

ARCHBISHOP HOVNAN DERDERIAN

Spiritual

Reflections

2021

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Mrs. Sybille Aprahamian

“The Lord is my refuge.”
(Psalms 91:9)

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ST. NERSESS THE GRACEFUL

“Today, the Sun of righteousness was revealed before mankind”.

Cuddled in the heavenly azure, the star of Bethlehem shone like a celestial lantern cherishing the spark of hope and expectation. Every now and then, the gloomy clouds seemed to devour the star in a sinister attempt to diminish its brightness. Despite their relentless efforts, the fearless star emerged through the darkness. Heaven and earth were both in agony of labor, for the star was giving birth to a sun and the Son of God would be born to a Virgin. At dusk, when the darkness disappeared and the stars lost their glimmer, the sun rose in the horizon and the Savior was born.

Indeed, the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the radiating sun in the life of humanity. In the words of St. Nersess the Graceful, “Today, the Sun of righteousness was revealed before mankind.” And what is the Sun of righteousness for a Christian, if not the compass, the touchstone, and the standard of all moral and spiritual values?

It’s not a coincidence that from ancient times, long before Christ, people worshipped the sun because it was the source of life as well as the guide in determining the time, weather, and orientation. Remember, people did not have smartphones or navigation systems back in the day.

When we delve into the mystery of the Incarnation, especially reflecting on the promise of salvation and the establishment of peace in the world, the metaphor of the Sun of righteousness becomes clearer and more comprehensible.

People perceive what they wish to perceive. However, the objective reality is that we live in turbulent times. The world is plagued by geopolitical, economic, religious, and social turmoil which jeopardizes peace and stability in the world. Of the aforementioned, however, the most tragic is the troubled soul and the distorted thought of men, which lead to a state of disorientation, uncertainty, and restlessness. As described in the Psalms, “They wander in the wilderness in a desolate way; they cannot find a city to dwell in.” (Psalms 107:4) People seem to be lost, for the value system has been distorted. Vice and virtue, truth and lie, black and white have been confusingly intertwined. For instance, we witness the brute force of countries, who ignite wars and command the intimidating display of their military might. Ironically and quite hypocritically, the leaders of those countries do not miss an opportunity to lecture on world peace from lofty podiums.

This example alone concurs the classic double standard of morals of today’s society. “Democracy,” “liberalism,” “progressiveness,” and many other “isms” have captured us in a web of ambiguous meanings and arbitrary definitions. Subconsciously, we have become the captives of our thought as we fear to touch on those sensitive terms thus, avoiding to call things by their proper names.

Political correctness and oversensitivity have turned us into indecisive, spineless, and wishy-washy beings. This unfortunate reality is due to the loss of our sense of direction and the abandonment of Christian ethics and values.

Today, as we celebrate the Nativity and Theophany of the Son of God, the sun of righteousness shines in the horizon. Christ the Babe is born. God, the Father has favored us with another opportunity to repent and reclaim the truthful meaning of life having Him as the ultimate standard and the guide. The miraculous birth of Christ makes us shine again in the blistering cold and warm the hearts of those who surround us. The Sun of righteousness illuminates our lives, brightens our minds, alters our perspective, and clears our vision. Most importantly, the Sun of righteousness, the Son of God, through His miraculous birth liberates us from the captivity of fear so that we can express ourselves straightforwardly and earnestly without succumbing to hypocrisy, and fake values. God makes the Sun of righteousness rise upon us so that we may see and follow the truth without giving way to sin, praising mediocrity, or promoting weakness.

On the threshold of the New Year, when we celebrate the Nativity of Christ, these reflections allow us to reevaluate our spiritual lives. Then we commit to surrender our lives into the hands of God so that He may mold and shape our spirituality and increase in us the faith, hope, and love. In this sense, the birth of Christ is a divine message addressed to us to love one

another, the Church, and the Motherland. Moreover, the birth of the Only Begotten exhorts us to strive to become perfect, exemplary, just, loyal, peace-loving, humble, humanist, truthful, fearless, creative and visionary servants.

Our moral and spiritual obligations are not confined to the aforementioned qualities. Furthermore, as true Christians we are obliged to also pray for those who do not know the Savior. We pray for the peace in the world and for the souls of those who perished as a result of bloody wars, natural disasters without seeing the dawn of Christmas. We pray for the world and hope that the year 2017 may be prosperous for all.

Today, the Sun of righteousness was revealed before mankind.

Christ is Born and Revealed. Blessed is the Revelation of Christ.

Feast of the Nativity and Theophany 2017
Burbank

RECLAIM: JOURNEY WITH GOD

My dear and faithful participant of the Reclaim Conference and Rally,

What brings us all to this sacred ground of the Cathedral and the Headquarters of the Western Diocese is our Christian Faith. This three-day-long weekend will be the theme for the renewal of our faith and the time of spiritual transformation to reconnect our lives to the Armenian Apostolic Church.

This Faith Rally and Christian Conference, a mission envisioned by Father Vazken and carried by priests and all of us will be the most precious honor and tribute to all who have preceded us living the Christian Faith and entrusted us with the legacy of our Church. Thus, the entire weekend entitled “Reclaim - Embracing our Faith in a Changing World” will be a beginning of a new journey in our faith life. Every stop that we take will bring us closer to God and closer to each other so that in us God is glorified.

I extend my warmest appreciation to Fr. Vazken for his leadership and extend thanks to all without exception who put their heart and soul into this unprecedented event to turn this Reclaim weekend into a reality.

As we embark on this weekend, I share with you a thought from a Christian theologian, which I believe would help us set the path of our journey on the right track.

“Our task as Christians, then, is not to adopt ourselves to what is going on in the society around us, but to be faithful to Jesus Christ.” John B. Cobb

Therefore, the Reclaim weekend will be journey with God, a journey of prayer and togetherness, living and renewing our faith life, the discovery journey of return to home, where God will embrace us. Throughout the weekend there will be multiple events and venues to deepen our faith in God and commit ourselves to the living Church. Our vision and aim is to reawaken in the hearts of our youth and the faithful the legacy of our ancestors who have lived a life witnessing Christ and surrendered their lives into the Hands of God.

God is calling on us to be devout stewards of the Church. This will be the time to respond with love, a compassionate and repenting heart, with patience and understanding, a time to learn the Bible and the history of our Christian faith, and the time to make the ultimate commitment to be emerged and engaged in the Church. Therefore, our motto will be “Faithful to Jesus Christ.”

I wish you all a blessed weekend and prosperous journey to search our faith values and live them and embrace them in a changing world.

God bless you!

March 10, 2017

Burbank

RECLAIM OUR FAITH IN A CHANGING WORLD

*The Purpose of the journey is to grow in our Christian Faith
Embracing our Faith in a Changing World*

The world may change, however, the Christian Faith can never be an accommodating faith. The Christian Faith armors us against all odds which can shatter the core values of Christianity. We need to become more vigilant and ultra-orthodox in our faith life to fight back challenges and attacks which can dismantle the sanctity of a Christian family. Our love and compassion should never be understood as acceptance of non-relevant aspects in our society. Christ, our Lord sat with the sinners to change them and guide them to the truth. He never became one of them.

Reclaim our faith in a changing world. This is a milestone in the life of our Diocese to revitalize our spiritual life, to strengthen the foundations of our Church mission. The mission energy has to be reflected in our God-given life on all levels of the Church. From Sunday school to the adult faith class professionalism is important. The Christian identity needs to be maintained intact.

The West has harmed the basic understanding of Christianity and communities are crumbling. The Armenian Church has a unique mission to realize. Throughout centuries, we have lived the Christian Faith and set

the example for others. We cannot be diluted in a changing world. We ought to become the chlorine in the water.

