September 11, the Pontiff will be joined

by high-ranking Armenian clergy to consecrate the Cathedral. On Sunday, September 12, His Holiness will celebrate the Pontifical Divine Liturgy and will deliver the sermon. The Church service will be followed by a formal banquet at the Universal Hilton Hotel in Universal City dedicated to the completion of the Cathedral.

We call upon each and every Diocesan faithful to partake and contribute to the historic Cathedral. Everyone's participation is vital. Let us remember the words of the Apostle Paul, ***"God loves a cheerful giver."*** (II Corinthians 9:7)

The Cathedral will become the spiritual center of the faithful of the Diocese as well as the unifying bridge between the Western Diocese and the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen." (II Corinthians 13:13)

June 3, 2010

MESSAGE AT “ECF” FUNDRAISING EVENT

“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth! Thou whose glory above the heavens is chanted by mouth of babes and infants.” (Psalms 8:2)

The mission of the Etchmiadzin Children’s Fund is one of the dearest to our hearts at the Western Diocese. With your compassionate hearts, you are reaching out to children who are in dire need of support, love and care. Many of these children are orphans living at sub-poverty levels. They lack necessary nourishment. With your lending hand, these children are provided with not only food and shelter but also with spiritual guidance and nourishment.

Throughout the years, the Etchmiadzin Children’s Fund has expanded its financial outreach. Currently, the Fund supports close to 500 children and assists an orphanage with an annual donation.

We wish to express our sincere gratitude to the Committee members under the direction and leadership of Mrs. Gayane Tatouljian for their passionate dedication to this God-pleasing mission. Their impeccable execution has served as an exemplary model of what is possible to achieve with an open heart and a caring spirit.

We extend our blessings to the supporters of the Etchmiadzin Children’s Fund. Nothing is more gratifying than reaching out to children who pray to be nourished, sheltered and loved. Today, you are the answers to their prayers.

May the Lord shower you with His blessings and keep you under His Benevolent Right Hand.

“FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST AND THE FATHERLAND”

This message is that of the heroic martyrs of the Battle of Vardanants, St. Ghevont, his Companion Priests, and the gracious widows of the unforgettable soldiers. This exact message became the spiritual nourishment and brought divine strength to our ancestors.

The Blessing and Dedication Ceremony, which is dedicated to St. Ghevont and his Companion Priests, shall become the mirror image of your faith life. As we gaze at this glorious structure, we reflect on the years of your dedicated service and support. The vision of the Cathedral is now a reality and this magnificent structure shall become the pathway to new horizons in the life of an exemplary Christian.

Today, we presided over and performed the TRNPATSEK ceremony so that these walls may be filled with our prayers. Let this House of Prayer become the source of our spiritual rebirth.

Christ, Himself said, *“You must be born again.”* The spiritual rebirth of the faithful shall spread within these walls of the House of God. It is inside this holy sanctuary that the Armenian Christian will be filled with God’s love and wisdom.

As we enter through these doors, we must be cleansed. This is the mission of the Cathedral whose torchbearers are present here today.

We celebrate this historic day, because we, present-day apostles, bear ample responsibilities on our shoulders. Such is our nature and our essence.

We will be expressing our gratitude to you for your dedication, commitment and undying love.

We especially would like to thank:

Mr. and Mrs. Gerald and Patricia Turpanjian, Mr. and Mrs. Armen and Nora Hampar, Mr. and Mrs. Edmond Bedrosian, Mr. and Mrs. Misak Ekizian and Mr. and Mrs. Zhirair

Kantarjian.

We lift our prayers to the Almighty God, with the request that each Armenian lay his own stone inside this incredible structure.

Dear faithful, we also call upon you, so that each of you may lay a stone for the Cathedral. The Cathedral shall become the symbol and the icon of the spiritual reawakening of our people. It shall become the clear testament to our faith, the Christian Faith for which our ancestors died yet preserved. The Cathedral shall lead the new generation to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Finally, the Cathedral shall become the true testament of the life of our ancestors, to those who bravely exclaimed: ***“For the Sake of Christ and the Fatherland.”***

August 14, 2010

CONSECRATION OF TERPANJIAN CROSSLANE

For centuries, the unparalleled beauty and spiritual mystery of the Armenian cross stones have symbolized our faith and have been the precious icons of our Armenian Holy Apostolic Church. The light, which reflects off of each of these “jewels”, is an invitation to lead a faithful life. This holy cross stone situated before the spiritual sanctuary of the Western Diocese conveys a sacred invitation to a prayerful life. This cross stone symbolizes the dedication of the Terpanjian Plaza. We transform our lives before this cross stone to lead a life with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. From this moment, as we walk by this icon of our faith, we shall pass with reverence and admiration. Let it fill our lives with humility and kindness.

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Gerald and Patricia Turpanjian, your cross stone illuminates the Terpanjian Plaza because it has been anointed with the Holy Spirit, the voices of prayers of our ancestors. Today, we lift our prayers for the souls of your late parents. You graciously dedicated this plaza in the memory of your father, Hagop Terpanjian, whose name will forever be remembered. We express our sincere gratitude to you for undying love and support for the Fatherland and the Western Diocese alike.

We pray to the Almighty God to grant you prosperous health and so that you may turn your life to a message of prayer and kindness.

August 14, 2010

THE VISION OF OUR CATHEDRAL

My dearest faithful, we will all remember the year 2010 as the year in which the vision of the Cathedral was realized. This historic event becomes even more meaningful with the Pontifical Visit of His Holiness Karekin II, the Catholicos of All Armenians. The spiritual lives of the faithful will be enriched with the blessings of the Pontiff from the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, the very source and foundation of our faith.

We praise the Almighty God as another magnificent Armenian sanctuary reaches for the sky, and under her Holy dome, new churches shall rise as true testimony of our faith. This magnificent Cathedral reflects the life of the founders of the Western Diocese and the former Diocesan Primates, many of whom have departed from us, and also the loyal servants who have selflessly dedicated their lives to execute God's Will. Through their souls and good deeds, we feel the presence of God.

During our seven-year pastoral tenure at the Western Diocese, we strived to enrich the mission of the Western Diocese by implementing numerous programs that would lead us to new horizons.

- Complete reorganization of the Diocesan structure with the establishment of new committees and departments.
- The preparation, education and ordination of young priests.
- The acquisition of eight new church buildings, and the establishment of two cultural centers throughout the Parishes of the Western Diocese
- Formation of new Ecumenical, Governmental and community relations.
- Implementation of special programs in Armenia and supporting the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.
- Ordination of Deacons and Acolytes.
- The publication of more than 200 religious books

and pamphlets.

- The strengthening of the Inter-Diocesan relations.
- The construction of the St. Leon Cathedral, the golden bridge leading us to new horizons.

The vision of the Cathedral is the very foundation of our spiritual lives. May the Cathedral become the sanctuary which unifies us with God, and as we walk through her blessed doors, may we encounter the presence of God and become reunited with our brilliant past. Through His glorious presence, may we be drawn closer to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin which forever calls upon her faithful sons and daughters.

The completion of the Cathedral presents a new beginning in the life of the Western Diocese and her faithful. This iconic structure shall serve as a clear and powerful reminder, that as survivors of a nation that endured genocide, we have remained loyal to our faith wherever our fate has led us, even in these distant shores. With this structure, we have taken the essential steps to assure our love for God and the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church. This deed will serve as a model for generations to come.

We Praise the Lord and extend our gratitude to all. We praise the Lord for granting us the opportunity to engage you, the faithful, in the completion of this God-pleasing project.

We also wish to express our love and gratitude to the entire faithful of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church for believing in the importance of this project and working hand-in-hand with us to realize this vision, which has been shared by generations of Armenian-Americans.

We also extend our sincere gratitude to His Holiness, who with his memorable Pontifical Visits expressed his unwavering and gracious support for the Diocese and the building of the St. Leon Armenian Cathedral.

With uplifted spirits, we welcome you all to the historic consecration ceremony of the Cathedral of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church.

September 10, 2010

CENTENNIAL OF ST. MARY ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH

The Centennial Anniversary of St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church in Yettem is an important milestone in the life of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church. Hundred years ago, the foundations of this church were laid by visionary pastors and lay leaders, who have responded to the challenges and hardships of the times with immense love and dedication. They have graced our lives with the presence of a House of God. For the past few days, I have prayed constantly for the departed souls of the founders, who have taken upon their shoulders the noble cause of building the church as a living monument in memory of their beloved ones. The founders and all those who have put their heart and soul into the construction of St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church were people of strong faith and commitment. Their vision to progress and prosper as a church community certainly has become the destiny of their lives.

My dear faithful in Christ, decades have passed since the inception of this church. Throughout the past ten decades, countless prayers have graced the walls of this church. Today, we are gathered once again to celebrate the life of this church and the hundred years of her rich history.

The celebrations will continue for the coming twelve months and I have no doubt that many of the children and grandchildren of the founders will have the blessed challenges for the renewal of their faith in Christ and their dedication to St. Mary Armenian Church. Celebrations are special occasions, which help us and guide us all to rethink about our God-entrusted legacy and mission, to preach the Word of God, to become the living gospel and in particular to become the new apostles in modern times, when science and technology dominate the world; when politics and new social environments and orders shatter the foundation of Christian morality.

However, what remains to be the truth, is the mission the Church, which helps us all to bring God into our lives and the knowledge of the teachings of Christ, our Lord, to tie our lives to one another with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Dearest Der Vartan, and beloved faithful, the words of our Lord reawaken within our spirituality the passion of living our lives with God; ***“I am the bread of life.”*** (John 6:35) Christ, our Lord, is the bread of life and all of us need to enlighten our spiritual lives by following His life and living by His words.

The Centennial Celebrations will strengthen within our spirituality the same zeal of sacrifice and dedication as of the founders. We all need to remember that our forefathers neither had the wealth nor enjoyed the useful means of modern-day technology. However, they held their Christian faith firm in their hearts and *“moved mountains.”*

Today, we embark on a new journey. This journey will be a year-long journey, during which time we ought to seek the ways and means to transform our spirituality and make God the mirror of our lives. They year-long journey will be a time of spiritual rejuvenation. In that timeframe, we will have the depth of a better understanding of our God-given life in a sense that we all are to become the *“carriers of God’s love.”* The year long journey of celebration will have to draw the people closer to God and one another in order to turn this church into the “burning bush” for the many generations to come. As you continue to walk into the next centennial history, my prayers will be with you.

All of your celebrations will recall the heroic and memorable events of the past decades and you will all be recharged with the passion of strengthening the life of St. Mary Armenian Church. The miles and the distances should never be a cause of abandoning our Church and weakening in us the sense of responsibilities and duties. On the contrary, we should look at those as challenges, which eventually test the strength of our faith. I have always cherished the words of Mother Teresa *“Life is a mission, fulfill it,”* as a source of inspiration. In

another passage, Mother Teresa inspires us with a new command: “*Put your hands into service and your heart to love.*”

I wish you all a blessed journey and a blessed harvest in the vineyard of God.

THE NOBLE CAUSE

“O’ Lord, open your gates of mercy to us and make us worthy of your dwelling place of light together with your saints.”

This very day will be the most memorable, spiritually uplifting and enriching in the life of the Desert community and a historic day, when we all witness the completion of St. Garabed Armenian Church, which has been the cherished dream of the founders of this community and all those who have joined their efforts in many ways to become shareholders of this God-pleasing mission.

Building a Church is a noble cause. To me personally, this mission has been most enriching, as I have seen the active participation of the parishioners, who have worked hard and have called upon many to become the living members of a growing church community.

During the dedication service, we sung the words of the prayers of our Church fathers and made their prayers the prayer of our heart.

“O’ Lord open your gates of mercy to us and make us worthy of your dwelling place of light together with your saints.”

Therefore, we all are cognizant that the doors of St. Garabed Armenian Church lead us all through the gates of mercy, where we all meet God, and in His presence put off the old person and take on the new person clothed with divine love and wisdom, and make a dwelling place of light together with the saints.

Tonight, we remember in our prayers especially the late Ed Halvajian, who honored the memory of his parents and grandparents and became the grand benefactor of this Church. We pray for his soul and for all the departed souls of those who have put their heart and soul in this God-pleasing mission of the Church construction.

We uplift our hearts and pray for all those who have become the Hands of God throughout the planning and construction of St. Garabed Church. For what we see today is only the construction of the physical Church, which has been possible through your sacrifice and hard work. God our heavenly Father will reward all who have taken an active role in the building process of this Church. The real mission begins today. The Church will certainly be a blessing for us; however, more so, the Church has been built for the coming generation as a House of God. Above all, the sanctuary will serve as a constant reminder to them for the perseverance you have shown in your faith life.

The construction of the Church becomes a reality when we sacrifice. Sacrifice is ultimately the key to success. It is the reflection of our faith life, our love and commitment for a divine mission. Sacrifice, when and if, realized with the members of the community, brings forth progress and leads to the culmination of a mission. We all have journeyed together to reach a milestone in the life of the Desert community.

We all know for fact that there is yet a substantial financial burden to be carried together with faith and vision in order to continue the construction work and add to the beautification of St. Garabed Armenian Church. Therefore, as we celebrate the first phase of construction of St. Garabed Armenian Church, we all take with us a new message of continuity and endurance in our sacrifice.

The Church is the destiny of our life. Our journey of life begins with this mission. As we continue our journey towards the Church, we are constantly enriched with the light of God and the life-giving messages radiating from the gospels. Therefore, let us all give from the heart, and God will reward us with unattainable joy. St. Garabed Armenian Church has become a “jewel” in the Desert drawing many scattered Armenians and faithful members into the House of God.

October 6, 2010

THANKSGIVING DAY - A DAY OF SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

On Thanksgiving Day, we lift our heartfelt prayers to God for bestowing upon us those gifts, which we, at times forget. Thanksgiving Day is a day of reawakening. It is a day of reverence and respect for the daily bread for which we have labored. It is also a day of remembering those who are less fortunate including the thousands of men, women and children who die of hunger every day.

My dear clergy brothers and dearest faithful,

How should we celebrate Thanksgiving Day this year and make it more meaningful? As a spiritual leader of Christ's flock and your religious pastor, we call upon every one of you to recite the Lord's Prayer, read the parable of the Good Samaritan and say the below-mentioned prayer:

"But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10: 29-37)

Thank You, God, our Lord, for bringing joy into our lives with Your visible light. With the divine light of Your commandments, You illuminate the spirits of Your faithful followers. Strengthen us, O Lord, so that we may follow Your commandments today and always. Enlighten us and fill us with wisdom so that we may live according to Your will. Allow us to enjoy the bountiful gifts that You have bestowed upon us with the grace and the love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For the kingdom, the power and the glory, are Yours now and forever. Amen.

The time has come for Armenian households to be filled with prayer. Let us spread our Christian love and spirit with our kind deeds so that we may serve the Holy Armenian Apostolic Church with enlivened spirits. It truly is a rewarding experience to be thankful for God's precious gifts. Those with thankful hearts shall bring peace on earth. In our prayers, we ask the All Benevolent God to transform your lives. Love the Lord, cherish the precious gift of life, and become the carriers of His light.

November 9, 2010

2011

THE YEAR OF THE PRIESTHOOD

In our recent publication “The 40 Day Journey of the Priest,” we reflected on the “Spiritual Belonging” of the Priest and noted his crucial role in the life of the community (The 40 Day Journey of the Priest – Burbank – 2010 – p. 35).

“Serving the flock of Christ is the essence and the calling of the Priest. If we do not prioritize service over everything else in our God-given life, our lives will be filled with void. Blessed are those Priests who truly fulfill their role and enrich the lives of the faithful” (p.27). With his presence, the Priest must grace the faithful with “*God’s light, love, peace and hope*” (p.31). Therefore, “he must constantly strive to learn and evolve, immerse himself in prayer, preach God’s Word, and finally, exemplify Christ, our Lord.” (p.6) With this in mind, we once again wish to emphasize the role of the Priest. “The life of the Priest must bear a “resemblance” to the life led by Christ. He must portray the presence of Christ. Through his celebration of the Divine Liturgy, the faithful commune with Jesus Christ. Therefore, do we clearly define our responsibilities and our roles in the community?” (p.5)

In addressing these concerns, we have initiated the following steps, which we believe will prove to be helpful in the life of the Western Diocese.

- Considering that the Church is comprised not only of the faithful but also of the clergy.
- Considering that the Western Diocese today is blessed with more than 50 clergymen.
- Considering the dedication and commitment of our clergymen in their parishes and communities.
- Considering the loyal service our clergymen throughout the years, we declare 2011 as the “Year of the Priesthood”.

In 2011, we shall,

- Continue to pay pastoral visits to the Parishes of the Western Diocese across the Western United States. We will educate the parishioners of the crucial role of the Priest in the life of the community as well as stress the necessity of preparing new clergy in the Western Diocese.

- Centralize the Clergy Conference topics around the relationship of the Priest and the Parish and emphasize his role in the overall liveliness of the parish.

- Analyze and exam.

- In the essence of a pastoral life. We will hold lectures on the Christian topics of “Church-Priest-Service” and offer contemporary analysis and evaluations.

- Incorporate the crucial role of the Priest in your Sunday Sermons and instruct about his crucial role in the Church to Sunday school students.

- Mandate each Parish of the Western Diocese to honor their respective Priest in the year 2011.

We hope to recruit, educate, develop and ordain new Priests while motivating and preparing our current Priesthood Candidates for a prosperous pastoral life.

One of our Church forefathers, Nerses of Lambron, writes *“You took a vow; do not be weakened. You relinquished everything; do not expect pity from people. You are a learner; do not be misguided from the path, which leads to the Lord. As you preach the Holy Cross, ensure that the divine image does not fade within you. As you teach the words of the Saints, let their life be an exemplary one for you. You were invited to live an eternal life, do not succumb to the easiness of the earthly life. Prepare for death yet peacefully dream of the everlasting life”* (Nerses of Lambron, Commentary on the Divine Liturgy, Venice, 1847).

Let us remember and stay true to the words of the Apostle “He disciplined us for our good, that we may share his holiness.” (Hebrews 12:10)

November 22, 2010

PASTORAL LETTER

Dear faithful in Christ,

With this pastoral letter, we bring to you our sincere wishes. In our prayers, we ask God to grant you and your families a long and a prosperous life.

The year 2010 was one of the more memorable years in the life of the Western Diocese. On September 11, 2010, His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, realized a life-long Diocesan dream with the consecration of the St. Leon Armenian Cathedral. The monumental event will always serve as a testimony of our unshakable Christian faith.

Dear faithful, let us live our God-given life according to His will. We are ***“created in the image of God.”*** (Genesis 1:27) Hence, let us cherish the beauty of our Homeland, the vision of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, the sanctity of our families and the richness of our language and culture. As devout faithful, let us instill in the hearts of our young generation the love of God in order that they may ***“walk as children of light.”*** (Ephesians 5:8)

You have reaffirmed your dedication and your firm belief in the mission of the Western Diocese through your vast contributions. The success of the Western Diocese is largely attributed to the kind deeds of God’s devout faithful.

In 2011, we aim to primarily focus and stress the vital role of the Priest in the life of the Church, for we have declared 2011 as the “Year of the Priesthood.” To add to the vivacity of the Western Diocese, young Diocesan priests have taken on challenging roles in their respective Parishes. Currently, four young Deacons are continuing seminarians that are also undergoing training and enrolled in development courses in various areas of pastoral life.

In 2011, students in various Armenian schools will be taught Christian values which empower their spirits and enlighten their minds with the Gospel of our Lord and Savior

Jesus Christ. Saturday and Sunday Schools shall undergo a restructuring process.

We shall be actively involved in the life of our Diocesan Youth. We are fully aware and acknowledge that the vibrant members of the Armenian Church Youth Organization (ACYO), the Christian Youth Mission to Armenia (CYMA) are the future of our Church. Their valuable insight contributes to the liveliness of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church.

We express our sincere gratitude to you for your steadfast support and we highly value your active involvement in the life of the Western Diocese. The Church shall surely progress because of your unrelenting dedication to serve Christ, our Lord and humanity. Let us render ourselves into the Hands of God and commit to spreading the light of the Gospel.

May God bless and protect you and your loved ones.

CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS AND THE NEW YEAR WITH FAMILY

The Blessed Birth of Christ, our Lord, and the New Year shall vividly express the spiritual transformation of our lives. This Miraculous Birth is the arsenal of our spiritual strength and God's invitation to us to lead a New Life.

The Armenian family celebrates Christmas on January 6th. We must cherish the holiness and understand the significance of this day in our lives as a sacred tradition. Preserving our Christian identity and our cultural values in the Diaspora are vital to our existence as a people, for the challenges facing our future generations will confront their spiritual strength. We must stay loyal to the teachings of our church forefathers.

According to tradition, Armenian families would attend the celebration of the Divine Liturgy to hear the Good News of the Blessed Birth of Christ. Following the service, the family would gather at the house and pray around the family table. The gathering itself symbolizes the vision of leading a Christian life, the sanctity of a family, the wisdom to lead a humanitarian life, all of which define the uniqueness and the essence of an Armenian family. From generation to generation, the family elders would recall fond memories of the past and share them with loved ones. The act of giving presents during Christmas has graced Armenian families for centuries.

We must cherish the tradition of attending Church on Christmas day. By praying collectively, we strengthen the foundations and contribute to the mission of the Armenian Apostolic Church. It is no secret that we live in a world dominated by materialism. Mass media excels in devaluing the miracle of Christmas by portraying the Blessed Day as a crazy shopping holiday. The Church, the House of God, is the very place where the faithful find peace, shelter and spiritual consolation. The Church is the safe haven of the faithful.

My dear faithful in Christ, let us honor the tradition of

gathering around the dinner table on the sacred day and celebrate the Birth of Christ, our Lord with prayer. It is in the Blessed Birth of Christ wherein we find the meaning of God's Love for humanity. Visit relatives and loved ones on Christmas Day, spread the news of the Birth of our Savior Jesus Christ and convey your sincere Christmas wishes to your loved ones.

Let us humbly extend our helping hand to those institutions, which convey God's Love and spread the Gospel of Christ.

Dear faithful, it is our wish that you preserve or even establish a tradition of prayer on Christmas Day. When you come home from Church and as you gather around the Christmas dinner table, remember to say the "Lord's Prayer," to read about the Blessed Birth of Christ in the Gospel according to Luke and to sing the hymn "Khorhurt Medz."

*"Christ is Born and Revealed!
Blessed is the Revelation of Christ, our Lord!"*

A SACRED MISSION

“Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’”

(John 21:15)

The dialogue between Christ and Peter the Apostle mirrors our own spiritual life. It is a clear reminder of the God’s calling addressed to the priest and thus the priest’s response to the Lord. It is most evident from the dialogue that Christ, our Lord, expects complete devotion and commitment from the Apostle. Indeed, the life of an ordained priest becomes meaningful and complete through his devotion and commitment to serve the flock of Christ. It is for this exact reason he earns the love and respect of the faithful.

Until recently, the preparation of future clergy as a vital mission of the Western Diocese was overlooked. We praise the All Merciful God for granting us promising young men who have expressed their desire to walk the path toward the Sacred Order of the Priesthood. The Stewardship Program, one of the missions dearest to our hearts, was enlivened through the financial support of dedicated faithful. Thus, the Stewardship Committee, under the sound chairmanship of Dr. Vahram Biricik has been re-organized for the purpose of addressing the preparation of future clergy of the Diocese. We cannot forget the valuable contributions of Gary Lulejian, a pioneer in the establishment of the Stewardship Program of the Western Diocese.

It is our wish that our Diocesan clergy and respective councils support this vital mission. We thank God for caring individuals, (clergymen, benefactors and donors) who have understood the importance of this God-pleasing mission and have stood by it with their loyal support throughout the years.

This year, we are honored to recognize Mr. and Mrs. Gerald and Patricia Turpanjian, Grand Benefactors of the Homeland, the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and the Western Diocese, for their relentless support and dedication. Their Christian faith has also been exemplified through their firm belief in the mission of the Stewardship Program. Their vast contributions to the Stewardship Fund speak of their belief in the prosperity and the vivacity of the Armenian Apostolic Church. We extend our deepest gratitude to the couple. May the Almighty God grant them long and prosperous lives.

Our special thanks go to Dr. Vahram Biricik, the members of the Stewardship Committee, benefactors and donors for their loyal support.

January 22, 2011

HOLY WEEK AND THE GLORIOUS RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

The Holy Week that concludes with the Glorious Resurrection of Christ our Lord is the culmination of the Christian faith. We live in such times where the need to preserve our faith has not been greater. With the arrival of the spring season, a season of rebirth comes also the sense of joy and anticipation. Spring is the time when most flowering plants bloom, and this powerful act of nature symbolizes the revival of life. Many hearts are thus uplifted when witnessing the renewal of life. The source of our renewed spiritual strength comes from our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Throughout the Great Lenten journey, we cleansed our hearts and souls with the divine love of Christ.

Dear faithful, the ultimate goal of the Holy Week is to welcome the presence of Christ in your lives and embrace His Victorious Resurrection to the Heavenly Kingdom of life, peace, and righteousness. As you return to your homes after church service and gather at the Easter dinner table, teach your children and grandchildren to pray. Bless your tables with the Lord's Prayer, read the day's verse from the Gospel, sing the hymn "Today, He is Risen" and finally, greet one another by saying;

*"Christ is risen from the dead."
"Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ."*

April 24, 2011

“LET US BE RENEWED WITH THE GLORIOUS RESURRECTION OF CHRIST, OUR LORD”

Let us renew our lives with the Glorious and Victorious Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is the challenging message of the Feast of the Holy Resurrection. The Blessed Resurrection calls on us all to renounce our old-self and instill within us a new beginning: to live a Christ-like life. The Christian faithful is created in God’s image and is granted divine strength to contest all adversaries, which impede the spreading of the Good News. This has also been the legacy of our forefathers.

“Christ is risen from the dead.”

Easter grants us new life. For a devout Christian, the Holy Resurrection of Christ is life’s greatest miracle, for it opens the door to a new and pristine life. Through this glorious miracle, we welcome and embrace a life of spiritual transformation. Easter has an even greater significance for an Armenian Christian, for the Holy Resurrection of Christ, our Lord, is the celebration of life. This year, Easter falls on April 24th, the day when we commemorate the Resurrection of our people and honor the martyrs who, through their sacrificial life, envisioned the nation’s rebirth.

“Let us be renewed with the Glorious Resurrection of Christ, our Lord.”

Dear faithful, what does the message convey to us? It is the call for reawakening in order that we may live according to God’s commandments. It is nothing less than an invitation for a life of renewal. With renewed faith we shall cherish the beauty of our Homeland, the vision of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, the sanctity of our families and the richness of our language and culture. As honorable citizens, improve the life of your community with your exemplary deeds. As devout faithful, instill in the hearts of our young generation

the divine message of the Blessed and Miraculous Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ, our Lord.”

Dear faithful, the Resurrection of Christ, our Lord, is a blessing for humanity. Christ’s Resurrection is the confirmation of His victory over death. A door to a new life has been opened before us where a life of enlightened spirit and enriched moral values awaits. Let us grasp the true meaning of the miracle by engaging in God-pleasing missions, acting as the Hands of God and Ambassadors of Christ.

“Christ is risen from the dead.”

This Easter, the Victorious Resurrection of Christ exemplifies the Resurrection of the Armenian nation for Armenians across the world. The course of Armenian history is similar to Christ’s path to crucifixion. The life of each Armenian is a testimony of the will to carry on the message of the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Orphaned children of the fallen martyrs are today’s torchbearers, beacons of light and visionary leaders.

On this day of the Glorious and Victorious Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we lift our heartfelt prayers for peace in the world, prosperity of this Great Country of the United States of America, our Homeland of Armenia and the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. May Easter be the cornerstone in our path leading to God.

THE 59TH ANNUAL LADIES' SOCIETY ASSEMBLY

“And whatever you do, do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Colossians 3:17)

We referred to the aforementioned verse because we were witness to the love expressed by the Ladies Society for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ as well as their dedication to the Western Diocese and their respective Parishes.

On this auspicious occasion of the 59th Annual Ladies Society Assembly, we express our sincere gratitude to the Ladies Society Central Council under the leadership of Chair Araxie Boyamian and to all members of the Ladies Societies across the Western Diocese. May God Bless you and remember your honorable service for His glory. We also wish to express our sincere wishes and gratitude to the Endowment Fund.

We commend your praiseworthy deeds and your continued success. Furthermore, we are glad that through the blessings of their Parish Priests, the Ladies Society of each Parish of the Diocese is filled with motivation to carry out the mission of the Church. Your visitations to Parishes across the Western Diocese fill the parishioners with renewed strength and spiritual joy.

On September 11, 2010, a historic and memorable chapter was written in the life of the Western Diocese as His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, with the participation of twelve bishops, consecrated the St. Leon Armenian Cathedral. Thousands witnessed the significant event as yet another blessed dome of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church reached for the heavens.

We wish to conclude with the words of the Apostle Paul which ring deep within our souls, ***“Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”*** (I Timothy 4:12) Let God’s love reside in your hearts and enlighten your lives.

THE 84TH ANNUAL DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY

“Do your best to win full approval in God’s sight, as a worker who is not ashamed of his work, one who correctly teaches the message of God’s truth.” (II Timothy 2:15)

My dear brothers in Christ and delegates of the 84th Diocesan Assembly.

I chose these words as a leading thought for my message addressed to you as the delegates of the 84th Assembly. It is a message which sets the direction and the spirit we all out to take on as servants of God as clergy or lay leaders of the Armenian Church in the Western Diocese. A unique calling from God has gathered us all to enter into this sacred House of Worship to focus on the Holy Work of God and the mission of the Church. We are called to serve the Lord with humility, and reverence for one another as we continue to pursue thousand ways to educate, illuminate and enrich the minds and hearts of our children, our youth, and our faithful with the Love of God.

Therefore, the delegates of this Assembly are the representatives of the Diocese, who gather to review the course of the activities and renew the collective commitment in the realization of the mission of the Church.

“Do your best to win full approval in God’s sight, as a worker who is not ashamed of his work, one who correctly teaches the message of God’s truth.” (II Timothy 2:15)

This message by St. Paul is addressed to each and everyone, and in particular to us, the clergy and lay servants, who are called upon to teach God’s truth through the Holy Bible.

Seemingly very simple, this message suggests a few basic steps that need to be followed so that our mission becomes effective:

The first and most fundamental condition is that we win God’s approval. As God-pleasing servants, we need to be caring and faithful individuals, whose character should shine

and exemplify a true Christian life.

The second fundamental condition is that we fulfill responsibly the Christian mission entrusted to us as all. This naturally includes serving God and spreading His truth through our Church.

The third basic condition is that we should be accountable for all our deeds, because God will summon us all and will demand that we present an account of all our work.

The fourth fundamental condition is that we realize that our first and most sacred duty is to convey God's Truth and to preach His Gospel.

And the fifth and last basic condition is that we focus our attention especially on children and youngsters, and help them develop their life in the Christian spirit.

Dear delegates of the Assembly, brothers and sisters, faithful servants of the Church. The message of God's truth can be fulfilled as we all take on the responsibility to focus on three important stages in our God entrusted work.

The mission of the Church

The training of priests and lay leaders

The procurement of the necessary ways/funds

The mission of the Church in the Western Diocese is conditioned by the establishment of departments and committees. It is imperative that pastors and councils, as well as the Church auxiliary bodies collaborate with the Diocese and departments and committees to benefit from the available resources. Throughout the year, many events are being organized, and many more can also be organized to support our churches to progress in their missionary work.

The training of the priests is the most important undertaking of the Western Diocese. We cannot succeed in our Church's mission unless we all work together in identifying new candidates and raise the necessary funds for their training.

In my concluding words, I would like to share with you all one important statement which Fr. Avedis, our Youth Director has shared with the delegates of the Ladies Assembly.

In his presentation of the ACYO programs, he defined the purpose of the youth with these words. “All of these help our youth to reconnect to their roots.” Ultimately, in all of our efforts we pursue the same noble aspiration: to connect and reconnect our lives to God, to the Church, to the sacred family to the Motherland and the traditions of our nation.

The Diocesan life is dependent on the way its churches organize their life of divine worship, their spiritual mission, the array of their services and activities and their organizational efforts. All this, however, implies a basic condition: that we lead a life full of God’s love. It is not possible to build the Church, nor any other building pertaining to the Diocese without God’s love.

In short, dear Assembly Members, we wish to address you sincerely and assure you, that with God’s guidance and as much as humanly possible, we will continue to put all our efforts to serve God together with you. By remaining loyal to our Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and by our selfless dedication to the people, we help them to always be in the presence of God.

May the Good Lord bless you and strengthen you all as you take heed to the words of St. Paul to become the Ambassadors of Christ and partners in the Holy Work of God. Amen.

PRAYER AT CALIFORNIA STATE ASSEMBLY

“Almighty God, we lift up our prayers to You with reverence and trust to guide us and strengthen us all in our calling to serve and protect the people of God. We praise You for blessing us with the gift of life, bestowing upon us all bounties of the world and challenging us to become Your good hands in our communities.

Today, we pray especially for the peace of the world and for all those who suffer as victims of injustice, war and poverty. Almighty God, we know well that the Honorable members of this Assembly have responded to Your call to bring their wisdom for the well-being of the State of California.

Today we pray especially for the victims of the first Genocide of the 20th century premeditated and executed by the Ottoman Turks in 1915. The recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the State of California Assembly encourages the Armenian community as we continue to pay homage to the memory of the victims. Above all, the noble act gives us the spiritual strength to hold firm the essence of our Christian faith as devoted citizens of this blessed country of the United States of America.

April 24th is the sacred day in the life of the Armenian nation when we honor the memory of the martyrs, who through their sacrificial life, have envisioned the nation's rebirth.

We have remembered the victims of the genocide in our prayers with reverence for the past 96 years. Our prayers will continue to honor their memory, thus not only showing our respect for their martyrdom but also sending out a clear message to all nations that the gift of life granted to us by God cannot be taken away forcibly or brutally.

We are here today, with dual responsibilities as Armenian Christians who ought to guard and cherish their God-given

gifts and we are also here as citizens of the United States of America filled with the spirit of the founding fathers of this great nation to become exemplary leaders of our communities.

This country has inspired us to cherish the true value of democracy and freedom as well as the universal respect for humanity as the reflection of God's love.

Almighty God, Bless this Assembly with their members and their mission. Grant them divine wisdom and love to carry on their duties diligently, to uphold firm justice for the past and be the path of justice for all generations to come. Amen.”

April 14, 2011

APRIL 24 A DAY OF AWARENESS

April 24 represents a sacred day in the life of our nation. On this day, in Armenia as well as in the Diaspora, every Armenian is filled with spiritual and national awareness and is reminded of the sacrifices they make to safeguard their Christian faith. Moreover, this day gives birth to a firm and unwavering vision that encompasses the entire creed of one million and a half victims.

96 years have passed since the First Genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman Turks. In this comparatively short period in history, the children of a whole generation of victims have survived, in Armenia and in the Diaspora, by believing firmly in the spirit of Christ's Resurrection, and furthermore, by making the sacred mystery of the Resurrection part of their very essence.

In one of his reflections devoted to the calamity of the Armenian Genocide, Archbishop Yeghishe, of blessed memory, has made the following statement: *"Several attempts have been made to annihilate us physically; however, we have always had an inner, spiritual strength, which is difficult to explain, that has united our language, religion, national characteristics and civic struggles thus rendering our people vigorous and strong, and safeguarding its survival."*

For centuries, our people have expected neither pity nor admiration, but rather the right to live freely and peacefully under the righteous God-given Sun. Naturally we cannot relinquish our rights from the lands paid for by the bloodshed of our forefathers, an undeniable and infinite debt which we have inherited.

We live in a world where people are so oppressed that they are unable to express their sense of justice. The vivid proof of that is the constant postponement of the Armenian Genocide recognition. However, this historically undeniable

fact keeps the children of our nation always alert. The memory of the victims of the calamity will not allow our consciences to rest until we appropriate our rightful claims. Just like the Israelites, who roamed in the Sinai desert and turned the Ten Commandments into their spiritual guide toward the Promised Land, Armenians living outside the Motherland will roam in their own Sinai deserts and will create a brighter future inspired by visions reflected from Holy Etchmiadzin.

We pledge to keep the memory of the victims alive deep in our hearts along with the numerous sacrifices and hardships endured by our leaders during the Soviet era. We shall heed to the call “Gochem abroghats” of our Karabagh heroes, to keep alive the name of the Armenian nation and to hold onto our biblical land, where God Himself descended and blessed our nation with His Resurrection. It is this spiritual force, which, passing through our victimized forefathers, inspires in us the vision to be born again as a free and independent nation. *“The dead will be forgotten when the dream is dead, and the living are dead when the dead are silent. Together, we have a dream that connects our yesteryears to our tomorrows.”*

Our nation’s continuing dream is our Motherland, Armenia. *“A meager and bleak light, sparking from the ashes of our dreams, has landed at the foot of Ararat, which, with its pale rays protects our past dreams and future radiance.”*

When we commemorate the memory of the victims of the Genocide, it is important to make our Motherland and Holy Etchmiadzin part of our life, for Motherland and faith are two of our most precious values that are the purpose and mission of our life.

Today, I call on to our sons and daughters, especially the younger generation, to make a pilgrimage to our roots – our Motherland. This should be the guiding principle of our life, so that by the centenary of the Genocide, every living Armenian would have visited our homeland and experienced deep in his heart the true feeling of belonging. For, the stronger our spiritual link is to our Motherland, the more genuine is our dream for a stronger and greater Armenia.

Today is yet another occasion when the Armenian Church beseeches her sons and daughters, without any exception, to strengthen within themselves the sense of leading a life in the Christian faith, laden with spiritual and moral values. To ensure our nation's immortality, it is crucial to devote us and preserve our spiritual and moral values.

Wherever we happen to reside, while demonstrating loyalty toward the local authorities, we will be favorably noticed because of our life full of faith, rich culture and centuries-old traditions and family values, which our forefathers safeguarded at the price of their lives.