Herewith, I wish to quote the late Pope John Paul II who said “I would especially like to thank Armenians for their long history of fidelity to Christ, a fidelity that has known persecution and martyrdom. The children of Christian Armenia have shed their blood for the Lord, but through their sacrifice, the whole Church grew and was strengthened.”

Therefore, together we have an important mission to realize: to be the arms of Christ our Lord, the evangelists of the changing world, reclaiming the faith of our forefathers, to be the energy of the mission of our Church. No other nation has ever lived the Christian Faith to the extent that our forefathers have lived. The birth of Christianity has been relived with the vision of St. Gregory and the fertile soil of our faith has been called Etchmiadzin – the descent of the Son of God into the hearts and souls of our nation. The same vision needs to be relieved by each of us. The new journey begins here and will continue vigorously, with wisdom, witnessing Christ, recalling the history and becoming the architects of the meaningful life.

March 10, 2017

Burbank

MOMENT OF TRANSFIGURATION

Չի ինձ կեանք Քրիստոս է
Քրիստոնեային համար կեանքը պայմանաւորուած է
Քրիստոսով: Այս է խորհուրդը նաեւ այս ամբողջ շաբա-
թավերջի: Ի մի ենք հաւաքուած նորոգելու մեր հաւատքի
կեանքը եւ Քրիստոսի Աւետարանը դարձնելու ուղեցոյցը
մեր կեանքին: Եռօեայ մեր ներկայութիւնը Ս. Ղեւոնդեանց
Մայր Տաճարի հովանիին ներքոյ բոլորիս համար դարձաւ
հրաշալի, քանզի աղօթքի առաջնորդութեամբ, խոկումնե-
րով ու սիրոյ միաբանութեամբ փափաքն ունեցանք վերա-
կոչելու մեր հաւատքի կեանքը այնպէս ինչպէս մեր հայրերը
ապրեցան եւ ըստայնմ ուղեգծելու նաեւ գալիքը:

My dear faithful youth and congregants,
I remind you all the words of St. Paul, which cer-
tainly have inspired us all: “To me Christ is life.” The
Faith Rally and Christian Conference has been the
moment of transfiguration for us all. The entire wee-
kend entitled Reclaim has been the time to embrace our
faith in a changing world. The world may be changing
but we need to make sure that we stay firm and stronger
in upholding our core spiritual values which stem from
the Gospels. As I extend to you all my love and deep
appreciation and gratitude for taking an active role in
the organization and success for the Reclaim mission
weekend let us all recognize the leader of this weekend
Father Vazken, whose vision for the Armenian Church
is genuine and compassionate.

The message of this weekend can be summarized in
one statement: Live your faith. We have all read the

leading thought of the weekend in all of our releases: Reclaim: Embracing our Faith in a Changing World.

In a book entitled “Reclaiming our Church,” the author John B. Cobb, Jr. shares with us numerous thoughts. One in particular is important, which speak about the impact of Faith in God. “Where there is vital belief in God, as God is known to us in Jesus Christ, there is likely to be strong conviction about the meaning of life and the mission of the Church. Faith in God - empowering us with the purpose of life and the mission of the Church.”

The entire weekend has been a journey with a journey with God, praying and learning together to be one in Christ. The journey starts here, in the bosom of our Church, the very sacred place where we were baptized to be Christians. What is vital in the journey of our God-given lives that our faith in God is nourished constantly in thousand ways. Our faith in God will empower us to a life pleasing to God, armored with Christian values. “The world is changing; however, as Christians, we cannot adopt ourselves to what is going on in the society around us, but to be faithful to Jesus Christ.” Our nation has been the first to become martyrs for the Christian faith. Our ancestors were sanctified for witnessing Christ.

March 10, 2017
Burbank

CHRIST IS RISEN!

The Victorious Resurrection of Christ, our Lord is the single most miraculous event which transformed the life of humanity. As we embrace the mystery of the Resurrection, we certainly create and feel in the depth of our spirituality a sense of eternity. The Resurrection of Christ, our Lord, is not in the past. It is about the present and the inspiration of hope for the future. Those who have been transformed by the mystery of the Resurrection, have lived meaningful and purposeful lives, have cultivated history, have initiated culture and have become martyrs in witnessing Christ. The Resurrection of Christ, our Lord, has been the journey of our forefathers. The holy martyrs of the Armenian Genocide have entrusted us their vision to see the new dawn of our nation - the independence of Armenia.

Christ is Risen!

Each faithful who pronounces this truth with a genuine heart reflects his faith towards God and makes the commitment to live a new life in Christ, a life in resemblance to the Lord's. Christ's Resurrection ought to lead us in the pursuance of new aspirations but above all, Christ's defeat over death should become a call for every one of us to inspire the people of our communities.

This year's Easter celebration is also a milestone in our Diocesan life as we mark the 90th anniversary of establishment of the Western Diocese. Throughout the

past 90 years, Easter has been celebrated by many generations of faithful. Undoubtedly, their faith has been instilled in our hearts and has motivated and empowered us to respond to God's call to be the new architects of this Diocese. The 90th anniversary becomes meaningful only when we renew our commitment to serve God, the Church and her numerous missions for the well-being of the Armenian Apostolic Church and our Motherland.

We live in a world where the only constant is change. On the one hand, science and technology progress exponentially while on the other hand, religion and spirituality decline rapidly. This challenge needs to be addressed with resilience of faith. We refer to the same faith which has empowered our ancestors and has become the foundation of their lives.

In this chaotic world, methods may have changed but let us all remember that the message of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ cannot be banned and suppressed. On the contrary, new methods in technology and science should be applied to protect and preserve the resilience and the applicability of Holy Bible, the Word of God. When we speak of peace in the world, that peace is conditioned by the strong bond between God and man. The same faith leads us also to uphold firm the sanctity of the family life, which is the ultimate victory of Christianity. Therefore, the mystery of Christ's Resurrection is grasped through acts of faith.

Christ is risen from the Dead!

Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ, our Lord!

The resurrection of Christ our Lord is the call for a new life which helps us bear within us the presence of God, the spirit of our Christian identity, the love for our Motherland, the respect for human values, the selfless spirit of service and the vision of the sanctity of a family. These are the most important spiritual values which are catered to Christ's flock by the Church. We are the living stones of the Church through our faith in the Resurrected Christ, for in Him is the new life.

Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ, our Lord!
Amen.

Easter 2017

90TH ANNUAL DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY

Reverend Fathers,

Dearest and distinguished guests of the 90th Assembly of the Western Diocese,

A year ago, at the 89th Assembly, we declared the year 2017 as the Year of Stewardship. I believe this thought has challenged us all to reevaluate the course of our mission and faith life, and led by divine ordinance and a prayerful life instill in our spirituality new visions and horizons for a stronger Church.

During my recent readings, I came across words by Pope Francis I which I believe clearly explain the core value and meaning of stewardship. Certainly, our Lord has given us the message of stewardship through the parable of the shrewd steward: “Give the account of your stewardship” (Luke 16:2). The account of our stewardship is our faith life.

Pope Francis reflects upon this message and shares his vision of stewardship in the following words: “The value of Stewardship is to be good stewards of the talents and time God has given us.”

We have also set **excellence** as one of our core values. To ignite the apostolic energy, the Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church continues by saying “This is not only the responsibility of priests and bishops. Everyone who is baptized shares responsibility for the Church’s mission.”

To some extent, this whole notion of stewardship has charged us all to take the lead of this Diocese with a renewed commitment and vision to secure the continuity of the mission of our Apostolic Church in the West Coast.

However, the 90th anniversary urges us all to see beyond the horizon and inspires the new generations with the message of our Lord as indicated in the Gospel according to St. Matthew Chapter 7: *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.”* (Mt. 7:24-25) and honor the memory of the founders of this Diocese as well as all those, who for the past nine decades have worked hard and faithfully for this diocese and all the churches governed by this institution.