While reflecting on the sacrifices suffered by the victims of the Genocide, Patriarch Yeghishe of blessed memory makes the following statement: *"The 24th of April is the tragedy that we have inherited from our past. The noblest duty of our generation is to always keep its memory alive. If we succeed to preserve the ideals for which our ancestors perished, and unite, hand in hand in brotherly love, then our forefathers will rest in peace and we would have accomplished our duty. Only then can we claim that April 24, though a day of mourning, is also a day of resurrection. We were persecuted and murdered but we were never lost. Our forefathers who perished paved the way to our immortality."*

Guided by these principles, we should strive to become a strong nation, by achieving economic success, by playing important roles in local political arenas, by acquiring a good reputation in the media, by encouraging the younger generation to strive for higher education, and by becoming top achievers in the realm of the arts and sciences. It is then that the bigger powers of the world will take heed of our demands for restitution.

Our prayers and demands are just. We need to manifest a life rich in faith, by turning the love of God into the spiritual energy that binds all our hearts into one, which, as an innocent flower, we will place on the Holy Altar of our fallen ancestors as our most beautiful gift.

SPEECH AT LA CITY HALL

Honorable President Eric Garcetti and distinguished members of the City Council,

Each gathering in the forthcoming day is a special time for us all, as we, citizens of this Great City of Los Angeles and the Great Country of the United States of America, unite in common cause and common prayer to commemorate the 10th anniversary of September 11th and embrace future harmony. Leadership will remain a key element in the life of our communities not only to foresee and envision peace, justice and true freedom, but above all, to be the architects of the new world.

The commemoration of the attacks of September 11th will honor the blessed memory of the victims and transform the world with hopes and new aspirations for a brighter future.

Those who have fallen were deprived of the beauty of life, God's immeasurable gift. We have the moral duty to prevent any kind of similar devastations from ever taking place in our respective communities and in the entire world. Together, as religious and civic leaders, we have a special message to convey to the people of God.

God is the giver of life. Any crime committed towards life and humanity is a crime against the Creator. Therefore, in order to make this world a prosperous one for future generations, we need to unite in common prayer. God calls on us all to become His Holy Hands."

Our beloved brother Bishop Jon Bruno, a founding member of Los Angeles Council of Religious Leaders, shared with us all as the religious and civic leaders of the City of Los Angeles a unique vision to honor the memory of the victims of the September 11 attacks.

We are truly inspired and strengthened to witness the genuine collaboration of the City Council and thank you all as the honorable President and the distinguished members of

the City Council. Our act of unity will give the citizens of the City of Los Angeles a strong message of partnership in the community life and a statement of peace and prosperity. Amen.

September 9, 2011

A TIME OF REMEMBRANCE AND REFLECTION

Ten years after September 11, 2001, the world continues to observe with reverence the memory of the victims whose martyrdom will be a symbol of freedom, justice and true peace against all those who defy God's greatest gift of life. Year after year, Americans and world citizens commemorate September 11th with prayer and meditation for the souls of the victims who have lost their lives as a result of terrorist attacks on American soil and for their beloved ones who undoubtedly will continue to suffer for the remainder of their lives.

The act of crime perpetrated on September 11, 2001 is an injustice against humanity. The voice of the peacemakers of the world cannot be silenced when terrorist attacks shatter the beauty of God's creation. Terrorism is ultimately a shameful act against God and the children of God. Through commemorative gatherings, we are invited in our prayers to bring the love of God to the hearts of the people of God through the gift of prayer. Human life mirrors the image of God. Preservation of life in a peaceful world is the realization of God's dream. The life of each person should be a living prayer, a statement of peace and the spiritual energy of prosperity.

September 11, 2011 marks the 10th Anniversary of the darkest day of American history. However, September 11th, 2011 will be the day of "One Light" for us all as religious and civic leaders as well as members of our respective communities. On September 11th we will unite as one family of citizens of America and the entire world. Through our prayers we will be committing our lives for the realization of the dreams and the aspirations of the victims of September 11th attacks. However, their noble spirits of peace will forever remain in our hearts.

America has once again risen from the ashes of darkness. The New Life we all embrace today will be the luminous

crown to the memory of the victims. May the prayers we offer today to God armor us all with divine wisdom in order that we may all become the holy hands of the Almighty God in the world that God has created. Amen

September 11, 2011

ST. LEON ARMENIAN CATHEDRAL FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF CONSECRATION

On September 11, 2010, a life-long dream of former Diocesan Primates, clergy and laymen was realized with the consecration of the St. Leon Armenian Cathedral by His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians.

St. Leon Armenian Cathedral is the vivid reflection of the Christian faith of our blessed ancestors. With the first anniversary of the consecration, we are invited to a life of spiritual reawakening and transformation. Through this House of Prayer, we are called to strengthen our faith-life and to carry out the mission of our Armenian Holy Apostolic Church. Within the blessed walls of the Cathedral, each faithful is reminded of the wonder of our homeland and the sanctity of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

On the auspicious occasion of the First Anniversary of Consecration, we lift our heartfelt prayers to the All Merciful God for granting us the wisdom and the vision to collectively build the Cathedral of our dreams.

This anniversary and all upcoming anniversaries will become more meaningful as we, devout members of the Christian community, spread the Christian spirit throughout our respective communities, for herein lies the essence of the mission of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church. Our Christian spirit is expressed through our love for Christ, our Church, our dedication and our commitment to the ancient traditions of our Church forefathers.

We congratulate you and extend to you our warm wishes on the occasion of the First Anniversary of Consecration of the St. Leon Armenian Cathedral. May God bless each and every faithful who enters the House of God with an enlightened spirit.

My dear beloved faithful,

This day, September 11, 2011 marks the first anniversary

of the consecration of St. Leon Armenian Cathedral. It was one year ago, when all of us celebrated a historic day in our faith life. The past 365 days have been truly spiritually enriching and fulfilling in many ways for the faithful in Christ, our Lord.

The Cathedral has become the source of Divine Light for those who have baptized their children, those who have been wedded, those who have transformed their spirituality through prayerful life, those children who have become the Angels of Sunday School and those students who have become students of Soorp Mashdots within these blessed walls. In one word, with the consecration of the Cathedral, the Western Diocese has embarked on a new journey of life. It is a life with God and a life armored with the faith of our forefathers.

My dear faithful in Christ,

This glorious Cathedral reflects the measure of your faith and will undoubtedly transpire to our children, youth and the faithful with new dreams, new hopes and new aspirations.

On this auspicious occasion, I call on you all to take pride in the mission of the Cathedral and to be actively engaged in lessening the financial burden which shall not hinder in any way our courage and strength to apply the Word of God in the life of our community.

The Church is the House of God, which mirrors our spirituality and helps us to better understand our inner dynamics to become a partner with God in the Creation of God. The key question addressed to us all is the real challenge that needs a response from each and every one of us as children of God.

"We all have a divine spark within us. How much and how often are we able to reflect God's Love in our everyday life?" Those who are courageous to apply the Law of God often and in abundance will always be closer to God. The Cathedral and all churches are a blessing in the life of a Christian which bridge our lives to God."

THE COMPLETION OF ST. LEON ARMENIAN CATHEDRAL AN INVITATION TO A NEW MISSION

It is with great spiritual joy that we share with you the excitement of the glorious consecration of the St. Leon Armenian Cathedral of the Western Diocese in Burbank, California. A new and historic chapter was written in the life of the Western Diocese on September 11, 2010 when His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, presided over the consecration of the St. Leon Armenian Cathedral.

As we had previously mentioned, the completion of the St. Leon Armenian Cathedral marks a new beginning in the spiritual lives of the Diocesan faithful. The mission of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church shall be strengthened and we stand ready before a new mission. With this new mission, we shall deliver the Word of God to our people and especially to the new generation that is thirsty for His Word. The newly added magnificent sanctuary of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church shall quench this thirst and shall become the rebirth of their spiritual lives.

What are the steps needed to effectively fulfill and realize this new mission? We must return to our religious roots, to the faith of our forefathers and focus on spreading of the Gospel of Christ, while staying vigilant against those who deliver distorted versions of the Gospel, lead us away from our roots and misguide us from the message of His everlasting love.

Dear faithful,

In our heartfelt prayers, we ask that the upcoming year be filled with the love of the All Benevolent God. May He be the light in your path so that you may walk as the children of light (Eph. 5:8) and may He fill you with the peace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

THE 20th ANNIVERSARY OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

“Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the money for the tax.” And they brought him a coin. And Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They said, “Caesar’s.” Then he said to them, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” When they heard it, they marveled; and they left him and went away.” (Matthew 22:17-22)

With these words, Christ, our Lord, delivers a clear message of selfless and dedicated service to one’s country. On September 21, 2011, our Homeland will celebrate the 20th Anniversary of Independence of the Third Republic of Armenia. Armenia was able to withstand the trying times of the Soviet Era that spanned for over seven decades. The youth of our Republic has captured the beauty and essence of freedom and with the sense of “belonging to Armenia,” they firmly believe in the promising future of our beloved country.

“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” Dedicated service to the blessed the land of our forefathers has a divine meaning. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, dictates to the disciples of the Pharisees the meaning of obedience, loyalty, humility of citizens to their respective nations.

Twenty years of independence is relatively a short period of time for a young nation to be compared to European countries. The past century for Armenia has been nothing but “Golgotha”.

Armenia is a wondrous country. Our land was sanctified with St. Gregory’s vision of Christ striking with the golden hammer on the soil where the first Armenian Church would be built. The golden bridge between heaven and earth was

established with Holy Etchmiadzin.

The 20th Anniversary of Armenia's Independence is an invitation for us all to live a life of a true patriot, to lead pilgrimages to the blessed land of our ancestors and through our deeds, envision a prosperous Armenia.

We wholeheartedly congratulate the 20th Anniversary of the Republic of Armenia. We are delighted to welcome His Excellency Serzh Sargsyan, President of Armenia to the Western Diocese and St. Leon Armenian Cathedral. We extend our blessings and heartfelt wishes to our fellow compatriots and the young men serving in the armed forces of the Republic of Armenia.

In our prayers, we beseech the All Merciful God, to protect the Republic of Armenia as a sovereign state, and bring prosperity to the lives of our compatriots in our Homeland.

HOLY ETCHMIADZIN IS THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

“To abide by Etchmiadzin and to live for Etchmiadzin means to live with the holy legacy of our land, our history, and our Motherland. Furthermore, to live for Etchmiadzin constitutes our faithfulness toward our aspirations and expectations, all of them being our guide in Armenia and in the Diaspora. Today it is our collective dream to see our Motherland in good progress, and the Armenians gathered around her with our national and cultural values at hand, aiming at national and unified purposes, bearing at heart the vision of Holy Etchmiadzin and Mt. Ararat.”

His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians

The above pontifical message carries with it the kind of spiritual power that can transform the soul of every Armenian. It is a message focused on the authenticity and the validity of 1700-year old history. These words move our souls and oblige us to bow before divine and historic realities and make us confront eternal truths. It is in this same message that the Armenian Christian realizes his true existence.

How can we utter words on behalf of the mission of the Church without even alluding to the status of Holy Etchmiadzin, our Holy of the Holies? How can a person address the children of our people forgetting to acknowledge Holy Etchmiadzin and Mother Armenia that should appear on our lips and in our hearts in the first place?

Each word and each message that spring from the heart and soul of an Armenian should build both spiritual Etchmiadzin and spiritual Armenia in our being. Holy Etchmiadzin is indeed the birthplace of the Armenian Church, as it is the rock on which Mother Armenia is founded.

Glory and honor to Vasken I, Catholicos of All Armenians of Blessed Memory, whose inspiring presence ever cultivated

our mind and soul with Christian love and faith, so that we could dedicate ourselves to our homeland and to secure Holy Etchmiadzin as the way of our renewed life.

Holy Etchmiadzin is the Font of our souls in which we were christened and which radiated a new capacity through the vision and the message of Karekin I, Catholicos of All Armenians of Blessed Memory. He distributed them to the children of our nation as spiritual nourishment and as a destination to eternity. Today the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin is full of life, thanks to Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, who made himself the non-consuming oil burning in the Lantern of the Illuminator and the calling of our soil, a challenge that keeps us all awake in our commitments so that we may dedicate our lives in unlimited service to the Holy Altar of God. Indeed that Altar is where Christ descended, and it is through the light of that Lantern that we can behold the history of our past and welcome the dawn of our new Armenia, now bloomed and bright with the blessings of Holy Etchmiadzin.

The love of God obliges us to humbly acknowledge and justly witness the ever blossomed fields of the Armenian Church, headed by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, the Holy of the Holies of all Armenians. It was in front of the Altar of Holy Etchmiadzin that our ancestors bowed their heads loyally and faithfully, anticipating in their souls the rebirth of our present generation. Along with that experience, our Mother Language in Golden Age Armenia embodied the newly written scripts by St. Mesrob, and at the same time the heroic sacrifice of the Holy Translators assured the essence of our nation adorned with multifaceted virtues and values.

We remember as clear as today when in 1976 we entered the Mother See for the first time. The Holy See was the same then as today, attractive from within and from without. What we witness today is the tireless accomplishments of His Holiness' twelve years pontificate. Today, what we actually witness certainly entices and obligates us, the clergy and the laity alike, to extend our just and sincere gratitude to His

Holiness. This refers not only to the Mother See, but also to the complete objectives and missions realized in various fields projected from a clear crystal as it were. Those accomplishments represent only the beginning of His Holiness' journey during his Pontificate, and God knows how much more miraculous achievements under divine providence will register our history in the coming decades on behalf of His Holiness, thus enriching "the Birthplace of our souls".

How is it possible to speak about the mission of the Church without saying even one word in favor of the Church unity, a dream with which our Church and faithful are living? It is a fallacy if our words addressed to our people do not pave way toward unity. In this temporary life what is expected from us, clergy and laity, is to reject all foreign and destructive powers that create distance between us and the source of our Mother Tutor, namely, Holy Etchmiadzin. The Armenian Church is privileged to have our Hierarchic Sees that comprise golden bridges spanned toward the Mother See Holy Etchmiadzin, the unmatched authority whose head is the Chosen of God, the Catholicos of All Armenians in the land of Armenia.

We express our deep respects to all of our Hierarchic Sees and to their honorable incumbents and salute them for their God-given service to our people through their equally illustrious leaders. This we say asking them to humbly achieve the miraculous unity and bring it to life so that they may rise in our history as truly illustrious models.

God of our fathers, we ask Thee to bless our Holy Church and the Armenian nation so that we may respond to the challenge of church unity in utmost faith founded by our Illuminator St. Gregory, by the vision of St. Sahag and St. Mesrob, St. Nersess the Graceful, St. Gregory of Narek, and of those numerous saints who served unselfishly who left behind our holy legacy. That legacy is the embodiment of the Armenian Church, founded firmly by God Himself, along with her mission, which includes prime tribute to the memory of millions of our martyrs of the Genocide whose graves are left unmarked.

Our Church has been and today remains to be the Mount Tabor of our nation's children. The Armenian Church is the anchor of our existence, as it is the "Altar of Light" for our lives. Under the arches of that church we preach the Gospel of Christ and spread the knowledge of God to renew the lives of our faithful.

Let us keep our Church away from the danger of dissension, the Church originated from the vision of the Illuminator and from the "Altar of Light" of Holy Etchmiadzin. Our Church is identified by the name of Holy Etchmiadzin, the Great Mystery in which we feel the descent of the Son of God who founded our Church personally by the golden hammer in His hand. The eternal existence of the Armenian Apostolic Mother Church is guaranteed by our loyalty toward the Mother See, as long as we concentrate our mind and spirit on that Great Mystery which rises from earth to heaven.

PASSING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND LOVE TO A CHILD IS A SACRED MISSION

In the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America, the year 2012 will be dedicated to Christian Education and the Sunday school. Consequently, this year's wall calendar pages contain photos of various Sunday Schools within the Western Diocese, thus highlighting their noble mission.

“Parents, raise your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:4) Such is the plea of St. Paul, the Apostle, to each Christian family.

Responding to these meaningful words requires commitment and dedication. Let each of us partake in the sacred mission of educating the children of the living Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, for herein lies the mission of the Church and its sustainability. This glorious mission will only be accomplished when we instill in the hearts of the children the vision to comprehend the All Benevolent God. Throughout the years, Sunday school teachers have relied on a number of Diocesan publications to reach out to the children with the divine message of the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To ensure uniformity among all parishes, exceptional training and development programs for Sunday school teachers have been implemented. The adoption of the latest teaching methods will help effectively carry out the mission of the Sunday school, one of the dearest to our hearts.

Every child baptized in the Armenian Apostolic Church shall grow and shall inherit the love, grace and wisdom of Christ for ***“Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature.”*** (Luke 2:52) We live in a world where the need to spread the Good News has never been greater. ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...”*** (Matthew 28:19-20) in order that

the life of each child may turn into a living Gospel ***“for to such belongs the Kingdom of God.”*** (Mark 10:14)

Therefore, beloved parents, raise your children with a sacred gift of a Christian education and upbringing.

Beloved Sunday school teachers, ***“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”*** (2 Timothy 2:15).

Finally, dear Sunday school children, reach for Christ in order that you may be filled with His love and wisdom.

This year, let our prayers revolve around our Diocesan Sunday schools. May the soul of each Armenian child be enlightened with the Gospel and be filled the Love of Christ, our Lord.

BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE

Tonight, we are celebrating the living mission of the Armenian Apostolic Church. As we launch a new milestone in the life of the Armenian community of San Diego with the implementation of a larger church complex to better serve the community.

This commencement of this vibrant project has been coined as the “Bridge to the Future” by a group of distinguished and dedicated leaders who have foreseen the future needs of their community and have responded to God’s call with courage and firm commitment.

The Church is the House of God that gathers us all in the name of the Lord and purifies in us the image of the All Benevolent God. Those who enter the House of God are empowered with the glory of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, as children of God and as dedicated servants of the Armenian Apostolic Church, we take this gathering as well as the initial step toward realizing a life-long dream.

The Church is God’s work and all those who are engaged in the work of God become living images of the Church. You have embarked on a challenging journey. Throughout this journey, you your Christian faith will be your source of spiritual energy and inspiration in guiding you to complete this glorious task. Throughout this journey, the Love of God will inspire us all to be true to one another. Finally, throughout this journey, you will secure the sanctity and be enlightened by the mighty and glorious presence of our Church.

October 1, 2011

6TH ANNUAL “AIWA” CONFERENCE

As I look at the three-day conference program, the themes of the leading presentations and discussions have truly captured my attention. We live in a world where women’s rights and issues should no longer be at stake.

Civilization should have the due equal respect for all human beings regardless of gender. For every human being created by God is able to create and contribute to the world through advancements in technology, education, business, art, culture, science, and medicine. These invaluable contributions stemmed from positive social activism.

Working with the women of the Church as well as of other institutions has greatly impacted my personal and pastoral life. Their selfless dedication and innovative spirit in strengthening our community has been most visible, enriching and spiritually uplifting.

Today, I salute the 6th International AIWA Conference, the organizers, the speakers and the panelists and convey to you my sincere wishes. Each conference can be justified when we all are able to establish advancement and progress in the social and spiritual fabric of the community.