Assemblies in general gather us in prayer and empower us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Firstly, they allow us make the vow to be good stewards of the talents and the time that God has given us. Secondly, we aim to set “excellence” as one of our core values. Thirdly, we have convened to reignite in us the apostolic energy. Lastly, we are united in the vision of sharing the responsibility for the Church’s mission.

The Western Diocese and the administration together with all of our churches, under the leadership of our pastors and faithful servants, with numerous departments and committees fulfill many projects concentrating all of our efforts on the Christian identity

of the individual and our communities. And “the Gospel of Jesus Christ gives us a beautiful vision of human dignity and the sanctity of life. And He calls us to herald a society where the good things of God’s creation are shared with all.”

In the past year, much has been accomplished in our Diocesan life. Our weekly newsletters in hundreds of pages reflect only a portion of the achievements of this Diocese. You all have to take pride in all of the accomplished missions for the past year’s history reflects your faith life and engagement in the Church’s mission.

This 90th Assembly is a milestone. Certainly, we have the moral right to celebrate the ninety years of witnessing Christ, living our Christian Faith, holding firm to the traditions of our ancestors, remaining faithful to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, educating generations with the love of God and above all, inspiring our people to be the loyal citizens of this country, which has embraced the orphans and the survivors of the Genocide.

The 90th anniversary celebrations of the Western Diocese challenge us to renew our Christian calling and apostolic energy in a turbulent world, where humanity is struggling to maintain peace and honor human dignity and be the co-creators of this beautiful world.

The Diocese of the Armenian Church of America was established in 1898 by the late Catholicos Mkrtich Khrimian and for almost thirty years all churches were

governed by one Diocesan institution. As the communities grew, the initiation of two separate entities became an urgency. And we all witness the continuous expansion of the Western Diocese, which ultimately charges us with new responsibilities.

May 5, 2017
Burbank

YOUTH IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Last year, during the Supreme Spiritual Council meeting at the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church, His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians conceived the idea of dedicating the year 2018 as the year of the Armenian Youth around the world. Indeed, what an anticipated, timely, and wise decision, which speaks so dearly to our heart.

The youth has always been the epicenter of our spiritual ministry, the dynamic force, which gives us wings, instills in us hope and aspires us to new feats of spirituality. However, since the year 2001, after the unprecedented pilgrimage we had led to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and initiated the Pan-Armenian Church Youth Organization with the blessing of our beloved Catholicos, we had felt a different connectedness with the youth, which resembled the rediscovering of a treasure.

Today's youth is our treasure in every sense of the word. Therefore, it is our obligation to take care of them today, to listen to their needs today, to encourage the flight of their spirit, for the hope of a brighter tomorrow is conditioned upon how we take care of them today.

With this in mind, our Diocese joins this powerful Armenian international youth movement, the culmination of which will be the historic pilgrimage to the

Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin in July 2018. As we had written in one of our sermons, *“the youth finds nourishment in Holy Etchimiadzin, the Holiest of Holies, where God and the Armenian spirit unite.”*

We have said it repeatedly: *“the youth ought to be the protector of the Armenian Church, wherein shines the redemptive light of Holy Etchmiadzin, wherein the miraculous traits of the Armenian identity sprung to life and molded its character.”*

May God bless the Armenian youth around the world and keep them unshaken under the invincible sign of the Holy Cross, so that with the graces of the Holy Spirit, they may strengthen the Armenian Apostolic Church and the paradise that is our Homeland.

January 2018

HOLINESS AND PURITY

“Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” 2 Corinthians 7:1

The birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the presence of the Divine in the life of humanity that leads us to holiness and purity. God’s creatures naturally depend on systematic spiritual renewal so that they may keep their innate faith actively engaged in all endeavors of life, reflecting God’s will by deeds and words.

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

Every year, when we celebrate the Theophany and recite the above-mentioned proclamation, we feel the need for spiritual renewal in the depth of our souls. When we reiterate the Christmas greeting, we celebrate the beginning of a new life gifted to us by God Incarnate who is the path to wisdom, humility, and holiness.

“Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

The miraculous birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ reawakens in us the very particles of life that has been breathed into us by God, turning us into living souls on the day of the Creation. Whoever comprehends this truth, walks on the path to purity and holiness ‘*in the fear of God,*’ which is nothing than the wisdom of God.

We live in a time when now more than ever, we need to feel the presence of God and do His holy will to be impeccable and stay away from the snares of evil.

Our forefathers felt the presence of God and lived their lives according to His will. They grasped the true meaning of Christmas and accepted God's invitation to 'cleanse themselves and live holy lives in the fear of God.' For them, Christ was the embodiment of *holiness*. His biblical teachings, our Christian values, a life lived with faith, the Armenian ancestral model family based on love and wisdom were all synonymous with our forefathers' understanding of holiness.

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

Beloved faithful, the Theophany is the golden bridge that spans divinity to humanity. Glory be to the Almighty God for sending His Only Begotten Son to this world to guide us through darkness to light so we may see the path that leads us to holiness. Today, as we celebrate Christmas, we strive to reclaim that holiness in our lives.

Our Christmas prayer for this year is that we may become instruments of peace and vessels of the Holy Spirit to live tranquil lives and continue to prosper as individuals and as faith communities "perfecting holiness in the fear of God" in our everyday lives.

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

*January 6, 2018
Burbank, California*

69TH ANNUAL ACYO ASSEMBLY

Dear ACYO members,

The Annual ACYO Convention is indeed a time to renew our calling. During this time, we gather as responsible delegates of our youth family to review our past year's activities and to set forth the path for a new journey. Therefore, these are the following steps that we need to take:

a) to live our Christian Faith to its fullest and to walk on the path of our ancestors who have lived the Christian Faith and through their deeds, the Christian Faith, which is God's gift graced upon us, was reflected.

b) to become Ambassadors of Christ, our Lord and the Armenian Apostolic Church. In taking on the messages of the Holy Gospels as important ingredients which help and strengthen us against all challenges and odds of the times. We are living in turbulent times and the Holy Gospel of Christ our Lord continues to be the sole source of divine Truth, one which cannot be superseded. The closer we stand to Christ, the more we sanctify our lives.

c) to exercise in our daily lives the gift of self-examination. This can be realized only through prayer. Therefore, the person who leads the God-given life with prayer enlightens life itself. This is conditioned upon constant self-reevaluation and the renewal of the spirit.

There are numerous other steps which one has to take and fulfill to lead the life of a good Christian. The Holy Bible nourishes our souls with all the necessary spiritual goods. As dedicated members of the ACYO family, I urge you all to remain firm in your Christian Faith, be a praying soul, and always engage in the life of your Church.

The year 2018 has been declared as the Year of the Youth in our Church Calendar by His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians. I challenge you to be innovative and enrich the year with multiple activities to inspire our communities with the rebirth of our youth. One of the most important acts which would bring us together and strengthen us in our commitment will be the pilgrimage to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin in the month of July. Be a part of it! Be a pilgrim in the life of the Armenian Church, for the transformation of our Church can only occur when together we all become one in the birthplace of our soul: The Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

I convey to you all my warmest wishes. May you have a blessed New Year.

January 12, 2018

RECLAIMING OUR CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

Humility: The Hidden Treasure

Esteemed participants of Reclaim 2018,

No doubt that we are extremely delighted that Reclaim, initiated by the Rev. Fr. Vazken Movsesian, and supported by many, continues to be a tradition in the Western Diocese.

The whole idea of reclaim speaks to us about recalling, regaining and reinstating our Christian Faith. Based on the Word of God, this year, I want to share with you all a reflection by Archbishop Desmond Tutu dedicated to humility, for I certainly believe that the human life can be glorified and all-important missions on the life of the Church can be successful when humility dominates our lives.

“Humility is the recognition that your gifts are from God, and this lets you sit relatively loosely to those gifts. Humility allows us to celebrate the gifts of others, but it does not mean you have to deny your own gifts or shrink from using them. God uses each of us in our own way, and even if you are not the best one, you may be the one who is needed or the one who is there.”
(Abp. Tutu)

The South African leader Archbishop Desmond Tutu shares his insight of humility.

The ultimate source of humility is in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of God who knelt and washed the feet of His Apostles. Christ reassured us

that humility is the source of consolation and solace. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11:29). In his Epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul writes that Christ lives in us. “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” (Galatians 2:20). As Christians, we believe the ultimate source of joy is derived from our quest to walk with and emulate the life of Christ, our Lord. The Psalmist says “Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” (Psalm 37:4).

Let us pause for a moment and question the desires of our hearts. “Is it wealth? Is it power? It is status?” What is the purpose of your presence here at the Reclaim Conference?

Your presence attests of your commitment to drawing one step closer to the Almighty. A Christian’s desire of the heart is to emulate the life of Christ. It is to reclaim the humility of the heart. It is to give glory to the Almighty for the blessings bestowed upon us. It is to rejoice in the Resurrected Lord.

Let Reclaim 2018 be the journey into the depth of your souls. A delightful route to get to reach this destination is via prayers in solitude. Thus, I encourage everyone here today to embark on a self-discovery journey. Pray in solitude and pray often. It is then that you will discover that God is ever-present within us.

The reason I have chosen a message dedicated to humility is one of the most important ingredients

which has to be lived by each of us as well as society at large.

One of the Christian virtues, which secures the peace of the world but above all the prosperity of community life. RECLAIM is an important mission, which is now realized in the life of the Western Diocese with the sole noble intention to cultivate our Christian life. Throughout this weekend every step that we take, every message that we extend has to be deeply rooted in the divine Word of God. This weekend offers us the time for solitude and enables us to grow spiritually and make the commitment and the promise to live a life similar to Christ our Lord, and to be empowered with the spirituality of the Church Fathers who have paved the true way of life as the most valuable gift and legacy for us.

Reclaim is the weekend to stay firm in our Christian Faith and to be most careful not to alter a dot in our Christian beliefs, which make the core foundation of our Church life. The Gospel of Christ our Lord cannot be altered under any circumstances. The Gospel of Christ is an everlasting truth. The Gospel of Christ our Lord cannot be accommodated to our new movements. Rapid advancements in technology, social media, science, etc., should work in unison to attest to the Truth that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Democracy has to serve God and the Church. The Church and the Christian cannot be bargained with the weight of human

votes. Christ, our Lord fought the multitudes. He sacrificed His life for the Divine Truth. In Him and with Him we ought to set the journey of our life.

We are gathered with the sole purpose to secure a stronger Church with stronger commitment and never distancing ourselves from the traditions which we hold in reverence. Therefore, all discussions, fellowships and prayer hours should aim for the defense of our faith and the holy traditions. The new world is threatening to destroy the core beliefs of our Christian way of life. We must adamant to become true apostles of Christ and be the living gospels in our community.

What we see today around the world and in our communities brings much pain and suffering to individuals and groups. It is the direct result of the lack of the living Christian Faith and the complete misunderstanding of freedom. Freedom lies in Christianity. Let us not challenge and destroy our Faith under the pressure of the “New Rules” and lifestyles.

Dear faithful,

I wish you all a blessed weekend. My special appreciation to Fr. Vazken Movsesian who has been the mastermind of the Reclaim Conference, a venue which enlightens our minds and souls so that we may be able to embrace Christ, our Lord and be His true followers.

March 2, 2018

“GIVE THE ACCOUNT OF YOUR STEWARDSHIP”

These are the words of the Lord. They are words which challenge us and empower us to have the reawakening moment in our God-given life, in our spirituality to focus on the way of life we are registering.

Undoubtedly, as human beings we set the pace to live a God-pleasing life, living and fulfilling our responsibilities for the well-being of the people of God. However, the words of Christ our Lord infuse in our spiritual being the electrifying shock to self-examine the path of our way of life and be courageous to give the account of our stewardship.

Self-examination is the key word, which help us to evaluate our stewardship, the way of life for which we are responsible. The day comes and we all will be called to give the account of our stewardship, life itself.

We all are graced with the gift of life, with the expectation to fulfill the will of God and not our own will. The architect of our life is God and God expects from us to live a responsible life. Having this thought in mind, in a moment of prayer and solitude, we self-examine ourselves and there starts the moment of purification the beginning of new life, the spiritual rebirth.

As we participate in the Reclaim Conference, the question of self-examination becomes vital to see our true self and elevate our lives to a new level of spirituality to be more engaged in the creation, and gain ownership

of the universe with a new vision. This spiritual exercise is a requirement for all of us as we dive in the great Lenten Journey, to prepare ourselves for the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ, our Lord.

And this spiritual exercise is achieved if only humility fills our hearts. Christ, our Lord, gives us this message through the parable of the unjust steward. The story empowers us to enter into the depths of our heart and soul, and have the courage to point out to the acts and thoughts which hurt and harm our spirituality as well as cause pain to others, and then to make the promise to change. The promise to change and fulfill the will of God. This is the very moment when we have reclaimed our original calling to be a child of God.

Reclaim Gala Banquet
March 3, 2018

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

“For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.” Psalm 36:9

Easter is the fulfilment of human anticipation for spiritual renewal – a longing desire that Christians feel deep down in their hearts with an implicit faith. As the deer pants for streams of water, we as Christians yearn for the fountain of life - Jesus Christ (Ps. 42:1). In the resurrected Christ, we see the clear light, which illuminates our entirety. In this spiritual anticipation, the mystery of the Resurrection of Christ, the Lord is revealed.

What Christians call a mystery, the rest of the world considers a paradox that subconsciously challenges even the most skeptical minds. Those who perceive the mystery of Resurrection from a spiritual point of view comprehend its life-giving power that leads to eternity. Subsequently, they strive to illuminate their lives with the inextinguishable light of Christ and drink from His fountain of life.

Christ is risen from the dead.

Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ.

Believing in the Resurrection of Christ implicitly is not sufficient. More than ever, we have to have explicit and abiding faith so that we may surmount everyday challenges thrown at our face. Many are worldly distractions that try to deviate us from the path of truth

and righteousness. The evil of this world is ready to devour us lest we stumble or succumb to its temptations. As a Christian nation, we continue to thrive because of our faith and essential values we hold in reverence – our independent Motherland Armenia, Holy Etchmiadzin, the ingenious Armenian people living in Armenia, Artsakh or Diaspora, the call of the blood of our martyred heroes, and the visionary youth of today. These eternal values embody the true mystery of resurrection and transcend the worldly transient. Historically, the Armenian people shared the Passion of Christ and the anguish of crucifixion. However, through the Resurrection of Christ, we rose victoriously with a renewed life.

This year, quite symbolically, Easter coincides with the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the First Republic of Armenia and the heroic Battle of Sardarabad. Derived from the core message of Easter, we witness the awakening of the patriotic spirit and national unity in the hearts and minds of our beloved faithful. Today, the resounding chimes of Sardarabad ring louder than ever. They testify the freedom-loving spirit of our people, which vouchsafed Armenia's first independent Republic in 1918. Not too far from Sardarabad, we can hear the prayerful peal of Etchmiadzin bells proclaiming the undying spirit of our resurrected nation. The heroes of Sardarabad, Artsakh, and Avarayr, although chronologically apart from each other, symbolize one and the same historical truth that nothing can defeat our resilient faith in Christ.