The world has witnessed many astonishing women leaders, who have been through enormous challenges, yet have inspired humanity through their innovative mind, vision of excellence, and advocacy of social justice and equality. My thoughts would not have been complete without mentioning the names of a few pillars such as Mother Theresa, Rosa Parks, Toni Morrison (*Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*), Oprah Winfrey, Marin Callas, and Sophia Lauren, all of whom have impacted the world and have transformed the lives of those who were in search of their identity. These are women who have lived their faith thoroughly such as Mother Theresa, who have fought for social justice like Rosa Parks, who have enlightened the minds of the people of God like Toni Morrison, who have

empowered the women of the world and gave them the strength to fight for their rights and liberty like Oprah Winfrey, who have touched the hearts of humanity through artistic aspirations like Maria Callas, have become professionals yet holding firm the sanctity of motherhood in the family.

In the past few days, the world has shown tremendous respect to the late Steve Jobs, an outstanding human being who, equally, through his innovative thinking, changed the world. His innovative approach made digital technology vastly available to people of all social classes and backgrounds.

His example inspires us all to apply our intuition in our daily lives. Therefore, we all should have the same visionary spirit in sharing our God-given gift of wisdom while leaving behind a rich and a prosperous legacy.

Steve Jobs' speech at the Stanford University commencement ceremony has touched my heart. Each and everyone should read it. In his words, I found the power of his faith that granted him the courage and the strength to continue his fight for life and the vision to create.

His innovation in the field of digital media has changed the course of human life. In all of his successes, his humble nature struck me the most. This aspect of his personality clearly indicates his reverence for God.

As a fellow human being, I would like to share with you my admiration to all women who have transpired and transformed the world through their wisdom and passion, through their commitment and sacrifice. This conference is a noble mission that aims to reawaken in the hearts of the participants the momentum to be a leader in the life of the community. Each and every one of you has that God-given spark to be the light in the life of the world and above all, to be the mover of mountains.

May the Good Lord bless you all abundantly and guide you to live a rich spiritual life in making God the presence of your inner life with the attainment of noble aspirations which bring light, hope and peace into the life of the world.

Almighty God, bless your servants with your divine wis-

dom and empower them with the vision to guard the beauty of your creation. Grant them all the guidance and the spiritual strength to be the true pillars in all domains of life. Bless this conference and fill the hearts and souls of the women with the power of the Holy Spirit in order that they may become ambassadors of faith and history, education and civilization, art and culture, in order that they may continue to be the life-giving light to our children and the divine blessing of our Church community – to inspire our children with the love of our Motherland Armenia and the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. Amen.

“MAN’S LIFE IS THE GLORY OF GOD”

There are certain sayings that could be well understood when we meet people whose lives have been reflections of a particular message.

Today, I would like to share with you one simple saying from the writings of the early Church Fathers which is relevant to the life led by Larry Zarian, an outstanding community leader whose passion for humanity and to this great country of the United States of America has touched the lives of many.

“Man’s life is the Glory of God.” Life, being the gift of God, when lived and enriched with dignity, dedication and good service, not only brings light and joy to the hearts of the people, but above all, the same life itself brings Glory to God.

For many decades, the Armenian communities of the City of Glendale and the Greater City of Los Angeles have witnessed a most exemplary leadership by Larry Zarian. His unique charisma in conducting community events blessed us all with momentums that have helped us in our efforts to build a community. I have no doubt that many of you have witnessed firsthand his love for people. He served his nation with honor, humility and grace and became the pride of our community. In my personal life, Larry Zarian has been a mentor with whom I have cherished fond memories. Our meetings were held in a warm and friendly atmosphere. I especially remember our last television interview, which aired on April 26th.

Larry Zarian has been a legendary figure. His embracing personality has inspired me tremendously. I specifically remember his inspirational speeches on Memorial Day. In his words we all felt his passion for this great country and his immense respect for the soldiers who sacrificed their lives for justice, peace and freedom.

I also remember his joy during the Grand Opening ceremony of the new headquarters of the Armenian Society of

Los Angeles as he was emceeding the event. His words addressed to His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians and dignitaries were filled with respect, compassion and love.

With his kind deeds, Larry exemplified the essence of a true leader. His humble personality and his compassionate spirit indeed echo the saying “Man’s Life is the Glory of God.”

May the Good Lord bless his soul and reckon him amongst the abode of the heavenly saints and grant us all the grace of faith in abundance, so that we may fulfill it and exercise it in our God-given life without failure. Amen.

“For what we are it is God’s gift to us. What we become, is our gift to God.”

THE 40TH ANNUAL DEBUTANTE BALL

We are overjoyed to greet you on the occasion of the 40th Annual Debutante Ball of the Western Diocese. Over the years, the Debutante Ball has become recognized as one of the most exciting celebrations because not only is it a social event that recognizes the youth of our families, but it is in fact an event that leaves a spiritual impact on the lives of the community of faithful. This year marks a milestone in that we celebrate 40 years of a beautiful tradition of acknowledging the youth of the Diocese; a tradition that takes root in our rich heritage of faith and culture. This magnificent celebration is a reminder of the steadfastness and perseverance of the faithful of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church who uphold the very essence of our being through their love and service.

Tonight we celebrate youth who have shared ACYO camp days together and have grown to form a bond of friendship together with the Church. Tonight we celebrate 40 years of debutantes, escorts and cross bearers, many of whom are here to applaud as proud parents of their own debutantes, escorts and cross bearers. Tonight we also celebrate and recognize the magnificent efforts of the Ladies Auxiliary many of whom have served tirelessly for 40 years, and today, continue to bring together such an exquisite Ball.

We thank the donors and supporters of this annual event. We are grateful for their generous donations which contribute to the well being of the Diocese and our youth. We congratulate the parents and friends and all who are gathered here tonight, and encourage them to carry on these traditions that remind us to preserve the rich culture of our Armenian heritage. We pray that the 2011 Debutante Ball keeps you steadfast in your loyalty to our traditions as you engage the Church in your lives.

We wish to thank His Eminence Archbishop Vatche Hovsepian for his crucial role as the founder and initiator of the

Debutante Ball. He has served the flock of Christ with reverence and unrelenting dedication. The faithful will always recall the years of his Primacy with admiration and enduring affection.

We also commend the members of the Ladies Auxiliary Committee chaired by Mrs. Cindy Norian. Their stellar work ethic in organizing this momentous event exemplifies their love for Christ and the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church. May God bless and protect you and your loved ones.

We extend our pastoral blessings to all the youth, and pray that this evening be their celebration of traditions. Let this 40th magnificent evening be a reminder to dedicate and enrich your lives and the lives of your beloved children with their God-given legacy: the Armenian Church.

IN HONOR OF OUR VETERANS

“The most powerful thing in the world is memory; we have to collect our shattered memories and art by their coercive laws.” Parouyr Sevak

November 11th is a day of remembrance for the veterans of the United States of America. It is a day to reawaken in our memory the vision and the sacrifice of the men and women who put their trust in God and served this nation with reverence. It is the special time of prayer in our God-given lives to pay homage to those men and women who will be the veterans of tomorrow in defense of this great land of ours, in order that our lives may be sheltered in peace and prosperity.

Veterans are the light of this nation, for whom we offer our prayer. We offer our special prayers for those who pursue the noble mission of becoming the peacemakers of the world, to keep our country free through their service and sacrifice. We remember them with dignity and make the promise to keep their memory with pride. On Veterans Day, we honor those brave men and women who have led the Ship of this State to safety in troubled waters and will be the source of inspiration for the children of God.

THE CONSECRATION OF ST. GARABED ARMENIAN CHURCH IN RANCHO MIRAGE

“For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” (II Corinthians 5:1)

From the Headquarters of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America, we extend our blessings to the Rev. Fr. Krikor Zakaryan, Pastor of St. Garabed Armenian Church in Rancho Mirage, the members of the Parish Council, Building Committee, Ladies Society, all auxiliary bodies and the entire faithful on the auspicious occasion of the consecration of St. Garabed Armenian Church, the spiritual shelter of the Armenian faithful of Coachella Valley.

By the Grace of God and through the dedication and prayers, the faithful stood firm behind the spiritual calling of St. Gregory the Illuminator, *“Come, let us build the Altar of Light.”* The Parish was blessed with the Kirkjan Hall. Now, the faithful will worship in the House of God.

The Armenian Apostolic Church is a vital part of the greater Christian body. For centuries, the Armenian Apostolic Church has preserved its rich traditions and has become an integral part of her people. Essentially, when we refer to the Armenian Church, we are referring to the Armenian people, for we find our identity within the blessed walls of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Indeed, the Church is the same divine establishment whose responsibility lies in the spiritual nourishment of her faithful. We are confident that under the pastoral care and leadership of Rev. Fr. Krikor Zakaryan, St. Garabed Armenian Church in Rancho Mirage will continue to carry out the sacred mission and thrive.

On the blessed occasion of the consecration of St. Garabed Armenian Church in Rancho Mirage, we congratulate you all

and convey to you our genuine wishes. We lift our prayers for the souls of Grand Benefactor Ed Halvajian and his father Garabed Halvajian. May their souls rest in the abode of the heavenly saints, for their undying legacy will forever linger in our minds. Their generosity made it possible for the domes of St. Garabed Armenian Church to reach for the heavens.

“Always and for everything give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.” (Ephesians 5:20)

December 19, 2011

BLESSED IS OUR LORD! BLESSED BE YOUR LIFE!

On the eve of the New Year and Christmas, I extend to you my heartfelt wishes and prayers. May the Good Lord bless you abundantly and fill your lives with joy and prosperity in the upcoming year 2012.

We have dedicated 2012 as the Year of the Sunday schools in the Western Diocese. The Sunday school is the foundation of our faith for it secures the future of our Church. Within the walls of this sacred institution our children establish a lasting relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The expansion and rejuvenation of the Sunday schools mission, alongside numerous other missions and projects including the expansion of the departments of the Western Diocese attest to the unshakable Christian faith of our people. These missions and projects are all a necessity within the lives of our youth that can be realized to its full potential through the contribution of our faithful.

The Western Diocese is your home and we are committed to always serve you with love in the work of God. The Diocese will continue to be a vibrant institution in our community only through your participation and commitment to our mission.

Let us dedicate our lives to God, to the well-being of our Church, the Motherland and the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin; but above all, for the prosperity of this blessed land of the United States of America, a country which has granted us all the ingredients to hold firm in our spirituality the image of God.

May the love of God inspire us all with the consciousness of embracing Christian values, for the peace of the world and the prosperity of the faithful.

Blessed is our Lord.

Blessed be your life.

THE NEW YEAR

Where do we search the New Year? Do we look into a specific timeframe? We need to make the search for it in our own spiritual being. The New Year is visible when we are renewed inwardly and spiritually. Thus the New Year is conditioned with the transformation of our inner self, when we are able to create the New Self, the New Year, the New Person within us, the New History.

The human being is a spiritual presence. We all have a divine spark within us. We all have the dire need to change led by new hopes and aspirations.

St. Nersess the Graceful (Soorp Nersess Shnorhali) leads us all through the prayers sprout from his heart:

*“When you come in glory,
Remember me, O Christ,
Renewer of the old,
Renew me also,
Adorn me again.”*

We make these words the prayer of our heart addressed to God. Do we have the strength to change? Certainly, we do. Therefore, we need to make the practical steps. When we lead our lives with prayer and faith, we then are able to bring forth the light and enlighten the world.

Each year is a gift from God, a special time to set forth the notion of self-accountability. In other words, when we are able to review the past and analyze it with the power of prayer, we then embark on a New Life.

On the eve of the New Year, let us all cultivate within us a life in accordance to the divine law, with the love of God and the wisdom of Christ radiating from the Gospels.

On the eve of the New Year, let us uplift our hearts to God and exchange with our brothers and sisters good wishes and prayers. With this behavior we then create the New Year and instill within us the New Life.

May the blessings of God lead our lives to new spiritual heights. This journey empowers us to search and create the New Life, the New Year within the depth of our spirituality.

December 31, 2011

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

“And put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4: 24).

The Blessed Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the most significant miracle in the life of humanity, which leads it to a New Life. This New Life is conditioned through our relationship with the Almighty, as we are filled with prayer and spiritually empowered by the strength of the Christian faith. For us as Christians, the New Life begins with the Birth of Christ, through His Incarnation, the Descent of the Only Begotten from Heaven for the salvation of souls of humanity.

“Put on the new nature”

This message of St. Paul speaks to us all with the understanding that the Blessed Birth of our Lord inspires the people of the world with the Newness of life. This by itself embodies the divine presence in the life of humanity, which leads us to the Newness of life, a life which ought to be the reflection of the love of God and the message of the Holy Gospel. St. Paul calls on us all to put on the New Person, namely Christ, our Lord and live our lives with Christ, by instilling in our hearts divine love and wisdom towards one another.

We live in a world where the advancement of science and modern technology has become limitless. However, humanity is in dire need of the Word of God and the Light of the Gospel. The person who builds the life upon the Word of God lives a life full of spiritual and moral values, a life in accordance to the good example of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Thus, we become the peacemakers of the world.

“Put on the new nature created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

The blessed Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is clearly the engagement of the Almighty God in the life of humanity, which has paved the journey toward God. Those who

walk through this journey and live a life with God certainly are able to bring their share for creating a better world for us all.

The Birth of our Lord has transpired our people with the vision of St. Gregory the Illuminator, who saw clearly and vividly the Descent of the Son of God on the blessed soil of Armenia. His vision remains to be the core of our Christian faith. Therefore, the vision of St. Gregory should not be disclosed in a specific timeframe. The vision has been passed on from generation to generation as the spiritual nucleus of our Christian life.

As we celebrate the Blessed Birth of Christ, our Lord, we relive the mission of the Armenian Church and set a new beginning in our lives. This celebration implies also an important aspect: it renews in us our commitment to be faithful and dedicated to God and to the faith of our forefathers, but above all to the Armenian Church and her sacred traditions with special homage to the martyrs of the Armenian Genocide of 1915.

“Put on the new nature”

Celebrate the Birth of our Lord. Our calling is that we live our God-given life with purity. In the creation, God made man to be the most perfect, thus empowering us with the divine gifts to make spirituality a visible state of our identity. God blessed us all with the Birth of Jesus and paved the way for us to meet the saints and martyrs, teachers of the Christian faith, who have lived the Birth of their new life.

“Christ is born and revealed. Blessed is the Revelation of Christ.”

The Birth of our Lord is the call addressed to all humanity, in order that through His Birth we lead a life similar to that of Christ, our Savior.

“Put on the new nature”

Dear faithful parents, let the Birth of Christ, our Lord be the journey of your children in order that they may enlighten their mind and thoughts with God’s love.

Dear youth and children, let the Birth of our Lord become the mission of your life, in order that the tree of your life brings forth abundant light.

Our message is addressed to all in order that with the courage of your faith, you may celebrate the Blessed Birth of Christ and make the His life mirror your own.

Dear faithful, on the auspicious occasion of the New Year and the Blessed Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we wish you a long, healthy and prosperous life. Be firm in your commitment to live a virtuous life, a life lived for the glory of God.

“Christ is born and revealed. Blessed is the Revelation of Christ.”

Christmas 2012

ARCHPRIEST FR. MOUSHEGH TASHJIAN'S 40th ANNIVERSARY OF ORDINATION AND CONSECRATION INTO THE PRIESTHOOD

From the Headquarters of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church, we extend to you our blessings and congratulate you on the auspicious occasion of your 40th Anniversary of ordination and consecration into the Sacred Order of the Priesthood.

Having heard the calling to serve Christ at a very young age, you entered the seminary of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem with the vision to lead the flock of Christ. Serving in many capacities at St. James Armenian Cathedral in Jerusalem, you graciously accepted the invitation to join the ranks of clergy of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America. For decades, you have served with humility and grace. Since 1992, you have enlightened the faithful of St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church of Costa Mesa with the light of the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. With your caring, meticulous, and passionate personality, you have earned the respect of the faithful as well as the members of your community. In addition to your pastoral duties, you have exceptionally served the Western Diocese on the Diocesan level.

Through your committed service, you established the Armenian Church Youth Organization (ACYO) of the Parish. To further strengthen the bond between the faithful and the Parish, you created the “Zangag” periodical, the Sunday school and the AGBU Saturday school. Your vision of a prosperous future of the Armenian Apostolic Church is most evident in the present day as today’s members of the youth will one day be the leaders of our community.

We commend your active involvement in the fundraising activities of the Parish enabling it to acquire adjacent facilities within a short period of a few years. We are delighted in kno-

wing that the success of St. Mary, as an exemplary parish, is largely due to your ability to organize and work in harmony with the Parish Council and all auxiliary bodies.

As a “kind and loyal servant,” and a “brave pastor” you have been blessed with the wisdom to serve with renewed vigor and enduring affection. The clergyman ought to be the individual who yearns for a life filled with prayer. It is in prayer where he finds God’s bountiful grace bestowed upon him. Prayer quenches his thirst, fulfills his hunger, illuminates his path, prevents his thoughts from going astray, and finally, fills his heart with the Word and Breath of God. With your commendable life and kind deeds, you are one of the “chosen” from the spiritual vineyard of God. We lift our heartfelt prayers to the All Merciful God to bless and protect you and your loved ones.

Dearest Fr. Moushegh, on the blessed occasion of the 40th anniversary of your ordination and consecration into the Sacred Order of the Priesthood, we congratulate you wholeheartedly and convey to you our heartfelt wishes. Our congratulations to your beloved family members including Yeretsgin Silva, your children, relatives and the entire faithful of St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church.

May the Almighty God protect you and your family and grace you with the everlasting love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

January 2, 2012

THE CONSECRATION OF THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH IN SEATTLE

“Rejoice, Holy Church, Christ, the King of Heaven Crowns you with His Cross, And adorns your edifice With glories of wonder.” (Hymn – Feast of the Church)

From the Headquarters of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America, we extend our blessings to the Rev. Fr. Yeghia Isayan, Pastor of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Seattle, the members of the Parish Council, Ladies Society, Benefactors and Godfathers, Deacons and the Choir, all auxiliary bodies and the entire faithful on the auspicious occasion of the consecration of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Seattle, the spiritual shelter of the Armenian community in the State of Washington.

Our people, filled with the light of the Gospel radiating from the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, have gathered in all corners of the world and have built the House of God, thus loyally backing the mission of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church.

A prayerful life is man's most spiritually enlightening experience. A life filled with prayer is a life lived with God. A collective prayer plays an essential role in uniting and strengthening the community at large. We thank the All Merciful God for granting us the vision to pray not only in unison but for one another. A continuous life of prayer purifies within us the image of God. Dedicating our lives to prayer enables us to better understand most precious gift from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We live in a world where the Love of God must dominate the essence of humanity. The prayers during the Dedication and Consecration ceremonies were spiritual enlightening experiences as we felt the presence of God within us.