Dear faithful,

The secret of our eternity lies in the mystery of the Resurrection of Christ. It is imperative for us to cling firm to our Christian values in order to continue to thrive on the face of this earth. Our forefathers attested to that truth through their personal example and sacrificial life. Therefore, this Easter should be another invitation extended to each of us to live with faith and serve as an example to our children, youth, and young families. Furthermore, we are reminded to preserve our identity, kindle the love for our Motherland, and remember the sacrifice of our ancestors, who always prioritized the mission of the Holy Church in their lives.

With this in mind, let us glorify God by proclaiming, “Christ is risen from the dead. Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ, the Lord. Amen.”

Easter 2018
Burbank, CA

91ST ANNUAL DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY

PREFACE

We give thanks to the Almighty for gracing the year 2017 with the fruits of our collective labor and guiding our steps towards priceless values, toward God, the Motherland, Holy Etchmiadzin, values that define our sacred institution. As they have been in the past, the Armenian Church, school, culture, the Christian family, an educated society and a well-rounded youth continue to be the foundation of our mission. They are the keys to our victory and the inscriptions of our identity. They have been the guidelines of our Diocesan activities. Categorized under three subheadings, they are as follows:

- a. Annual Report
- b. Challenges
- c. Key Message

ANNUAL REPORT

1. New Church construction in Hollywood (Ongoing)
2. Construction of the Church Complex in San Diego (Commenced with the Ground blessing Ceremony - Sunday, April 29)
3. Complex Adjacent to St. Mary Armenian Church of Costa Mesa (Planning Stage)

4. Construction of Banquet Hall and adjacent lot at Holy Resurrection Armenian Church of La Crescenta (Work in Progress)

5. The construction of a second retirement home adjacent to St. Apkarak Armenian Church of Scottsdale, Arizona (Second planning Stage)

6. Construction of Chapel and other structures at the Archbishop Vatche Hovsepian Summer Camp (On-going)

Future Analysis and Upcoming Plans

In the past two years, we requested the submission of the ten-year plans from the administrative bodies of each Diocesan parish. Once again, we stress the importance behind this appeal. Just as a parent plans for the future of a child, so does our Diocese. The presentation of the future plans of each parish (thus, the Diocese as a whole) allows for the painting of a complete picture, in which a clear image is visible. A professional approach to our appeal is mandatory if we wish to forecast future trends. Imagine if the parishes in Reedley, Yettam, East Los Angeles and in other regions were able to predict and furthermore adapt to the shifts in population trends, a suitable approach toward an effective solution would have been possible.

Newly Formed Parishes and Clergy Preparation

The formation of new parishes and the preparation of clergy remain central issues. In the past fifteen years, we have had a major generational shift and accordingly,

we shall shift our focus toward the establishment of new parishes. With the ordination and consecration of the most recent graduates of the Stewardship Program, a brief halt was placed on the clergy preparation program. By the grace of God, we shall resume this God-pleasing mission in the near future and shall prepare the newest wave of young clergymen.

Newly-Launched Youth Missions

Under this sub-heading we wish to make a reference to newly-launched youth missions, which we believe are essential in the reawakening of the faith of the young generation as well as the molding of a close relationship between the youth and the Church.

1. Reclaim (Three-day youth conference and fellowship)

2. Nerouj (Professional guidance, mentorship and networking)

3. Scholarship Fund (Educational mission and scholarship opportunities for students of Armenian Schools)

4. Graduation Communion (Commencement Exercises and Graduation Communion)

Of course, we cannot forego recapping such established youth missions as the ACYO, CYMA, Summer Camp Program, Saturday and Sunday Schools.

Missions in Armenia

1. Harchivank Monastery and Complex

2. Sanahin Monastery Complex

3. Church-building missions
4. “Mer Hoos” – House of Hope
5. Assistance to Less Fortunate Children
6. Kindergarten Assistance Projects
7. Bedros and Anna Oruncakciel Gymnasium
8. Sister Churches Mission
9. Artsakh Humanitarian Fund
10. Syrian Armenian Relief Fund

Besides the aforementioned missions, the Diocese is involved in a number of others projects including the Hayastan All Armenian Fund. Each year, the Diocese contributes nearly half of its annual budget in fulfilling the above-mentioned programs. We are eternally grateful to our donors and faithful.

Religious Missions

1. Religious Publications
2. Bible Studies
3. Religious Courses
4. Pilgrimages
5. Spiritual Retreats

90th Anniversary of the Western Diocese and the Pontifical Visit

On the blessed occasion of the 90th anniversary of establishment of the Western Diocese, His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians In late October of 2017, paid a pontifical visit to our Diocese. During His Holiness’ Pontifical

Visit, the Western Diocese hosted the Supreme Spiritual Council meeting. For the faithful, the Pontifical Visit was historic indeed in strengthening the sacred ties with the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and the Motherland.

Ecumenical, Civic and Public Organizations

The Diocese is represented in the following organizations:

1. LACRL (Los Angeles Council of Religious Leaders)
2. SCCF (Southern California Christian Forum)
3. Arizona Ecumenical Council
4. Sacramento Ecumenical Council
5. Faith and Order Commission of SCCF
6. Oriental Orthodox Churches Dialogue

The Protocol Committee oversees all ties between the Western Diocese and national, state and local governments. The Western Diocese is partnerships with the following public, educational, cultural and humanitarian organizations: American Red Cross, Glendale YWCA, Children's Hospital Los Angeles, Ararat Home and others.

St. Leon (Srbots Ghevontiants) Armenian Cathedral

In the year 2020, we will be celebrating the 10th anniversary of St. Leon (Srbots Ghevontiants) Armenian Cathedral. The celebration will be historic in a sense that in this short span, the Cathedral has become a

source of religious and spiritual reawakening for the Armenian-American community. Hence, we will work collectively and wholeheartedly to pay off the loan entirely.

Membership

One of the issues that is of concern is the issue of parish membership. The idea of due-paying membership has not been cemented in a number of our parishes. We have noticed a steady decline in due-paying members in established parishes and especially in those where third and fourth generation of Armenian-Americans make up the majority of the parish. As a non-profit organization, it is essential that we secure a large number of due-paying members, whose purpose shall be to assist in govern the administrative life of the parish. Practical yet serious steps need to be implemented in regards to this matter.

Staff

As an institution, the Western Diocese, as a family member of the Armenian Church is comprised of over 2,000 volunteers. They work in partnership with the Diocesan Primate, the Diocesan Clergy, the Diocesan Headquarters, the Diocesan Council and all auxiliary bodies of each parish in governing this institution.

Diocesan Properties:

The number of Diocesan properties has distinctly increased in the last fifteen years. The current properties owned by the Western Diocese are valued at \$130 million.

Endowment

The financial backbone of the Western Diocese is the Endowment Fund, which has increased multifold in the last decade. Without going into too much detail, we wish to reiterate that the activities of the Western Diocese are directly related to the growth of the Endowment Fund. Therefore, we are obliged to ensure the continuity of its success.

Diocesan Events

Throughout the course of 365 days, the Diocesan Headquarters hosts more than 100 events (both large and small in scale) religious, cultural and educational, in nature. These events are made possible through the tireless efforts of the Diocesan subcommittees. Those who keenly follow and are subscribed to the Diocesan newsletter are well aware of the vast activities taking place at the Western Diocese.

Community Engagement

More than 100 large and small organizations operate in the City of Los Angeles. With the participation of the Diocesan clergy and as much as possible, the Western Diocese seeks to partake in community-wide organized events. We receive a number of invitations from Armenian and non-Armenian organizations, churches, governmental and diplomatic organizations and others.