The Church is the abode of the Heavenly Father. In the House of God, the faithful become immersed in God's abundant

grace. Indeed, ***“the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and faithfulness.”*** (Galatians 5: 22)

We are delighted that under the pastoral care and leadership of Rev. Fr. Yeghia Isayan, and the collective efforts of the members of the Parish Council, Ladies Society, Building Committee and the faithful, the Armenian Apostolic Church in Seattle will continue to carry out the sacred mission and thrive. On the blessed occasion of the consecration of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Seattle, we congratulate you all and convey to you our genuine wishes. May you be granted the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in order that you may continue to serve with grace and humility.

“Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.” (I Corinthians 16:13)

January 13, 2012

PREPARE FOR THE GREAT LENT

The Great Lenten Journey is a unique time in the life of the Christian faithful which calls on us to set aside a special time to be with and to walk alongside Christ, our Lord.

This year, I have chosen seven messages for the seven weeks of the Great Lent. The author of these selected messages (quotes), is the late Patriarch of Jerusalem Archbishop Yeghishe Derderian (1910-1990). Undoubtedly, the following messages help us to transform our spirituality as we prepare ourselves to celebrate the Victorious Resurrection of Christ, our Lord.

Week One: (Carnival Sunday)

“Today, fasting is not practiced properly. To many, it has been regarded as an unnecessary burden on the physical body which has been passed down to us from our church fathers. However, our church fathers have understood well the importance of the healing of our soul more so than the body. Through fasting, they were eager to adopt the means to heal the soul, thus preparing the body to become the ground (soil) for the cultivation of one’s spirituality.”

The Carnival Sunday (Great Baregentan) is the day when we make the promise to renounce from all physical pleasures thus paving the way to walk toward God. The readings of the day, the hymns and prayers lead us to the newness of life in Christ.

Fasting is not a burden placed on our physical body (*Matthew 6:16*). It is a spiritual discipline which we have inherited from the Lord Himself and our Church forefathers. It is also a necessity for the healing of our souls (*Matthew 17:20*). Therefore, the Christian faithful who walks through the Lenten Journey fills the self with Divine Light (*I Timothy 6:16*). The faithful takes a promise to lead a Christ-like life (*I Corinthians 11:1*) but above all, while searching within the

inner-self, he aims to identify the man created in the image of the Almighty God (*Genesis 1:27*).

Week Two:

“If fasting is a religious practice by nature, in its content is the preparation to walk towards God and a wonderful tool for the salvation of our souls. The human person is also equally graced by the spiritual gift for we have within us the image of the Creator. The spiritual sense within us is certainly the reflection of God’s image which reawakens within us the longing for God.”

Fasting is certainly a practical expression of prayer for it leads us toward God. Those who fast in a disciplined manner deepen in their faith life the very sense that they belong to God in purifying within themselves the image of the Creator. In our perseverance to pray and fast, we hold firm within us the vision to see and equally feel the presence of God in our being. This unity with God leads humanity toward sanctity and the blessed life.

Week Three:

“The human person is the battleground for spiritual and physical encounters. On one hand, as human beings, we love our physical body while on the other hand, we equally love our soul and pursue the noble aspiration to free our soul from evil. Therefore, humanity’s mission is to harmonize these two encounters in such a unique way that they can co-exist in harmony.”

Fasting purifies in our human identity the ultimate truth about the conflict between the material and the spiritual. When the physical entity defeats the spiritual, then we are distanced and separated from God. What is expected from us that the spiritual within us should never be subjected. On the contrary, our physical bodies are intended to become the Temple of the Almighty (I Corinthians 3:16).

Week Four:

“Each human being is a shareholder in the Divine Nature through the spirit and the body...When our spirit is

weakened, it becomes the pray for the physical body. However, when we discipline our bodies, the soul becomes the dominant...God does not embrace the weak souls and the weak bodies."

The ultimate goal of the Great Lenten Journey is to lead humanity towards God. The words of the Patriarch are most inspiring as he concludes, *"God does not embrace the weak souls and the weak bodies."* As we lead a life of fasting and prayer, we expel within us the weakened soul which then is replaced by the Love of Christ and the presence of the Almighty God.

Week Five:

"Without the perception of the conflict of the spiritual and the physical, we cannot realize within us the Life of Christ which would also help us to understand the crucifixion and the Mystery of the Resurrection..."

The Christian faithful cannot grasp the true meaning of the Mystery of the Resurrection and cannot relate to the Miracle without proper preparation and fasting. Those who walk through the Lenten Journey are able to have the vision to live with the Victory of the Resurrection.

Week Six:

"As Christ was crucified, He then realized the ultimate sacrifice...He took upon Himself all the human sufferings Without this aspect of Christ's taking upon Himself the human sufferings we would not be able to relate to Him..."

Through fasting in actuality we live a Christ-like life. We also become partakers in His Resurrection (Romans 6:11, Colossians 3:1). Therefore, in a sense, fasting in its own unique way is a kind of crucifixion for we become Christ-like and partakers in His sufferings and crucifixion.

Week Seven:

"Faith is the possible impossible. Those who believe in the possible are wise. Those who believe in the everlasting are great. Those who hope for the impossible are the perfect

amongst people...Those who love themselves, they are merely worth the self. Those who love their friends are the dedicated ones. Moreover, those who love God are capable of loving the entire world...The Great Lenten Journey is the time for self-criticism, self-recognition and self-enlightenment..."

Fasting is the most important tool which strengthens our faith as the armor against all adversities and temptations (Ephesians 6:10-18) which lead humanity to destruction. It is a temptation when love is self-centered. The Patriarch's message is most inspiring. *"Those who love God are capable of loving the entire world."*

Beloved faithful,

Stay steadfast and apply fasting in your spiritual life in order that you may grow in the three steps, namely self-criticism, self-recognition and self-enlightenment which lead us to God. As we walk towards God, we then enter into the Highest State of spirituality – united with God (John 17:21).

HOLY WEEK

From the liturgical viewpoint, Holy Week is the most decorated timeframe in the Christian Church. It is the period where the faithful relives the final week of Christ's life on Earth from His triumphant entry to the Holy City to His sufferings and crucifixion and finally, His Victorious Resurrection.

We call upon each faithful to be immersed in the liturgical life throughout Holy Week. The week-long Gospel readings, the singing of the heavenly hymns, the recitation of the heartfelt prayers help the faithful to better understand the essence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As a keen participant in the liturgical life during Holy Week, the Christian faithful surrenders his life into the compassionate Hands of Christ, thus reawakening within him a New Life.

Herein we present the most noteworthy days of the Holy Week:

PALM SUNDAY

On Palm Sunday, Christ triumphantly enters Jerusalem, the Holy City, where he is welcomed and greeted by the faithful exclaiming Hosanna. A little later we will examine the act of Christ cleansing the Temple. The act exemplifies the beginning of a New Life with Christ. The path leading to God opens through Christ.

OPENING OF THE DOORS / "TERNPATZEK"

The Opening of the Doors / Ternpatzek ceremony is performed in the evening on Palm Sunday. The ceremony is symbolic in a sense that it relates to the opening of the heavenly doors that are reserved only for the righteous. It is necessary to include the inspirational and spiritually uplifting dialogue that occurs during the ceremony. We present the dialogue in its entirety without further commentary.

From the inside:

“Who are they for whom I shall open the door? For this door belongs to the Lord and only the righteous may enter through it.”

From outside, the priest says:

“It is not only the righteous that may enter through it but also those sinners who confess and repent.”

From the inside:

“For this is the door to heaven and the valley of sadness, the Almighty God covenanted James – the resting place of the righteous, the purgatory for sinners, the Kingdom of Christ, the abode of the angels, the assembly of the saints, the city of hope and the House of God.”

From outside, the priest says:

“Your sayings about the Holy Church are valuable and just, since for us the Church is the pure mother from whom children of light and righteousness are born – for us it is the path to justice and it leads us to the Heavenly Father.”

From the inside:

“Let us see our Lord Jesus Christ whose Throne is on the Holy Altar and who calls to Him those who do according to His will, for wherever I am, there shall be my official.”

From outside, the priest says:

“We are the outcome of the undiluted blood of the Son of God. We zealously praise our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and exclaim in unison “Glory to your Advent, O Lord.”

From the inside:

“The Trumpet of God calls with the words “The Groom is coming, come to him and greet him.”

From outside, the priest says:

“Here I am with God’s children trusted to me and we wish to see Christ and hear His blessed voice.”

From the inside:

“The Creator’s voice calls and says: Come, blessed children of my Father and inherit the Kingdom promised to you since the beginning of time.”

MAUNDY THURSDAY

On Maundy Thursday, the liturgical-worship service of the Church presents the Last Supper, the Washing of the Feet and the Sufferings of Christ. The Last Supper is the sacrament of the Divine Liturgy, the pillar of the Church. The faithful witness the immense sacrifice of Christ in the celebrant priest. This in itself is a subject of a broad spectrum and could be analyzed in great detail. The Washing of the Feet Service represents the humility of Christ. The act is symbolic, for Christ conveys to us the notion to live a life of humility and virtue. The sufferings of Christ clearly explain His willingness to endure the unbearable sufferings for the spiritual salvation of humanity.

GOOD FRIDAY

The burial service of Christ is presented on Good Friday. The significance of Good Friday lies in the notion that light radiates from the tomb of Christ. It is for this reason that the faithful humbly sings “We praise Your burial.”

EASTER EVE

During the Divine Liturgy on Easter Eve, the Church announces of the Victorious Resurrection of Christ thus establishing the New Life of man in Christ. For close to two millennia, the world has preached of the Blessed Resurrection of Christ. With a firm belief in the Victorious Resurrection of Christ, an insurmountable number of faithful have renewed their lives. They have rejected the within them the first Adam and have accepted in their being the second Adam. In other words, they have made a covenant with God to live lives filled with the Love of Christ.

HOLY EASTER

On Easter Sunday, the Church and the faithful celebrate the Victorious Resurrection of Christ. The sacrament of the Resurrection is not a science, nor can it be negotiable. Holy Easter is a spiritual feeling that cultivates the essence of the faithful. Similar to the love that binds us with our relatives, the Resurrection of Christ ought to become an inner spiritual feeling that captures our essence.

Palm Sunday, 2012

“HE IS NOT HERE; FOR HE HAS RISEN”

These words are uttered by an angel of the Lord to the women who went to see the sepulcher of Christ at dawn on Sunday. There, the women are met by God’s angel who informs them of the Miraculous and Victorious Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with the words “***He is not here; for He has risen.***” (Matthew 28:6)

The Victorious Resurrection of Christ is the sole miracle which transforms the essence of humanity. One of the prominent bishops of last century offered the following insight on the glory of this event. “*The idea of the Resurrection which brings forth the notion that life does not end in the tomb, is the light of an everlasting life within our souls. The Victorious Resurrection of Christ is the greatest miracle of all.*” Archbishop Yeghishe Derderian, late Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem (1910-1990).

With the Glorious Resurrection of Christ, the Christian faithful affirms the new life in Christ and renews his covenant with God. We speak of a New Life, where one’s unshakable faith allows for the ability to see beyond the confines of the material life. Empowered with the blessed gift of the Christian Faith, one becomes a creator, an architect of light, a notable spiritual presence to transform lives and steer those who are lost to the path leading to the Creator, the All Merciful God.

Patriarch Archbishop Yeghishe Derderian’s ability to illustrate the Miraculous Resurrection of Christ is captivating to say the least. “*In Christ’s Resurrection we see the fall and defeat of what seemed to be the unconquerable death. As the soul of man bears the image of God, it is predestined to exist in eternity rather than a time frame.*”

Indeed, the Glorious Resurrection of Christ affirms the crushing defeat of death. The miracle of the Resurrection is

the source of all miracles. For ages, humanity has accepted the mystery of the Resurrection, thus capturing the meaning of divine life. To relinquish the concept of the miracle intrinsically means to abandon God and to believe in a brief life span. On the other hand, those who fill the soul with the mystery of the Resurrection define and outline the essence of the Christian faithful – one who leads a life with the vision of the Resurrection and one who is involved in God-pleasing endeavors. Equipped with God’s everlasting presence, the Christian faithful becomes a living and breathing Gospel.

The mystery of Christ’s Resurrection has enlightened the lives of people around the world. The outcome of the Miraculous Resurrection of our Lord is revealed through the establishment of the Church. *“The Righteous Resurrection of Christ is His Church. As the source of the Christian lifestyle and universal civilization.”* (Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian) In other words, the Church bears a strong resemblance of Christ in modern society. The Church is the eternal ray of Christ’s Miraculous Resurrection. It is the Body to which we belong – the Body of Christ which flourishes through our kind deeds.

“He is not here; for he has risen.”

The period of the Great Lent was a spiritual journey which brought us to the destination of the Victorious Resurrection of Christ. As we fill our lives with prayer and prepare for spiritual rebirth, we can join the angel of God in exclaiming “He is not here; for he has risen.”

As Christians, we are the One Body of Christ. In our inner selves, we witness the presence of Christ. We walk with Him on the Way to the Cross and ascend with Him where we will reunite with God and live alongside the Creator.

The Armenian Apostolic Church celebrates the Resurrection of Christ with the following hymn – “O Lord, Glory to Your Resurrection.” These words contain the essence of our creed. If our Church fathers did not live their lives according to this creed, they would not have been able to overcome numerous obstacles and surely, their legacy would have been

long erased from the pages of history. The Victorious Resurrection of Christ, in a sense is applicable to the Resurrection of our people and the spiritual reawakening of our Motherland. The history of the Armenian people has been one of martyrdom for we have shared the sufferings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. However, like Christ, we have always emerged “*victorious over death*” due to the unbreakable chain of miracles that has strengthened the spirituality of the Armenian people.

“He is not here; for he has risen.”

The empty Tomb of Christ is a testament to Christ’s Glorious and Victorious Resurrection and to His everlasting divine light that has found shelter in the hearts of Christian faithful.

Beloved faithful,

On Holy Easter, the most significant Feast Day of the Church calendar, let us kneel before the Holy Altar as a sign of our humility, respect and honor for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In the sacred sacrament of the Divine Liturgy, let us apply the mystery of His Glorious Resurrection in our daily lives. Let us accept Holy Communion with the intention to turn our lives over to the Lord and pass on His divine light to future generations in order that the gates to eternal life may open before them.

*“Christ Has Risen From the Dead,
Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ.”*

Easter, 2012

PRAYER AT THE CALIFORNIA STATE ASSEMBLY

Almighty God, we lift up our prayers to You with reverence and trust to guide us and strengthen us all in our calling to serve and protect the people of God. We thank You for granting us with the blessed gift of life, for bestowing upon us all bounties of the world and challenging us to become Your good hands in our communities.

We pray for world peace and for all those who suffer as victims of injustice, war and poverty.

Today we pray for the souls and honor the memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide, the first genocide of the 20th century premeditated and perpetrated by the Ottoman Turks in 1915.

California State Assembly's recognition of the heinous crime against humanity encourages the Armenian American community of this Great State to remain steadfast in the quest for justice. Above all, the noble act grants us spiritual strength to hold firm the essence of our Christian faith as devoted citizens of this blessed country of the United States of America.

In 2015, the Armenian American community and Armenians worldwide will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. Very few survivors of the dark genocide remain and they pass on each day. However, their unconquerable spirit will live forever. We will continue to honor their memory, thus not only as a form of respect for their martyrdom but also as a clear message to all nations that the gift of life granted to us by God cannot be taken away forcibly or brutally.

We are reminded of the words of the great Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who in his last sermon said, **“Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I have seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I**

want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land!”

We are here today, with dual responsibilities as Armenian Christians who ought to guard and cherish their God-given gifts and we are also here as citizens of the United States of America filled with the spirit of the founding fathers of this great nation to become exemplary leaders of our communities.

Almighty God, Bless this Assembly with their members and their mission. Grant them divine wisdom and love to carry on their duties diligently, to uphold firm justice for the past and be the path of justice for all generations to come. Amen.

April 19, 2012

JOIN US IN BUILDING THE HOLY MARTYRS CHAPEL

For the Armenian people, April 24, 1915, was the road to crucifixion. The day will forever remain as the day of resurrection of the Armenians, for the vision of the martyred souls resides in the hearts of the surviving generations.

In 2015, we will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. To forget the systematic extermination of the Armenian people by the Ottoman Empire means to renounce the blood shed of our million and a half ancestors.

As we approach the 100th anniversary, we, as survivors of a wounded nation shall continue on our quest for justice with determined minds and reawakened spirits. The calls of the martyrs shall be answered by generations to come. Time cannot distance us from the truth, namely historical facts. Numerous events are planned by the Western Diocese to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide one of which includes the construction of the “Holy Martyrs” Chapel in the Diocesan complex. The remains of our ancestors from the desert of Der Zor shall find rest and peace in the Holy Martyrs Chapel.

THE EVE OF APRIL 24

“Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.” (John 2:19)

The message of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ empowers us spiritually to understand the notion that the Temple Christ our Lord refers to is His Body which as a result of His crucifixion has been laid for the salvation of humanity. The message of our Lord is a clear reminder of Christ’s crushing victory over death through His Glorious Resurrection, the very foundation of our Christian faith.

“Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.”

For nearly two thousand years, these words were echoed in the spiritual lives of our people. Time after time external forces tried to destroy the “Temple”, the essence and identity of our people. The “Temple” was our Homeland, our people – the heirs of the of Armenian Holy Apostolic Church, who physically perished yet were raised again in “three days” just as Christ was resurrected from the dead. Ninety-seven years ago, the Young Turk regime carefully planned and executed the systematic extermination of the Armenian people, a horrific chapter in our history. Ninety seven Aprils later, sons and daughters of the fallen martyrs and the entire nation continue to honor their blessed memory.

For Armenians, the 20th century commenced with a woeful path to Golgotha. However, our people emerged victorious as a result of their unshakable Christian faith, their firm belief in the restoration of the “Temple” and the Resurrection of our nation.

Let us commemorate the 97th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide with the vision of our fallen ancestors. April 24 is no longer a day of mourning and sorrow. April 24th is a symbol of victory for our resurrected nation.

THE ORDINATION OF DEACON MATTHEW ASH INTO THE PRIESTHOOD

REFLECTIONS ON THE CALLING TO THE PRIESTHOOD

In a book published by the Western Diocese on March 15, 2011, we reflected on the essence of a priest's life and his selfless pastoral servitude with the following words:

“In his pastoral life, the priest must remain awake, for he is the guardian of his flock. Just as a shepherd is obliged to tend to his sheep, the priest has the pastoral obligation to lead his flock closer to God by preaching the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and to lead an exemplary life of a true Christian.”

“The life of a devout priest brings light and spiritual comfort to his people. In essence, Priesthood, as a calling, is very challenging and demanding; however, at the same time, it is also the most rewarding mission in the eyes of the Lord. Throughout our pastoral tenure, we have understood in depth that Priesthood is a God-entrusted mission and have lived Priesthood thoroughly.”

THE PRIEST AS A MAN OF GREAT FAITH

Through a prayerful life, the priest, as a man of great faith, must be awake and alert, for he represents Christ. This challenging and serious task is entrusted to the priest in order that he may be able to tend to and lead his flock.

THE PRIEST AS THE UNIFIER OF THE FAITHFUL IN CHRIST

The priest is the pastor and leader of his flock, the faithful of Christ's Holy Church. Just as a shepherd is entrusted with the serious responsibility of caring for his flock, the priest is obliged to unite the faithful in Christ making the Lord and Savior the very center of their lives.