Armenian Daily Schools

Los Angeles is home to the largest number of Armenian Schools in the Diaspora. Besides being taught in private schools, it is inspiring and commendable that some public schools also teach the wondrous Armenian language. Hand in hand with daily Armenian Schools, the Western Diocese proudly takes part in the instruction of the Armenian language through a meticulously and professionally organized Saturday School system. It is important to note that teacher preparation courses are organized and held annually at the Western Diocese. The same is applicable to Sunday Schools.

Pastoral Visits and Travel

Besides the dozens of pastoral visits to Armenian communities in the Western United States, it is important to note our participation in the Supreme Spiritual Council meetings. As the Director of the Pan-ACYO and the Chair of the By-Laws Committee of the Armenian Apostolic Church, we also preside in meetings of these respective committees.

Holy Etchmiadzin and the Catholicosate of All Armenians

In accordance with the Bylaws of the Western Diocese, our ties with the Mother See and the Catholicosate of All Armenians continue to remain strong. For each Armenian, the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, as the spiritual center of our people, is the holiest of holies.

With each visit, our loyalty for Holy Etchmiadzin and our Pontiff is renewed.

CHALLENGES AND KEY ISSUES SPECIFIC TO LOS ANGELES

With all of its advantages, the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church and specifically Los Angeles faces a number of tremendous challenges and core issues. These issues proven to be hindrances to the overall regular activities of the Western Diocese and the Church.

The first and most important concern is the administrative division in the Armenian Apostolic Church. The reality of the matter is that presently there is a general peaceful atmosphere in the community. However, the administrative division in the hierarchy of the Armenian Apostolic Church will have an adverse impact on the overall activities of the Church. The operations of the Church are headed by two separate hierarchical entities, each with their separate structures. As such, the workload doubles. We pray that mutual love and respect prevails in the administrative unification of the Church and the Western Diocese. Indeed, no verbal explanation for the division can be presented.

The second concern is the presence of sects. They not only disrupt and tear apart communities but all other denominations as well. Hundreds of sectarian movements exist in the country. Naturally, the Church combats these movements through preaching and doctrine. However, it is clear that sects present a serious

challenge to our people and especially to Armenian families.

Thirdly, we wish to address the topic of mixed marriages, an issue which seems to be unavoidable. As a Church, we are obliged to implement ways of tying mixed marriage families to the Church and the community. The challenge here is not only the language barrier but also major cultural differences. More difficulties arise with children of mixed marriages who require proper Christian upbringing and a sense of belonging to the Armenian Church. We are obliged to adopt a professional and wise approach in addressing this issue.

The fourth concern is the spread of sexual and moral perversions, the use of drugs, the acts of crime, imprisonment, and other horrific acts which spread like wildfire in the lives of the youth. Our communities house a number of illegal immigrants as well as political and religious refugees. The problems of our people are shared by us all.

The fifth challenge faced by the Armenian community of Los Angeles is the multitude of fundraising activities whether they benefit Armenia, Artsakh, other segments of the Diaspora and or local humanitarian organizations. Besides the fact that people participate in fundraisers driven by emotional motifs as they pick and choose the organizations to which they contribute, the multitude of fundraisers organized routinely distinctively lowers the financial contributions of the community. Unmethodical fundraisers indeed disrupt the life of the

community in the sense that the community already has a tough time caring for its own needs.

The sixth concern is the mission of the Armenian Schools which places yet another serious financial strain on the community. Our people, understanding the importance of and prioritizing the education provided by Armenian Schools continue to support our schools, providing tens of millions of dollars of support for a record number of enrollments in the Diaspora.

The seventh challenge is the record migration from Armenia, Iran and the Middle East for the “benefit” of the Western Diocese. This occurrence has both positive and negative implications. The migration is positive in the sense that it contributes to the growth of communities in the Western United States but reduces the population of country of origin by the same number.

The eighth challenge is this huge community is the lack of an adequate number of residential complexes for our seniors. The senior population in our community grows by the day and the need for senior housing is vital. Thousands sign up for housing provided by non-Armenian organizations, which cannot provide the same level of care and compassion as the staff of Ararat Home provides to its residents. As Primate, we have assigned clergymen to visit the elderly in a few homes. However, this step is a temporary solution. In addressing this issue, and as you are aware, a similar approach to house the community’s elderly has been undertaken by St. Apkar Armenian Church of Scottsdale with the

construction of a Senior Living Facility in the property adjacent to the church.

We are alarmed by the great number of defrocked clergymen who choose not to reveal their state to the community's faithful and continuously take advantage of the community's unawareness. These defrocked priests perform rites in cemeteries, banquet halls and in other venues. Besides the unpleasant situation, the performance of rites by defrocked priests may cause serious problems as the government may deem the sacramental rite as invalid.

The list of challenges can be numerated if we consider such inner divisiveness as language barriers, as well as cultural and social differences.

Lastly, amidst all these challenges and obstacles in Los Angeles and along with all financial obligations, we also wish to inform you of the construction of the Armenian American Museum in the City of Glendale.

Hence, given all these circumstances, the Headquarters of the Western Diocese continues to operate and carry out its numerous missions. We continue to remain a national, religious and cultural center.

KEY MESSAGE

“The most beautiful things in the world are done in a state of fever” – Ernest Renan

The second portion of our report, which was dedicated to the challenges faced by the Diocese in Los Angeles, was not intended to express our disapproval or dissatisfaction, but rather offer a collective solution

where each of us can contribute our share. Our success, in the Christian context, lies in the narrow path. We are often obliged to enter through the narrow doors for we have not made a practice of walking on the path of conformity. As the French thinker Ernest Renan said “the most beautiful things in the world are done in a state of fever.” These few words also encompass the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ because if the Son of God did not walk on the path of Golgotha, if He did not shed His blood on the cross, humanity would drown in the swamp of sin.

As a people who have risen from the ashes of genocide, we are fully aware of Christ’s Resurrection, for we have paid the price of justice and righteousness. The ways of demanding justice may change but the content remains our shared moral responsibility, which lies on our shoulders to collectively and intensively continue in our quest, the promised land.

Therefore, we call upon you to remain steadfast in your ancestral Christian Faith and loyal to our sacred values and traditions. It is our shared responsibility to preserve the sanctity of the Armenian family and its value. It is our common goal to ensure the purity and genuineness of that atmosphere which we have inherited and to pass it on to the young generation. The youth must follow in our example and awaits our guidance to lead them on the luminous path to righteousness.

As members of the large family of the Western Diocese, we are obliged to become architects of the future. Having a vision is not suffice in the effort to

realize the mission. The formation of an inner circle and working hand in hand as a support group is essential. Additionally, adopting a methodological and professional approach to combat our problems is vital. Our efforts will be deemed fruitless if we attempt to take on the challenges alone. Similarly, our report and message will not have the desired outcome if you, having returned to your parishes do not share our sentiment and concerns with your fellow parishioners.

Our Diocesan missions, efforts and activities are aimed at one goal. That is to provide spiritual security and certainty to our faithful. The treasures of these securities are not solely intended for the life hereafter. They are equally important today and apply to each of us, without reservation. Therefore, in our fatherly exhortation, we call upon each of you to become partakers in the mission of the Church and spiritual soldiers of Christ, who is praised eternally. Amen.

St. Geragos Armenian Church - Las Vegas, NV
May 4, 2018

2018 -THE YEAR OF THE YOUTH

The year 2018 has been declared as the Year of the Youth by His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, with the intention that the youth become the sole focus of our mission and that we collectively pray for the future generation of servants of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The purpose of our mission is unchanged – to strengthen in the minds and in the hearts of the youth the Armenian Christian identity. The aforementioned will become possible when we live a purposeful life filled with God’s love, inspire our brothers and sisters through the divine messages radiating from the Gospel of Christ, our Lord, transform and become the living parts of the Armenian Church, serve our Motherland and Holy Etchmiadzin, cherish the ancestral Christian Faith of our forefathers and lastly, incorporate the sanctity of the Armenian family as the backbone of our being.

The Pan-ACYO has come a long way since 2001. Beloved youth, we are grateful to you for your love and support throughout the last 17 years despite the challenges and obstacles we have faced collectively. Indeed, with the firm belief in God’s divine love, we have brought this mission to fruition.

We fondly remember the day when His Holiness entrusted us to lead the Youth of the Armenian Church. We organized and held meetings with Armenian youth in four corners of the world. From North and South

America, to Europe, Russia and Armenia, hundreds of trips were completed to realize the noble mission of the Pan-ACYO. We started out as a miniscule group and grew rapidly to a reputable organization in our nation's life.

During our conferences, regional meetings and workshops we stressed and continually reiterated our expectations of having each youth transform his or her God-given life into a life of service, one that is made wholesome by spiritual advancement and maturity of faith. We explained that the completeness of our national identity is dependent on the essential role of spirituality and the values, which we commonly hold in reverence in our lives. By incorporating spirituality and sacred values into our lives we will avoid being resembled to a blade of grass that breaks from the soil, grows, withers and transforming into dust, vanishes into thin air.

Throughout the four decades of pastoral service, we were humbled to personally connect with generations of young people who inspired us with their vision, abilities, wisdom and faith. You grew and matured under the umbrella of the Armenian Apostolic Church and were nourished from the source of True Orthodox Christian Faith. Having completed your education, you became keen professionals in your chosen respective fields. You became accomplished individuals and members of the collective body of the Pan-Armenian Church Youth Organization. Presently and quite naturally, we expect much more from you. You are expected to transform your God-given lives into miracles with the vision

of strengthening our Church and our Motherland. Now is the time for the harvest. You are called to take your independent steps, to establish yourselves, to contribute to the vivacity of this mission intellectually, professionally, spiritually, and financially while remaining in your roles as initiators and leaders.

You are called to become the guardians of the Armenian Apostolic Church. However, you must earn your right to be called guardians through your noble endeavors. In other words, if you wish to uphold the sanctity and holiness of our Church, you must first know how to lead sacrificial and loving lives. You must resemble a father who labors tirelessly to provide for his family, and ensure the best possible education for his children. You too must cultivate in your hearts the role of a guardian, provider, and caretaker. Plan your lives in such a manner that you may excel in your educational and professional fields. Succeed in your undertakings. Shine on life's grandest stage. Most importantly, like steel, be strong. Be well informed and versed in the public, political, and cultural spheres and partake in their advancements. Remain competitive in the broadest sense of the word and never cease to be courageous. Now is the time and your time has come! The future is now.

We our humble exhortation, we urge you to transform your lives and strengthen in you the spiritual, national, and moral values in order that your lives may be set on course to perfection.

What type of challenges do we then face in the "Year of the Youth?"

The greatest challenge of all, not only in Armenia but equally around the world, is the presence of widespread immoral and wicked practices. The ultimate way of combating these issues is accepting, implementing, and promoting the spiritual values, which are dearest to our hearts. The Armenian youth must be driven with the vision of a prosperous Motherland and the unshakable Christian Faith of the Armenian Church.

What are the fundamental steps required to make the “Year of the Youth” meaningful?

My dear youth, this pilgrimage to Armenia and Holy Etchmiadzin has been granted you a superior guide in order that you may lead your lives toward God, toward the sacred land of our ancestors, toward our people and toward our history. During this historic fellowship, I urge you to pray collectively so that you may be strengthened. Fortified with the graces of the Holy Spirit, I rest assured that you will return to your respective communities as architects of the New Church.

Therefore, this pilgrimage, which coincides with the 100th anniversary of the victorious Battle of Sardarabad and the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the First Republic of Armenia, is a calling for religious and national reawakening. From this day forth, filled with the divine love and wisdom of God, we are called to lead new lives with new visions.

Armenia and Holy Etchmiadzin enlighten and pave the way of our identity. Armenia and Echmiadzin strengthen and revitalize us. Wherever we may be, one

thing is certain. We shall always yearn for the sacredness which radiates from our Motherland and Holy Etchmiadzin. Life's bitter truth dictates that an Armenian away from the Homeland and Holy Etchmiadzin is an orphan. Consequently, let us embrace this pilgrimage and become a unified loving family, with a oneness in vision, service, sacrifice and creativity.

Each of you is graced with these unique gifts. Nourish your souls down to the roots so that you may witness the rise of the miraculous bread.

May 23, 2018

2019 - THE YEAR OF THE ARMENIAN CULTURE

A while ago, contemplating on the Armenian culture, I came up with the following reflection: *“Culture assumes body and becomes tangible only through people’s creative lives based on the biblical assertion that living a creative life for Christians means to become co-creators with God.”*

Therefore, we have an obligation to fill our lives with the immaculate culture of our ancestors by becoming its bearer and contributors, for nations are characterized by the culture they create. Indeed, if we delve into the depth of any culture, we will unearth the entire history of that people.

Culture is a multidimensional understanding, which encompasses beliefs, values, ideologies, arts, literature and more. As we celebrate the Armenian culture, we would like to give a special emphasis on the Armenian book. The book can be seen as a mirror image of history. Metaphorically speaking, books provide life support to human history. The more the book lives, the longer human history will remain alive. With this in mind, the Western Diocese prioritizes the publication of books, especially religious books to provide the faithful invaluable resources for Christian education.

We urge our faithful to rekindle in their heart the love of reading and study the Armenian culture in depth so that they may fully embrace the treasure of our faith and tradition with a strong sense of ownership.

There are many quotations about books. I would like to conclude my writing with a famous quote by Marcus Aurelius, Roman Emperor who live in the 2nd century. He said, “*Life should be filled with books that are full of life.*” We believe that the Holy Bible ranks number one among the books that are full of life.

Therefore, let us love the book, develop our culture, and make it the anchor of our existence.

January 1, 2019

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST IS AN INVITATION TO A NEW COVENANT

“Christ is Born and Revealed.
Blessed is the Revelation of Christ.”

By the Grace of the Almighty, the dawn of the New Year is upon us, which is sanctified through the Miraculous Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The true meaning of newness would have been impossible to comprehend had it not been for God’s intervention in human spirituality. The concepts of time, life, and space cannot be perceived through the prism of newness without the mystery of Christ’s Incarnation. This is not merely a thought but rather an expression of living faith. Each time we celebrate the Feast of the Nativity, our essence is filled with profound spiritual bliss, to which we succumb willingly, so that our joy may be complete.

Humanity celebrates the Birth of Christ with cognizant faith. We realize that the Son of God, the New-born Christ, delivers the divine love of the Father, the message of humility, peace, and appreciation for the God-given gift of life. The most essential aspect in this is that we are created in the image of God and are granted the power to become co-creators with the Almighty. The Birth of Christ is the most wondrous miracle, which gives birth to a new person within us. As we celebrate

Christmas, we pose for a moment for spiritual reflection and self-examination in order to align our lives with the will of God.

May the miraculous Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ increase in us the courage of faith so that we fill our lives with new commitments. Christ's life has become a path of service in the life of humanity. Therefore, let us follow that path by serving each other with renewed hearts. Like a lighthouse, His earthly life illuminated the world with radiant messages. Our Lord's divine commandments continue to shed light on every aspect of our personal lives to this date. The greatest commandment of all, I believe, remains the conveyance of forgiveness. For a Christian, emancipation from inner captivity is achieved through forgiveness.

The miraculous Birth of Christ leads to a New Life in order that humanity may be granted a turning point and live not in accordance with their own will but rather the will of God. These life-giving messages stem from Christ's sacred teachings and the Holy Scriptures.