THE PRIEST AS A MESSENGER OF GOD'S WORD

The priest is responsible for spreading the Word of God. Just as Christ taught and preached, the priest must follow in His footsteps and spread the light of His Gospel. Through his calling, the priest is a teacher and a mentor. He cultivates souls through the Love of Christ.

THE PRIEST AS LIGHT AND SOLACE TO THE FAITHFUL

Leading a sacrificial life, the priest becomes the light and solace for the faithful. In other words, the priest must unite the faithful of the Church by delivering the Word of God and leading a Christ-like life.

The life of the Priest ought to serve as an example to the faithful, for he is the representative of Christ. Only by following in the footsteps of Christ will the priest truly resemble Him and serve as a vivid example of a life of righteousness lived for the glory of God.

THE PRIEST AS A FATHER FIGURE

The pastoral life of a priest is truly diverse and in many ways it is similar to a shepherd who has taken his sheep to pasture. The priest must always be prepared to tend to the spiritual needs and concerns of his flock without exception. Therefore, the priest is a true father figure for an entire community of Christ.

PRIESTHOOD IS A CALLING AND A MISSION

Words can never fully describe the Sacred Order of the Priesthood as this sacred sacrament can be fulfilled only by living a life in Christ.

We dedicate these reflections to Dn. Matthew Ash on the auspicious occasion of his ordination and consecration into the Sacred Order of the Priesthood. We are delighted to lead a young servant of Christ as he prepares to dedicate his life to the mission of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church.

Dear Dn. Matthew, you have chosen the path to righteousness which requires from you to lead a life filled with prayer. Since your return the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, we have seen in you a spiritually transformed individual. You have truly grown and matured after furthering your theological studies. May the offerings you have received from the spiritual center of All Armenians guide you always. We have no doubt that you will become an alert priest who shall preach the Word of God, thus enriching the spirituality of the faithful. May you become the light and solace for the people of God and remain steadfast in your calling to “serve without shame.”

May God’s abundant blessings accompany you on your spiritual journey into Priesthood. We shall continue to pray for you and Yeretzgin Ani. May the light radiating from the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ illuminate your path in order that you may walk with pure hearts and righteous souls.

April 26, 2012

MESSAGE TO THE DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY MEMBERS

“The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” (1 John 2:17)

The truth in the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ fills the lives of mankind with the love and wisdom of the Almighty God. This message from the Letter of St. John the Evangelist clearly conveys the thought that all of us are called to fulfill God’s will and apply it in our daily lives.

The will of the Almighty God needs to be reflected in our collective efforts as the living sons and daughters of the Armenian Apostolic Church just as Christ commanded the Apostles soon after His Glorious Resurrection. ***“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*** (Matthew 28:19)

Diocesan assemblies are wonderful venues for applying the will of God in our Church and community lives. They are imperative venues to review the course of our mission with true faith, and with a forgiving heart.

Through humility and renewed commitment we aim to become the Hands of the Almighty God in the life of the world in order to fulfill all duties and responsibilities entrusted to us, thus becoming living Gospels.

I wish to share with you a reflection which has also become part of my spirituality. This reflection is expressed through words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

“In the Church of Saint Egidio in Rome, home of an extraordinary community of laypeople devoted to working for the poor, there is an old crucifix that portrays Christ without arms. When I asked about its importance to the community, I was told that it shows how God relies on us to do God’s work in the world.”

Without us, God has no eyes; without us, God has no ears; without us, God has no arms or hands. God relies on us. – **Abp. Desmond Tutu**

These are words which clearly define the notion that all of us are engaged in the holy work of God in becoming the arms and hands of the crucified Christ.

My dear Pastors and delegates,

Attached to my message, I present to you two sets of reports. The first is the Annual Report (May 2011 – April 2012) and the second is an overview of the work of the missions accomplished from 2003 – 2011 as a result of the collective participation of pastors and lay leaders of the Diocese. Both reports reflect your commitment. The scope of the work that we have accomplished is the direct result of our cohesiveness as Apostles and Ambassadors of Christ.

Today, we renew our commitment to progress our mission with a new vision of our Church for the Glory of God.

In the upcoming year we intend to strengthen the foundation of our Diocese as we celebrate the 85th anniversary of establishment of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America.

Alongside all the standing missions, in the following months I invite you all to focus on the following twelve steps:

- 1) Expansion of the religious mission –
Spreading of God's Word
- 2) Clergy training
- 3) Rejuvenation of Parish life
- 4) Social service mission
- 5) Scholarships programs
- 6) Reorganization of the structure of St. Leon
Armenian Cathedral
- 7) Regional meetings
- 8) Campus ministry
- 9) Financial stability of St. Leon Armenian
Cathedral and the Diocese
- 10) Diocesan Endowment Fund

- 11) Youth Ministry
- 12) Diocese and satellite missions

The Diocese and satellite missions will be crucial in our Diocesan life. It requires from Los Angeles based churches to become satellites of the Diocesan Headquarters in order to secure the expansion of certain Diocesan projects, thus rejuvenating the life of the community itself as well as securing inter-community activities. This move will give the Parish the opportunity to act as an extension of the Diocese.

The ultimate goal of the Western Diocese together with all the Parishes is to preach the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and to keep firm the rich legacy of our Church in the hearts of the faithful. The noble duty and responsibility of each member of the Armenian Apostolic Church is to become an exemplary and dedicated member of the Church and a respected citizen of this country. It is also noteworthy to remind ourselves that we have the responsibility to be the torchbearers of the sacred traditions of our forefathers in our effort to secure the sanctity of the Motherland, the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, and the history and sacred values of our nation. It is our noble duty to inspire the young generation with the strength of the Christian Faith.

With this in mind, we declared 2012 as the Year of the Sunday school. Educating our youth with the principles of the Gospel and the Love of Christ will build a stronger spiritual foundation for future community leaders.

Dear Pastors and respective delegates,

We extend to you the Love of God, our genuine respect and gratitude for the services you continuously render to the Armenian Apostolic Church but above all, we convey to you our passion and commitment to serve as your spiritual leader.

My special thanks to Mr. Armen Hampar for his outstanding leadership and to the members of the Diocesan Council. Special thanks to Dn. Jeff Hazarian, Chair of the Diocesan Assembly, to Dn. Steve Adams, Vice-Chair of the Diocesan Assembly and to Ms. Lily Balian, the Secretary of

the Diocesan Assembly and to all of you for taking an active role in the success of the 85th Annual Assembly of the Western Diocese.

I also thank Dn. Harout Markarian, the Executive Director of the Western Diocese for his diligent performance and the staff members for their dedication. Special thanks to Rev. Fr. Zacharia Saribekyan, Pastor of St. Apkar, to the Parish Council and Assembly Committee members. Above all, I convey my deepest gratitude to all the faithful of the Western Diocese for their undying love and commitment to the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church.

We are pleased to announce that the recipients of this year's Archbishop's Award. These individuals have shined for their exceptional services and kind deeds throughout the year. They are Sarkis Der Sarkissian, Derek Ghookasian, Khajag Konialian, Emma Melikyan, Silva Hagopian and Gini Topalian.

What is our goal and our mission? Simply put, our mission revolves around building the House of God. Our goal is not to build physical structures. It is much more than that. Our goal is to spread the Word of God, to tend to the spiritual needs of the faithful and to provide them with a place of worship.

Life begins with the Church. We must strive to pass on the sacred mission of our Church to the young generation in order that they may inherit the beauty and wisdom the Armenian Apostolic Church has to offer.

We shall continue to lead prayerful lives in order to enrich our spirituality and perform God's Will. In our prayers, we shall continue to beseech from the All Benevolent God to grace humanity with world peace, to bless and protect the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church, to grant prosperity to the United States of America, to preserve the Motherland and the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and to uphold the Throne of St. Gregory the Illuminator.

It is with great pleasure that we announce the upcoming year (2013) as the Year of the Armenian Family. May each family find spiritual reawakening and grow closer in God.

May, 2012

THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF CONSECRATION OF ST. MARY ARMENIAN CHURCH OF COSTA MESA

From the spiritual center of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America, we greet you with the love and peace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and extend to you our blessings and genuine wishes on the blessed occasion of the 20th anniversary of consecration of St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church in Costa Mesa.

Since the consecration of the parish two decades ago, St. Mary has been among the distinctive and exemplary parishes of the Western Diocese. Under the dedicated efforts of Archpriest Fr. Moushegh Tashjian, the Parish Council and all auxiliary bodies, the parish has flourished. In April 1992, Archpriest Fr. Moushegh Tashjian assumed the responsibility of Pastor of the Costa Mesa Parish. On June 13 and 14 of the same year, the church was consecrated and named St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church. The Parish grew stronger and more vibrant acquiring new property in the process. We wholeheartedly congratulate Archpriest Fr. Moushegh Tashjian as the guardian of Christ's flock and for his commitment in carrying out the mission of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church.

We commend the resolute efforts of the parishioners in burning the mortgage of the church in a short timeframe. To aid to the financial stability of the parish and to cover the expanded religious, cultural, national, and youth activities of St. Mary within the Armenian community, the St. Mary Trust Fund was established.

On the 20th Anniversary of Consecration of St. Mary Armenian Church in Costa Mesa, we congratulate you all and convey to you our heartfelt wishes and pastoral love. May God fill all parishioners with love and wisdom in order that under the guidance of Archpriest Fr. Moushegh Tashjian,

you may continue to serve Christ our Lord with grace and humility while carrying out the God-pleasing mission of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

May God bless and protect St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church and shower bountiful blessings upon her parishioners and their loved ones.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7)

May 21, 2012

THE LAW OF CHRIST

“Carry each other’s burdens and in this way you will fulfill the Law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2)

Dear members of the ACYO family,

The Sports Weekend, although not a religious venue brings youth of the ACYO for a unique fellowship. The fun-filled weekend facilitates a new platform of friendship and camaraderie. Together you engage in activities which strengthen your physical bodies. However, Sports Weekends are special times for all of us to encounter God in our personal and collective lives. The ultimate goal of each gathering is for each of us to become a witness of Christ in the lives of our fellow brothers and sisters. ***“Carry each other’s burdens and in this way you will fulfill the Law of Christ.”*** (Galatians 6:2)

I convey to you my pastoral love and deep respect. Be steadfast in your Christian faith hope and love and remember your God-given gifts which you ought to share with many. I also would like to thank Rev. Fr. Avedis Abovian, the Youth Director of the Western Diocese for his zealous dedication and committed service.

This is also the weekend when the Armenian Apostolic Church celebrates a significant liturgical feast, namely the Feast of the Pentecost. May the Holy Spirit shower upon you bountiful blessings and gifts.

May 26, 2012

THE FEAST DAY OF PENTECOST

Today the Church celebrates Pentecost, a significant feast in the history of Christianity. The Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples in the upper room following the Ascension of our Lord into heaven is designated as the birth and beginning of the Christian Church. Empowered by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were sent into the world to preach the Word of God and bring people of God nearer to the Creator. Therefore, on the Feast Day of the Pentecost, the Church was set forth in the life of mankind with the mission realized by the disciples as commanded by the Lord.

Pentecost becomes visible in the life of each human being through the baptism and the confirmation. Each of us lives the descent of the Holy Spirit through the Holy Sacraments of baptism and confirmation. However, this divine gift needs to be lived thoroughly. The divine gifts bestowed upon us need to reflect in our God-given lives. In other words, we ought to live a Christ-like life. We ought to love the world and the people of God as Christ taught us to do so. In doing so, we truly apply the Law of God and do God's work in the world.

Pentecost, therefore, is not only one day in our life. It is our destiny. It is the day which reminds us all of our calling to be a true Christian. It is the day which empowers us all with the divine strength to see people as Christ sees them and to partners in the work of God.

God wants us to experience His love. The descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus' disciples at Pentecost makes it clear that the divine ministry will continue. Certainly the divine ministry continued and will continue as we become the disciples of Jesus and see the power of the Gospel and become witnesses of Christ in our own languages and lives. Therefore, let us all pray fervently and see the fire in our hearts, as our forefathers experienced and shared their God-given gifts with the people of God.

**WELCOMING OF BURBANK POLICE CHIEF
SCOTT LACHASSE
AND
WOODBURY UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT
DR. LUIS CALINGO**

On a very special day when the Armenian Apostolic Church celebrates the Feast of the Assumption of St. Mary, it is an honor to greet amongst us distinguished guests and I would even say members of St. Leon Armenian Cathedral family Burbank Police Chief Scott LaChasse, his colleagues and Woodbury University President Dr. Luis Calingo. Chief LaChasse is accompanied by Deputy Chief Tom Angel, Captain Ron Caruso, Captain Denis Cremins and Executive Assistant Sherre Nakamura.

Since his arrival in January, 2010, the 32-year veteran of the Los Angeles Police Department has accomplished a myriad of goals that include: assembling a top level command staff, reorganizing the department's organizational structure, implementing an accountability system, creating external oversight, updating the use of force policy, and improving officer training.

Chief LaChasse has been a close friend of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America. His most genuine interest and support for the Armenian community is greatly appreciated. Each time we have met with Chief LaChasse, we have extensively discussed matters related to the well-being of our community be it youth or family related. Recently, through his initiative, we have established a standing committee, a special task group who would have the responsibility to overlook the serious and alarming issue of domestic violence.

At the Diocese, we feel it is our noble duty to remind our people of the importance of respect for law and render

due appreciation to representatives of law enforcement. Therefore, we welcome Chief Scott LaChasse and his colleagues with open arms and wish them well in their endeavors.

We also greet amongst us a very special guest namely Woodbury University President Dr. Luis Calingo who is accompanied by Director of Development Mr. Brian Flynn. Dr. Calingo's association with the Armenian community dates back to Fresno. Dr. Calingo joins Woodbury from Dominican University, where he was executive vice president and chief academic officer since 2009 and earlier was dean of the School of Business and Leadership. Dr. Calingo previously served as dean of the Boler School of Business at John Carroll University in Cleveland; and dean of the College of Business Administration and professor of international business at California State University, Long Beach; and past chair of the California State University Association of Business Deans, which coordinates leadership initiatives of 23 business schools in the CSU system.

Woodbury University and the Western Diocese have a long-standing history which has developed over the years. Undoubtedly, the relationship between the two institutions will continue to strengthen in the years to come.

We are extremely delighted to share with our parishioners that Dr. Luis Calingo and Woodbury University Board Members have launched a extensive project in collaboration with USAID and the Western Diocese whereby 12 students will be invited to further their education at Woodbury University.

Once again, we welcome you to the spiritual center of the Western Diocese and convey to you our most genuine wishes.

August, 2012

“AIWA” SAN FRANCISCO AFFILIATE’S LAUNCH CELEBRATION

We are delighted to greet with the love and peace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as you convene for the Launch Celebration of the San Francisco Affiliate of the Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA). We are happy in knowing that St. Vartan Armenian Church in Oakland is host to this auspicious gathering. We thank Rev. Fr. Hovel Ohanyan and the organizations of St. Vartan Armenian Church for their hospitality and welcoming spirit.

Armenian women are visionaries. They continue to shine in the fields of public service, law, science, business, education, journalism, government, entertainment, and art. In dynamic world, Armenian professional women inspire with their leadership. They enrich the souls of the community. They cherish their rich heritage and strengthen their cultural identity. They educate, innovate and inspire. They are the pride of their respective communities whose success is attributed to their profound dedication and commitment. Armenian women illuminate the hearts of their communities because of their steadfast Christian Faith.

We greet guest speakers Katherine Sarafian, Producer of Pixar’s Animation feature film “Brave”, Suzy Antounian, Vice-President of Management and Philanthropy of Global Philanthropy Forum and honorary guests Nora Shirikian, Director of Erebouni Armenian School and AIWA LA Affiliate Founding Members Elizabeth Agbabian, Flora Dunaian, Hermine Janoyan and Savey Tufenkian.

We commend the noble mission of AIWA of promoting and enriching the social, economic and personal advancement of Armenian women worldwide. May the Good Lord grant you strength, bless you abundantly and guide you in your path to righteousness.

September 8, 2012

ST. LEON ARMENIAN CATHEDRAL THE CROWN OF OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE

St. Leon Armenian Cathedral is a glorious edifice which radiates the Gospel of Christ, our Lord in the lives of the faithful. It can be defined as **“The Burning Bush,”** wherein the faithful can feel God’s presence, hear His divine call, and lead lives of spiritual transformation. To an Armenian Christian, a transformed life is lived according to the Word of God. It is a life of selfless service bound by the love of Christ. It is a heart molded and shaped by the Christian values we have inherited from Holy Etchmiadzin. The life of an Armenian Christian is a life lived with humility before the Armenian people and the world.

The consecration of St. Leon Armenian Cathedral is the sacrament which unifies the Armenian faithful community under her blessed dome. Through the blessed ceremony, the Western Diocese and her entire faithful are baptized once again and are renewed in Christ.

Today, the Western Diocese embarks on a historic journey as it sets sail for new horizons. The consecration of the Cathedral, the rise of new churches in the past seven years, the newly-ordained young priests and the numerous missions are the cornerstones of the Diocese which shall expand as a result of the unshakable Christian faith which we have inherited from our forefathers.

Praise to the All Benevolent God for granting us the sacred gift of life, for we co-created with the Almighty. We are spiritually enriched by this glorious House of Prayer, which has instilled in the hearts of the faithful the desire to be in the presence and to co-create with the Creator while clinging on to the everlasting thirst and hunger to hear and spread the Word of God.

This commemorative booklet, printed especially for the Second Anniversary of Consecration of St. Leon Armenian

Cathedral is filled with memorable photos which outline historic moments in the life of the Western Diocese. The booklet is the reflection of the unceasing prayers of the Diocesan faithful. It is the result of your participation in a God-pleasing endeavor, namely the sacred deed of church construction. Here, we wish to express our pastoral love and most genuine gratitude to all donors - Benefactors, Godfathers and the faithful who have supported St. Leon Armenian Cathedral, thus exemplifying their true Christian spirit.

Today, a new life opens before us. St. Leon Armenian Cathedral opens a divine path on which travelers deepen their love for Christ, our Lord, reassure their loyalty to the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church and the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, humble themselves before and carry on the legacy of the saints and heroes who had made their Homeland, Church and Culture the vision and purpose of their lives.

Consequently, St. Leon Armenian Cathedral is an invitation to lead a religious life, a call to spiritual reawakening, a vision to broaden the spectrum of the Western Diocese through training and preparation of young priests. Herein lies the key to strong Christian communities and a more vibrant Diocese. The Cathedral will become the source of spiritual nourishment for the youth. To educate and instill in hearts of the children and the youth the light of the Gospel of Christ, our Lord will continue to be the core mission of the wondrous edifice.

“Praise the Lord, you servants of the Lord, you who stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God...Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good.” (Psalms 135:1-3) We lift our heartfelt prayers for the faithful of the Armenian Apostolic Church with these words of the Psalmist. May you continue to cherish the sacred teachings and traditions of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church and may the loving Hands of the Heavenly Father accompany each and every one of you in your life’s journey. We are reminded of the following words which state *“The Church is holy and*

shall serve for a holy purpose...The main purpose of the Church is to pass on the Gospel of Christ, the teachings and traditions of the Armenian Church to our people...to contribute to their spiritual, national and patriotic growth...to ensure hope, mercy...to help."

"The most precious gift an Armenian Christian can give to civilized nations is the Armenian Church."

St. Leon Armenian Cathedral and every church is the House of God, wherein spiritual lives are renewed and restored. Inside, we stand firm on the soil of our Homeland and look to the beacon of light that Holy Etchmiadzin.

Beloved faithful, lead a pilgrimage to and lift up your heartfelt prayers under the blessed dome of St. Leon Armenian Cathedral, where the most-pleasant voice of God is heard, and where you find the ancestral unshakable Christian faith sheltered in the depth of your soul.

**CELEBRATING
DEACON STEPAN GOZUMIAN'S
50 YEARS OF SERVICE RENDERED
TO THE ARMENIAN CHURCH**

“...Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.” (1 Timothy 4:12)

With great spiritual joy, we extend our pastoral blessings and convey our congratulatory wishes to St. Leon Armenian Cathedral Choir Director Deacon Stepan Gozumian on the joyous occasion of 50 years of committed service rendered to the Armenian Apostolic Church and 45 years of masterful choral direction.

Dear Stepan Sargavag,

Attending church services at a tender age, you have exemplified your keenness and appreciation toward music. You have furthered your musical education and have used your God-given grace to serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with the utmost devotion and humility. Your love and meticulous approach to choral music have been greatly valued at the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople where at a young age you assumed the leading role of the Choir and were appointed as Choir Director. As a man of great faith and deep religious knowledge, you renewed your commitment to serving the All Benevolent God and were ordained as a Deacon of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church in 1977.

Your love for the Church continued to grow after establishing residence in these distant shores. Driven by your love for music, with your church-loving friends you established the Khachadourian Choir and named it in honor of the late Patriarch of Constantinople His Beatitude Archbishop Karekin Khachadourian.

At your leadership and direction, the Khachadourian Choir performed at a number of historic events including the

1987 celebration of the Divine Liturgy presided by His Holiness Vazken I, the late Catholicos of All Armenians at Hollywood Bowl as thousands of faithful flocked the largest amphitheater in the United States. In 1996, the Khachadourian Choir performed at St. Peter Armenian Apostolic Church in Van Nuys during the Pontifical Celebration of the Divine Liturgy by the late Catholicos of All Armenians His Holiness Karekin I. The Hollywood Bowl was once again the setting for the Khachadourian Choir's memorable performance during the Pontifical Visit of His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians in 2001. Four years later, during the Fourth Pontifical Visit of His Holiness Karekin II, the renowned Choir beautifully performed the chants of the Armenian Divine Liturgy at the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles. On September 11, 2010, in the most memorable performance yet, the jubilant voices of the Khachadourian Choir graced the blessed walls of St. Leon Armenian Cathedral as the wondrous edifice was consecrated by His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians.

Upon his calling, a servant of Christ surrenders his life to the Church, the "Body of Christ." This calling to service is the epitome of one's unwavering Christian Faith. You have responded to God's call and have served the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Armenian people with honor and love.

We are delighted in knowing that you have earned the love and respect of the Choir members and the community at large. We commend your noble deed of taking on the demanding role of leading St. Leon Armenian Cathedral's mixed choir.

On behalf of the Diocesan Council and the entire faithful of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America, we wholeheartedly congratulate you on the auspicious occasion of your 50 years of service rendered to the Armenian Apostolic Church of which 45 years were in your capacity as Choir Director.

May the Good Lord bless and protect you and your loved ones and fill you with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in order that through God's divine grace you may continue to serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with a humble heart.

“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

September 21, 2012

THE 55TH ANNIVERSARY OF CONSECRATION OF ST. VARTAN ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH IN OAKLAND

With great spiritual joy, we extend our blessings to Rev. Fr. Hovel Ohanyan, Parish Priest of St. Vartan Armenian Apostolic Church in Oakland, to the members of the Parish Council, the Ladies Society, the Choir, the Diocesan Delegates, the auxiliary bodies and to the entire faithful on the occasion of the 55th Anniversary of Consecration of the Parish.

The story of the parish dates back to 1929 when the faithful community of Oakland expressed a keen desire to build the House of God. Because of the dedicated and collective efforts of the “Body of Christ”, the construction of a sanctuary to tend to the spiritual and religious needs of the Armenian-American community of Oakland commenced. A life-long dream was realized in April 1957 with the consecration of St. Vartan Armenian Apostolic Church.

For 55 years, St. Vartan Armenian Apostolic Church in Oakland has led the faithful to the path of righteousness and has carried over the unshakable Christian Faith of St. Vartan Mamigonian to young generation of faithful.

Since his appointment as Pastor of St. Vartan Armenian Apostolic Church, Rev. Fr. Hovel Ohanyan has served with the utmost diligence and commitment while helping to carry out the mission of the Parish. We are delighted to know that he has earned the love and respect of the Parish Council, the Ladies Society and all auxiliary bodies of St. Vartan Armenian Church. We commend the love and affection demonstrated by the Parish Council and the entire family of St. Vartan in spreading the light of the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and preserving the sacred traditions of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church.

On behalf of the Diocesan Council and the entire faithful of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America, we wholeheartedly congratulate you on the on the auspicious occasion of the 55th anniversary of consecration of St. Vartan Armenian Apostolic Church.

May the Good Lord bless the St. Vartan Parish and fill you with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in order that, under the guidance of Rev. Fr. Hovel Ohanyan, you may continue to carry out the mission of the Church and serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with grace and humility.

September 28, 2012

THANKSGIVING

Beloved faithful,

Although not observed in the Armenian Church calendar, Thanksgiving Day must be celebrated by every citizen of the United States of America. It is the day of reconciliation with God, the Creator, and with our parents, friends and loved ones. It is a day of spiritual transformation of each and every one of us. Reconciliation and transformation only occurs when we deepen in our hearts the essence of the Prayer of Thanksgiving through which we thank the All Merciful God for all the gifts graced and bestowed upon us. Above all, we reconfirm our commitment to share the gifts of God with humanity.

I wish you all a blessed Thanksgiving Day.

EXTEND A LENDING HAND TO THE ARMENIANS OF SYRIA

Beloved faithful,

As you well know, the news arriving from Syrian towns including the capitol of Damascus is bleak and worrying, to say the least. The horrifying situation in war-torn Syria has taken a large number of lives of innocent civilians, including some Armenians.

Armenians in Syria are centralized mainly in Damascus and Aleppo, where organized communities, churches, schools, and chapters have been formed. We are in desperate need of preserving these institutions.

In the past few weeks, the unstable civil conditions have been the cause infrastructural damage in Aleppo, the city where our people once prospered. We are glad to know the thousands of displaced Armenian refugees who were forced to abandon their homes, have established residence in our Homeland. However, we have also learned with that the Armenian communities in Aleppo face grave danger with each passing day.

By the Grace of God, our people have overcome numerous trials and tribulations throughout centuries including the Armenian Genocide, the Armenian Earthquake of 1988, the civil wars in Lebanon, the war-stricken Middle East, and others. However, the Armenians have remained brave. Even at times of despair, they have preserved their identity and have restored their lives. Our history affirms this.

Dear faithful in Christ, humanitarianism is a Christian virtue. In the last few years, a number of natural disasters struck America and many regions of the world. The faithful of the Western Diocese responded with acts of generosity and benevolence. Through the American Red Cross, the Western Diocese allocated relief aid in the form of financial assistance to those seeking help. The time has come to de-

monstrate our love and affection for our brothers and sisters in Syria by extending our helping hands in order that they may provide for their daily needs.

We call upon you acting upon the request of His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians.

We are aware that in these desperate times, a humanitarian organization (Relief Aid for Armenians of Syria) has been established.

Beloved faithful, we call upon the entire Armenian community to reach out to our brothers and sisters with a heartfelt donation.

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

“That your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” (I Corinthians 2:5)

The greatest miracle in the history of mankind is the birth of the Son of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in which we perceive the power of God. Human wisdom is inadequate to fully comprehend the power of God because it is limited in its aptitude.

The world, in its attempt to explicate the mystery of the birth of Jesus solely through human wisdom, empties His Birth of its power of divine mystery. The descent of the Son of God from heaven to earth can only be perceived and understood through faith, for it led humanity to light and life.

Christ is born and revealed!

Blessed is the Revelation of Christ!

The birth of Jesus is the revelation of God, a mystery that we anticipate in faith, and in His birth we perceive the new birth of our life.

Indeed, for more than two thousand years the life of mankind has been enlightened and transformed through the birth of Jesus. Science continually recorded new triumphs, humanity established stations in the cosmic universe, the world is now condensed in a computer, and yet the birth of Jesus always weighed more heavily and conveyed eternity, because in it humanity perceived the birth of Jesus and what is yet to come, while scientific achievements became only the new steps to ascend to God.

Therefore, look at the birth of Jesus from the perspective of faith, and do not try to explain divine power through human wisdom because it is greater than all human power.

The birth of Jesus is heaven opened before mankind which unites us to God so that we may turn our lives into a reflection of His light. It is not in vain that church fathers see the birth of Jesus as the mystery of peace. The world must

renew itself in the birth of Jesus. His birth is the divine miracle in the life of the world. And the person who is connected to His birth truly transforms his/her soul, and even more, he/she permeates his/her life with such vitality that we are able to see in the person the blossoming of the birth of Jesus.

At the end of each year divine blessing awaits us when our spiritual life feels the need of divine energy to rebuild in our spiritual essence the person in the image of God. The birth of Jesus is truly the call to prudence so that we may live our life imitating the life of our Lord, freeing our spiritual essence from all undesirable symptoms of the transient life, from adverse habits and adornments that suffocate within us the birth of the new person, the humble and benevolent individual who strives for peace. If we do not look at the birth of Jesus in faith, and if we do not penetrate its essence driven by divine power, then we will be much distanced from God, and the virtuous tendency in us to become co-creators with God will be suppressed within us.

My fellow Christian, enter into the depths of your soul in prayer because it is only in the humility of your heart that you can welcome the Son of God. The Son of God being born in the manger, nurtured in the love of a Pure Mother, made His life an invitation to a life of humility, the path to God for all.

The birth of Jesus is indeed a path opened before man that leads to God. In the great family of nations our Holy Church has been the gate on the path to God. Many generations enduringly renewed their lives in the wondrous birth of our Lord and dedicated their lives to Him. They understood best that to live life with Jesus means to live the spiritual and moral life and to uphold its value as a gift from God. Our ancestors, attentive to the light of the presence of God, discovered within themselves supreme mysteries and visions that formed sacred values in the inner-being of the Armenian Christians. The perpetuity of our nation, our faith and culture, and even more, respect toward global human values, peace, and the spirit of justice and brotherhood among nations is warranted by these values. The birth of our Lord Jesus

reinforces in our spiritual being the divine so that the path of our life may be smooth. Humanity urgently needs to nurture its mind and soul with the word of God, with the tenets of the Gospel of Christ. The world of yesterday and today, in its history also recorded sad events caused primarily by the absence of God in man.

Christ is born and revealed!

Blessed is the Revelation of Christ!

To celebrate the birth of Christ means to make life a journey with Christ. Those who take that journey find within themselves the true life and bring light to the mankind. The great men of history are those who stayed on course in their journey with Christ. The saints lived a life imitating the life of Christ and thus became the fervor in the veins of the Church.

We are at the threshold of 2013 and God will grant us a new gift of 365 days. As individuals we will uphold the value to the gift and moreover, as a community we will uphold the value of the divine gifts. Man is capable of accomplishing so much! Nevertheless, the greatest moral victory of man remains the vision to building the spiritual that will be expressed tangibly in the character of the individual, the family structure, the community. It is with awareness of this that we declared 2013 the Year of the Armenian Family in our diocese. Therefore, in all aspects of our life let us make the Armenian family the focus of our prayers and thoughts. The stronger the Armenian family is in faith and moral values, the stronger will be the Armenian Church. And the stronger the Armenian Church is the better she will be able to accomplish her God-pleasing sacred mission, beginning from the nurture of the child in faith to the most modest services that keep the big family of the Church secure and in unity.

The birth of Christ is the miracle in the spiritual life of mankind that leads us to the truth. The one, who bends his knees before the Infant Jesus at the manger, will certainly discover in oneself a new zeal for life, to overcome one's shortcomings and to give birth to courage within oneself.

The birth of Christ is the good news of a new life that no doubt we were all waiting for. Therefore, let us open our hearts so the Infant Jesus may be born in us. It is not with outward adornments that we will be enriched but our hearts, adorned with the birth of Jesus brings to us the priceless treasure, the true happiness, so much more than the temporal and material treasures.

*Christ is born and revealed!
Blessed is the Revelation of Christ!*

Holy Nativity, 2013

EASTER MESSAGE

“We have seen the Lord!” (John 20:25)

These words, uttered after the Victorious Resurrection of Christ, embody the supreme righteousness of the single most spiritually enlightening event in history. Strengthened by the miracle of the Christ’s Resurrection, the Apostles informed the news to Thomas and to doubters like him of the modern times.

“We have seen the Lord!”

Contained in these words is the living image of the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In essence, those who are in communion with Christ feel the defeat of death. Through His Victorious Resurrection, Christ transformed the life of humanity and led believers to an everlasting life. In the Resurrection of Christ lies divine strength and celestial vigor. Those who lead humble lives, truly cherish the mystery of the Resurrection. The Victorious Resurrection of Christ, our Lord unites them with God. Had our forefathers not carried on with the sanctity of the Resurrection of Christ, we would surely not have inherited and been granted a New Armenia, a prosperous Holy Etchmiadzin and a vision to broaden our horizons.

For our Church forefathers, Christ’s Resurrection was the source of renewal. *“To a Christian, the Resurrection of Christ, our Savior, must become the source of boundless spiritual strength which enlightens dark paths, grants hope, combats fear and doubt with prayer and faith, and stirs up joy with humility and generosity with greed. In summary, the Victorious Resurrection of Christ, the Savior strengthens the soul with love and illuminates the path toward everlasting life.”* (H. H. Karekin I, Catholicos of All Armenians-1995-1999)

The Resurrection of Christ is the light in darkness. May the life of Christ become the mirror image of our own. His

Resurrection deeply enrooted in each of us is the undying hope amidst the abyss.

The Resurrection of Christ calms the storm of doubt and fear. Each time we distance ourselves from our Creator, we are reminded to look up in the Heavens where the light of Christ's Resurrection grants us strength and comfort and reassures us of His glorious victory over death.

The Resurrection of Christ is the divine love which dwells in the depths of our hearts. This love rejects all of our frailties in order that we may walk alongside the path of Christ, our Savior.

The Resurrection of Christ reveals the divine presence of the Almighty God in our lives. In His Glorious Resurrection lies the foundation of the Church. Christ's Resurrection is the supreme truth and nothing competes with its sanctity and virtue. If we walk with God, we inherit the Heavenly Kingdom as promised by Christ, our Savior and as realized by His Glorious Resurrection.

In Christ's Resurrection, we also witness the Rebirth of the Armenian people, raised from the ashes of evil and death. The spiritual lives of our forefathers were transformed because of their firm and unwavering belief in the Victorious Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Like "The Burning Bush," our people envisioned the path to a New Life and sought spiritual comfort and nourishment in Holy Etchmiadzin, the religious center of all Armenians.

"We have seen the Lord!" Let us celebrate the Victorious Resurrection of Christ with the vision of a new life, with new hopes, with renewed vigor and reawakened faith so that we may carry on the torch of Christ's Apostles and convey the blessed message to the younger generation, exclaiming *"We have seen the Lord!"*

*"Christ is Risen from the Dead,
Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ, our Lord."*

Easter, 2013

THE ARMENIAN FAMILY IS THE BEDROCK OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

When we reflect on the mission and the stability of the Armenian Apostolic Church, we must direct our focus on the Armenian family. In other words, how can we ensure the sustainability and the progress of the Armenian Church if the Armenian family, a miniature-scale representation of the Armenian Church, is not a stable structure? Time and modern advancements cannot in any way degrade or diminish the role and the mission of the Armenian family. The family is the purpose of the functionality of the Armenian Church. In the Armenian Church, couples enter into the sacred bond of marriage, and vowing before God, they create a new church. The lack of morality and values in society is attributed to materialistic obsessions. When the purpose of one's life turns into the endless quest to possess material goods, it is at that exact moment when morality is destroyed and the family structure is ruined.

It is our call that you attend Church services regularly and learn to pray as a family. Encourage your children to form a bond with the Church in order that they may belong to the Body of Christ and may grow according to sacred Armenian teachings. Ask yourselves such questions as how frequently do we attend Church? What role does the Church play in my life and in the life of my family? Have we done our part to ensure that our children are educated in the Church? The reason why a number of our community's children are engaged in wrongdoings is due to the lack of the Church in their lives, for they have distanced themselves from our Savior. The instability and the chaos that dwells within our families is due to the lack of spirituality within its core. Parents, make it your first priority to ensure that your children are raised in a religious environment. Providing only financial stability for your children is a sign of weakness and is a form

of escape. The Church and her vision must live and thrive within the family, for the Armenian family must be the source for growth and progress of the Church.

We call upon all parents to fill your house with the Word of God, the radiating light of the Gospel of Christ. It is our wish that you answer to our call and encourage your children to be engaged in the life of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church in order that they may flourish spiritually and distance themselves from false teachings which stain the Armenian Christian lifestyle and act as a hindrance to our unshakable ancestral faith.

Beloved parents, you are the Church. Be bound to the Church which stems from Christ, The Son of God. Be involved in the life of the Church through unceasing prayer, humble service. Involve your children and the youth by enrolling them in Sunday Schools and in youth programs. Let the Church mold, educate, and define their essence. It is only then that you will attest to the spiritual transformation of your families and will witness God's love and wisdom that is ever so present in each of the members.

The mission and the sacred duty of the Church is not realized solely by the clergy or the priest. We can only succeed in the noble mission if we dedicate ourselves to collective service and provide our youth the spiritual education and discipline it so dearly requires.

In his book entitled **Heavenly Family** (Trakhdi Undanik), Khrimian Hayrig writes, "The home and the family is a small kingdom with defined boundaries. It knows no violence, no sword, and no staff. It is bound by a father's love and a mother's enduring affection. People and nations do not survive on bread alone; they do not thrive as citizens of kingdoms. Rather, people thrive by living lives of morality and virtue. The family is the source of both."

In the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America, we have dedicated 2013 as the Year of the Family. Let our spiritual lives and our prayers revolve around the Armenian family.

WESTERN DIOCESE IN ACTION

“The Church in action will be the key theme in every corner of this Diocese. New missions, projects, activities and policies will be initiated regularly. A flurry of activities will energize our parishes, our youth and our Diocese.” (May 3, 2003).

Since May 2003 the Western Diocese has been revitalized with many new projects and missions. At the core of this growth was the consecration of numerous churches that have since inspired our faithful and spread the mission of the Armenian Apostolic Church to communities that had long been yearning for a spiritual and cultural presence. Let us not lose the zeal in doing good as our *collective* efforts have lit the path to the mission of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Diocesan Headquarters

Arshag and Eleanor Dickranian Diocesan Complex

“The strength of a Diocese lies in its ability to stay on the right path.”

During the Primacy of Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, the Diocesan Headquarters and the adjacent areas underwent renovation. The renovated areas included the Nazareth and Sima Kalaydjian Banquet Hall, the Paul Brothers Galleria, the Armen Hampar Reception Room, a portion of the administrative offices and the Primate’s reception room. With the creation of new departments and addition of staff, the next phase of renovation and improvements is already in the planning phase to accommodate for the departments and personnel within the administrative offices.

- **Personnel**

The expansion of Diocesan programs and missions are a testament with the staffing of trained and professional employees. In the short span of 8 years, the number of Diocesan

employees has nearly tripled and presently totals 16 members. Of the 16 full-time employees, 13 hold a bachelors degree or higher and 8 of which hold post-graduate degrees from accredited educational institutions. In addition, a majority of the staff participate in continuous education programs in field specific areas to keep pace with the continually advancing employment landscape.

- **Office of the Executive Director**

At the direction of the Primate, the position of the Executive Director was created in 2006. One of the primary responsibilities of the Executive Director is to ensure efficiency in management of the every-day operation of the Diocese. In addition, the Executive Director is responsible for implementing policies and procedures approved by the Diocesan Council. Working under the direction of the Primate and Diocesan Council, the Executive Director is also responsible in management of all employees and all personnel matters (including employee benefits). In consultation with the Primate, the Executive Director also recommends personnel policies and budgetary proposals. Another key element of the office of the Executive Director is to ensure all employees are equipped with adequate resources to provide support not only to the Diocese and the Diocesan Parishes but also to further promote the mission of Armenian Apostolic Church throughout the Western Diocese.

Harout Markarian holds a B.A. in Political Science (California State University, Northridge) and a M.A. in Public Administration (University of San Francisco). Serving the Diocese since 2008.

- **Religious Education Department**

In 2005, the Primate issued a directive for the creation of an essential department within the Western Diocese, namely the Religious Education Department. Aimed at providing spiritual nourishment and promoting Christian values, the Religious Education Department holds weekly Bible study sessions,

caters to the spiritual needs of students and provides lectures/seminars for Diocesan Priesthood-Candidates. In addition, the Religious Education Department is responsible for nearly 300 religious and educational publications since its formation in 2005.

Mashdots Jobanian holds a B.A. and M.A. in Religious & Philosophical Studies (Norwegian Theological Seminary) and a Recovery Ministry certificate (Fuller Seminary). Serving the Diocese since 2006.

- **Office of the Youth Director**

The Office of the Diocesan Youth Director was reorganized at the discretion of the Primate. The Youth Director manages a separate department where various youth programs and missions are organized, planned and executed. The Youth Director oversees the Christian Youth Mission to Armenian which serves to unify and strengthen the Armenian community by establishing a bridge between Diaspora's Youth and Our Homeland through participation in the social, religious, professional and cultural life of Hayastan. In addition, the Youth Director oversees the Armenian Church Youth Organization which actively integrates its members into the life of the church by providing opportunities for Worship, Service, Education, and Fellowship in Christ according to the doctrines and traditions of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Fr. Avedis Abovian holds a B.A. and M.Div. in Religious Studies (Claremont School of Theology). Serving the Diocese since 2008.

- **Communications Department**

The Western Diocese employs contemporary methods in efforts to reach out to the Diocesan faithful. The website of the Western Diocese is a vital source of communication with the faithful. The weekly e-newsletter has over 3,800 subscribers. In 2012, the website will undergo a series of changes and will include interactive content (videos, podcasts, etc.). The new changes and educational content that will be inclu-

ded in the revamped Western Diocese website will serve not only as a resource for the Western Diocese faithful but also the faithful of the Armenian Church throughout the world.

Sergey Arustamyan holds a B.A. in Business Administration (California State University, Northridge). Serving the Diocese since 2009.

- **TV and Media Department**

In 2005, Archbishop Hovnan Derderian spearheaded a new project with a Diocesan television program called “The Voice of the Armenian Church.” The success of the program was echoed throughout the community. In February 2011, a television and media department was launched. Upon completion of the St. Leon Cathedral, the studio of the TV and Media Department was opened with state-of-the-art equipment. Located adjacent to the Zorayan Museum of the Western Diocese, the TV and Media Department studio is used for taping the weekly television programs and various other promotional, spiritual and cultural programs. Presently, the Diocesan programs are aired on a global Armenian network and are also made available through social media such as YouTube and Facebook.

Vahe Sargsyan holds a B.A. and M.A. in Theological Studies (Yerevan State University). Serving the Diocese since 2009.

Aram Mousoian holds a B.A. in Television Production (California State University, Northridge). Serving the Diocese since 2010.

- **Western Diocese Endowment Fund (WDEF)**

The WDEF is one of the pillars of the financial security and stability of the Western Diocese. Income derived from the fund sponsors educational programs, humanitarian missions, building projects and many other missions. Established in 1979, the contributions to the Western Diocese Endowment Fund have increased dramatically since 2003 thus further ex-

panding the operations of the Western Diocese. The WDEF is currently chaired by Ben Krikorian.

- **The Aga Sargsian Library**

The official opening ceremony of the Aga Sargsian Library of the Western Diocese was held on June 6, 2006 and was presided by His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians. The library houses over 7,000 books and periodicals, some of which have been graciously donated by our faithful. Additionally, the completion of a recent project has enabled the Aga Sargsian Library to make available and share its inventory of 7,000 plus books with other libraries throughout the United States.

Hayk Madoyan holds a B.A. and M.A. in Theological Studies (Yerevan State University). Serving the Diocese since 2004.

- **Zorayan Museum**

The official opening ceremony of the Zorayan Museum of the Western Diocese was held on September 11, 2010, the day of the consecration of St. Leon Armenian Cathedral. The ceremony was presided by His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians during his Fourth Pontifical Visit to the Western Diocese. As a well known and respected venue within the community, the Zorayan Museum has hosted the exhibits of such renowned artists as Carzou and Pinajian. Presently, the Zorayan Museum houses precious historical and religious artifacts such as rugs, manuscripts, vestments, metals and coinage. In addition, various artists have donated artwork and sculptures that are currently displayed in the Zorayan Museum. Hayk Madoyan is the current Curator. Antranik Zorayan is the current chair of the Zorayan Museum Committee.

- **Western Diocese Summer Camp**

Western Diocese Summer Camp is a 160-acre property located in Dunlap, California about 225 miles north of the

Western Diocese and St. Leon Cathedral. It is within five miles of the entrance to Kings Canyon and the Sequoia National Park at an elevation of 4,400 feet. The property offers a unique, serene retreat setting, perfect for reflection and fellowship. The Western Diocese Summer Camp program has been created to nurture the bodies, minds, and spirits of Armenian youth in a natural setting, providing a stimulating environment of community which inspires individual growth and the values of Christian Fellowship. Acquired on December 3, 1987, the Diocesan campgrounds underwent a series of additions and renovations during the Primacy of Archbishop Derderian. Such additions included the building of new log cabins, the addition of the tennis and basketball courts, the boat house, the placement of a cross-stone (khatchkar - sculpted in Armenia), and the newly completed staff housing. The Youth Director, Fr. Avedis Abovian, oversees the Summer Camp. The Summer Camp Committee and the Camp Board are responsible for the organization and operation of the camp.

St. Leon Armenian Cathedral Parish

“The vision of the Diocesan Cathedral is the crowning of our faith life.”

The vision of building the Diocesan Cathedral dates back to 1927, since the establishment of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America. This vision has always brought together the faithful under the leadership of our former Primates. It is during the Primacy of His Eminence Archbishop Hovnan Derderian that this vision truly gained momentum and was realized in September 2010.

The Ground blessing Ceremony of the Cathedral was held on October 2, 2007 and was presided by His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians. On September 11, 2010, the Pontiff presided over one of the most sacred rites of the Armenian Apostolic Church, the consecration of St. Leon Armenian Cathedral, the spiritual center of the Western Diocese.

Fr. Khajag Shahbazyan holds a M.Div. in Theology (Claremont School of Theology). Serving as the Pastor of St. Leon Cathedral since 2010.

Diocesan Clergy

“A clergyman, as a humble servant of the Church, ought to extend to the flock of Christ an invitation to a new life.”

The number of clergy within the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America is among the highest in the world. As communities get larger, the need for pastoral care and guidance becomes greater. Over ten clergymen were invited to the Western Diocese for administrative or pastoral duties since 2003.

- **Stewardship Program**

In 2004, in order to address pastoral shortages as a result of retiring clergy and an expanding Diocese, the Stewardship Program of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America was re-organized by Diocesan Primate Archbishop Hovnan Derderian. The Stewardship Committee is currently chaired by Dr. Vahram Biricik.

By the Grace of God and the financial support of Diocesan faithful, five (5) young clergymen have been ordained since 2008 and have taken on challenging pastoral assignments within their respective communities. These promising young priests have dedicated their lives to serving our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the Armenian Apostolic Church. They include:

Rev. Fr. Avedis Abovian

(Ordained in May 2008 – currently serving as WD Youth Director)

Rev. Fr. Khajag Shahbazyan

(Ordained in May 2008 – currently serving as Pastor of St. Leon Armenian Cathedral)

Rev. Fr. Nerses Hayrapetyan

(Ordained in October 2008 – currently serving as Pastor of St. Sarkis, Santa Clarita)

Rev. Fr. Krikor Zakaryan
(Ordained in October 2009 – currently serving
as Pastor of St. Garabed, Rancho Mirage)
Rev. Fr. Mesrob Ash
(Ordained in April 2012 – currently serving
as pastor of St. John, San Francisco)

***Present Priesthood-Candidates
of the Western Diocese:***

Dn. Sarkis Alanjian
Dn. Guzh Khachikyan
Dn. Mkrtich Ksachikyan
Dn. Hovnan Vardanyan

• **Deacons and Acolytes**

St. Stephen the Protodeacon is the vivid example of selfless and dedicated service to Christ and His Church. Since his election as Primate, Archbishop Hovnan Derderian has ordained a great number of acolytes, sub-deacons and deacons enriching the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America with devout servants of Christ. 102 Deacons, 108 Sub-Deacons, 62 stole-bearers, and nearly 300 acolytes have been ordained throughout the Western Diocese since 2003.

New and Mission Parishes

“The establishment of parishes within the Western Diocese is one of the most crucial missions, as with the formation of each parish, a new family is formed.”

Since the founding of the Western Diocese 84 years ago, up until the Primacy of Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, the Western Diocese had 25 parishes under its jurisdiction. In the last nine years, eight properties were acquired and nine mission parishes were formed.

Newly Consecrated churches

- St. Peter, Glendale (Consecrated January 4, 2004)

- St. Gregory the Illuminator, Pasadena
(Consecrated September 29, 2007)
- St. Kevork, Portland (Consecrated March 22, 2009)
- St. Apkar, Scottsdale
(Consecrated September 20, 2009)
- St. Sarkis, Santa Clarita
(Consecrated December 20, 2009)
- St. Leon Armenian Cathedral
(Consecrated September 11, 2010)
- St. Garabed, Rancho Mirage
(Consecrated January 7, 2012)
- Holy Resurrection, Seattle
(Consecration January 14, 2012)

New Mission Parishes

- Denver, Colorado
- Albuquerque, New Mexico
- Boise, Idaho
- Palmdale, California
- Ventura County, California
- Victorville, California
- Riverside, California
- Carmel, California
- Salt Lake City, Utah

It is worth mentioning that new properties were acquired for the Crescenta Valley, Las Vegas, and San Diego parishes. The adjacent property to St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church was also acquired as part of the expansion process of the parish. The Taglyan Cultural Complex was built next to St. John Garabed Armenian Church in Hollywood and the Kirkjan Hall was built adjacent to St. Garabed in Rancho Mirage.

Missions in Armenia

“Armenia is an everlasting truth...”

- **Etchmiadzin Children’s Fund (ECF)**

The Etchmiadzin Children's Fund, a mission which aims to reach out to the orphans and financially disadvantaged children in Armenia (up until the age of 16), is one of the dearest to the heart of the Primate. Established during the Primacy of His Eminence Archbishop Vatche Hovsepian, much of the success of the ECF has been recorded in the recent years. A vivid proof of this statement is the number of sponsored children. Initially, 250 children received financial assistance. Today, the number has more than doubled. Close to 600 children receive financial support through the efforts of kind-hearted individuals. The sponsorship level has also increased from \$250 to \$365 (\$1/day). The ECF Committee is currently chaired by Gayane Tatouljian.

- **Mer Hooys – House of Hope**

“Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us,” are the words of St. Paul the Apostle in his Epistle to the Romans (chapter 5 verse 5.) The dedicated individuals of the Mer Hooys-House of Hope mission have instilled in the hearts of Armenian orphans this exact message of hope.

Mer Hooys' mission is to provide opportunities for achieving a productive and secure future to many young adults in Armenia who have outgrown their childhood homes in orphanages or who come from disadvantaged lifestyles. Mer Hooys provides housing and a family environment for young women in need and reaches out to both young men and women from disadvantaged lifestyles who otherwise have no hope of receiving higher level education, job skills training and life skills development. The Mer Hooys Committee is currently chaired by Hon. Adrienne Krikorian.

- **Christian Youth Mission to Armenia (CYMA)**

CYMA was established by Archbishop Hovnan Derderian in Canada in 1992. At the time, the acronym stood for Canadian Youth Mission to Armenia. After his election to

the Primacy of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America, CYMA was incorporated into the life of the Western Diocese as Christian Youth Mission to Armenia and began to flourish.

Through CYMA, Armenian youth connect with their spiritual and cultural identity. Some of the activities during the trip include visiting spiritual and cultural monuments, internship opportunities amongst various institutions, interaction with youth from around the world, and introduction to contemporary Armenian society. Fr. Avedis Abovian oversees the CYMA mission and the current chair for the CYMA committee is Armine Semirdjian.

- **Sister Church Program**

The Sister Church Program was founded on the basis to provide financial support to the churches in Armenia. Considering that the Diocese of Gougark is presently in dire need of a helping hand, the Western Diocese sought it vital to extend a helping hand to the historical churches not only to the Diocese of Gougark but also to many others.

Participating Parishes in the Sister Church Program include:

- St. John Garabed, Hollywood – Holy Resurrection (Diocese of Armavir)
- St. John Garabed, San Diego – St. John Mkrtych (Diocese of Artsakh)
- St. Gregory the Illuminator, Pasadena – St. Mary (Diocese of Gougark)
- St. Peter, Van Nuys – St. Sarkis and parish in Berd (Stepanavan)
- St. Mary, Costa Mesa – St. Mary (Tashir)
- St. John, San Francisco – St. John (Sisian)
- St. James, Los Angeles – St. Gregory the Illuminator (Goris)
- St. Kevork, Glendale – the Savior (Musa Ler borough) and Holy Resurrection (Parakar)

- Armenian Church of Crescenta Valley – St. Nshan (Village of Gai)
- St. Leon Armenian Cathedral – St. Kevork Cathedral (Tbilisi, Georgia)
- St. Garabed, Rancho Mirage – Diocese of Georgia
- St. Paul, Fresno – Village of Tsovinar Sunday School (Diocese of Gegharkunik)
- St. Vartan, Oakland – St. Mariané (Ashtarak)
- Armenian Church of Riverside and Armenian Church of La Verne – St. Narekatsi (Alaverdi)

• **Completed Projects in Armenia**

In recent years, a number of dedicated faithful became involved in church building projects in Armenia. Among them included Diocesan benefactors Mr. and Mrs. Gerald and Patricia Turpanjian who sponsored the complete renovation of the Harichavank monastery and the adjacent theological seminary. Others include benefactors Bedros and Anna Oruncakciel whose generosity made it possible for the building of the Conference Hall and the Gymnasium in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. St. Leon Cathedral Godfathers and Diocesan Benefactors Drs. Petros and Karine Taglyan made a generous contribution to the library of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin in memory of Dr. Yeghia Taglyan. The church in the village of Berd underwent complete renovation due to the generosity of the late Diocesan benefactor John Stevens.

Lastly, with the active participation of Diocesan benefactors, more than a million dollars was raised for the Stewardship Fund of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. The funds will be allocated for the education, religious training and pastoral preparation of future clergymen of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Academic Involvement – Schools & Universities

“We must make it our mission to instill in the hearts of the youth the unshakable Christian faith of our Church

forefathers in order that they may walk alongside God and be immersed in His love.”

For most of Armenian history, the Armenian Apostolic Church has been a vital source of education. Some of the most brilliant minds in Armenian history including St. Sahag, St. Mesrob, Movses of Khoren, Ananias of Shirak, David the Unbeatable, Gregory of Narek, St. Nerses the Graceful have been educated in the ancient Armenian monasteries which at the time served as educational centers.

The Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America continues educating the youth in efforts to preserve our Christian faith, our rich heritage and our identity in these distant shores.

The Diocese is actively engaged in the curriculum of five Armenian Schools. They include AGBU Manoogian-Demirdjian School, AGBU Vatche and Tamar Manoukian School, T.C.A. Arshag Dickranian School, Little Angels Art School and Alfred and Marguerite Hovsepian School. Religious courses are offered in the above mentioned schools. Diocesan Saturday and Sunday Schools also offer Armenian classes with a revised curriculum. On several occasions throughout the year, the Primate pays pastoral visits to the local schools where he meets with the students, faculty and PTO members.

In addition to the above grade schools, the Western Diocese has established relationships with the following universities: University of California Los Angeles, University of Southern California, Woodbury University, University of California Santa Barbara, University of California San Diego, and Claremont School of Theology.

Subcommittees and Auxiliary

Various subcommittees and auxiliaries within the Western Diocese help promote the mission of the Armenian Apostolic Church through a wide range of projects. Below is a list of notable subcommittees and auxiliaries within the Western Diocese.

Primate's Circle of Friends
Ladies Society Central Council
Ladies Auxiliary
Armenian Church Youth Organization
Junior Godfathers
Protocol Committee
Ecumenical and Inter-Faith Relations

Organizations

The Armenian Diaspora is rich with associations and organizations that strive to preserve the Armenian identity and promote Armenian values. As the spiritual center of the community, the Western Diocese strives to establish fond mutual relations with many organizations and associations not only within the Armenian community but within the community at large.

The Western Diocese collaborates with the following organizations:

- Armenian General Benevolent Union
- Ararat Home of Los Angeles
- Armenia Fund, Inc.
- United Armenian Fund
- Armenian Medical Association of California
- Armenian Bone Marrow Donor Registry
- Armenian Bar Association
- Hye Geen Circle
- Organization of Istanbul Armenians
- Armenian Society of Los Angeles
- Knights of Vartan
- Armenian National Council
- Tekeyan Cultural Association
- Nor Serount Cultural Association
- The American Red Cross
- World Vision
- Glendale Adventist Medical Center
- Glendale Memorial Hospital

- Claremont School of Theology
- Loyola Marymount University
- Huffington Ecumenical Institute
- Woodbury University