God's message of New Life is aptly addressed to the sons and daughters of our nation so that we internalize the love and wisdom of God and bring blessings to the Armenian Church and the Motherland. For us, celebrating the Birth of Christ means embracing the miraculous event, which in turn transcends our inner being wholly so that we may better serve Armenia and Holy Etchmiadzin with joyful hearts. Blessed are those who put their faith into action and accept the invitation to lead new lives.

The Birth of Christ, the Descent of the Son of God to earth, is the essence of humility conveyed to us by God so that we may ascend and inherit the Heavenly Kingdom. And if humanity responds to this divine call, we would gain a New Life with God.

With a blissful heart, we proclaim the miraculous Birth of the Son of God so that we may be born anew with Christ, the Child.

“Christ is Born and Revealed.
Blessed is the Revelation of Christ.”

Feast of the Nativity 2019

2019 ACYO CONVENTION

“In the Church of Sant’Edigio 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 of hands, God relies on us. Won’t you join other people of faith in becoming God’s partners in the world?”
- Archbishop Desmond Tutu, April 2011

1st Session (January 18)

We are called to become God’s partners in the world. As I see the youth in the life of the Church, the first thought which comes to my mind is the gift of the youth in our lives – a gift from God. Each of you here represents your respective community. You are privileged to receive the call to share your God-given graces with your fellow members, families and friends. I exhort you to heed to God’s call with humility, wisdom and grace.

2nd Session (January 19)

After the Resurrection, our Lord commands His apostles to be His witnesses, entrusting them to spread the Good News of the Gospel, telling people about the life of their master and spreading the Word of God. “You shall be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8).

To my understanding, in fulfilling their master's commandments, the apostles were becoming His witnesses. They were called to be the apostles, the partners in the mission of the Lord. And they have responded to God's call with courage and spiritual strength and through their apostleship and martyrdom, they became witnesses of the Lord and their blood became the foundation of the Church.

The reason I wanted to make this brief introduction is because we all are called to be the witnesses of Christ: "You shall be my witnesses."

As priests and youth of the Armenian Church, we have a calling graced upon us all to become the witnesses of the Lord. Our founders and the ancestors have been witnesses of Christ, our Lord and have entrusted us all with the sacred legacy of the Armenian Church and making the Church the anchor in our nation's life.

The question which needs to be addressed to us all is an important one: What is the mission of our Church and what are the ways and tools that need to be applied in order for us to become witnesses of Christ?

The Church is the House of God, the fellowship of the faithful and therein we are charged and empowered to become guardians of the divine institution which guides us and the people of the world to become partners in God's work. God's work is the creation and the Living Word. Can we become partners in the work of God? Can we be the guardians of the world? We call all respond to this question with a strong commitment:

YES. For we are all graced with the gifts by the Almighty.

My message today to you all is for you all to become witnesses of Christ and witnesses of the Armenian Church, the history and the faith of our ancestors, and the Holy Traditions. The 70th Assembly of the ACYO becomes meaningful and successful when we only make and establish new steps in the life our organization.”

3rd Session (January 19)

“Let us celebrate that which unites us, that which we share in common.”

Our Christian Faith is the key element which unites the family of the youth. Thus, we are celebrating our Christian Faith and identity. Our Christian Faith empowers us to live a life with God, to become a close friend to Christ, to armor our spiritual lives with the necessary tools to live meaningful lives.

My message to the delegates of the 70th assembly is for you all to become architects of the Western Diocese. A quick review of the history of the Western Diocese is important; as to who the founders were, the hard work and dedication they had shown, their vision of the Church and the bond with their ancestral land, upholding the holy traditions of our Church... These are all very important factors which unite us all to become the family of the youth.

Divine Liturgy (January 20)

The ACYO Assembly has become a source of spiritual rebirth as the youth have been called to read carefully the words of our Lord inscribed high above the Holy Altar: “I am the light of the world, who that follow me shall not walk into darkness,”

The 70th ACYO Assembly has become a journey towards God, a journey of cultivating in our hearts the Christian Faith; a journey of apostleship to Christ, our Lord; a journey of promise to serve our Church and nation.

Today’s message is reflected in the life of our youth, the ACYO, who held their 70th Assembly hosted by St. John Armenian Church of San Francisco. The last three days in the life of the youth, the delegates from respective communities gathered in prayer, a Christian fellowship and have renewed their faith in God and their commitment in the service of the Armenian Church.

Their assembly has become a source of spiritual rebirth as they have been called to read carefully the words of our Lord inscribed high above the Holy Altar: “I am the light of the world, who that follow me shall not walk into darkness.”

The entire Assembly has become a journey towards God, Christ, our Lord, a journey of cultivating in our hearts the Christian Faith; a journey of apostleship to Christ, our Lord; a journey of promise to serve our Church and nation. Throughout the assembly, our youth were reminded that we were gathered “to

celebrate that which unites us,” namely our Christian Faith. Our youth were reminded that God relies on us to do God’s work in the world, for we are all called to become “God’s partners in the world.”

*St. John Armenian Church
San Francisco, California*

GRADUATION COMMUNION

Dear Graduates,

It is quite an emotional moment for me as I greet you tonight in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in this magnificent Cathedral of St. Leon (Srpotz Ghevontantz). I am emotional not only because I reminisce my own graduations from Kevorkian Seminary and then from Oxford University's St. Stephen's House, but also because I realize how far you've come and how much you've grown.

13 years ago, when I embarked on my new journey as the Primate of the Western Diocese, you, as shy and uncertain first-year students, holding tight your parents' hands, stepped into your respective schools. You grew up under my pastoral care, bonding with me spiritually during each of my visits. You reciprocated my love and care and inspired me with your bright ideas, which, often times became headlines for my sermons. You challenged me with your smart questions, surprised me with your meticulous observations, delighted me with your academic achievements, and impressed with your mature faith. In other words, we started the school together and we are graduating together to the next stage of life, where we are going to be partners in God's good work.

On this significant day, I want to leave you with a beautiful biblical story, which I am sure will resonate with many of you.

After preaching to large crowds near the Sea of Galilee, Jesus and His apostles took a boat to the opposite shore to find some time and solitude to rest. As they crossed the sea, a furious storm came up so strong that the apostles thought they would die. Jesus was below deck sleeping throughout the storm and the apostles rushed to wake him up. Jesus woke and told the storm to be still and the winds stopped immediately. The apostles were shocked to witness the divine power of Christ, who even tamed the winds and waters.

My dear graduates, even at your tender age, I am sure you have had your challenges and life storms. I am sure you have learned by now that life is not a bed of roses but rather a narrow path strangled with thorny weeds, which we ought to fight as part of our daily struggles. As you enter life, your challenges may increase in number and intensity, and you may experience moments of fear, despair, and disappointment. Peer pressure, interpersonal relationships, economic strains, student loans, fierce competition may rock the boat of your lives so hard that you might think you would sink. Don't panic, don't let stress and depression conquer you. Just turn to Jesus, awaken him in your hearts and He will take care of the rest. Bear in mind that Jesus is the Lord and "even the winds and waters obey Him."

I pray and ask the Almighty to keep His watch over you and safeguard your boat so that you may sail to His safe harbors through the turbulent waters of life.

April 4, 2019

HOLY WEEK: A WALK WITH GOD

The Holy Gospels of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ are the tall-standing lighthouse of hope that call ashore all the lost ships sailing in high winds against breaking waves of life. Particularly, the chapters portraying the Passion of Christ deliver His message of salvation and outline the human drama in its entirety, from suffering to victorious resurrection.

As we embark on the spiritual journey of the Holy Week, the biblical vignettes invite us to walk with Christ to the Holy City of Jerusalem, where He was welcomed with palm branches by cheerful crowds, and where He was crucified on the cross of condemnation. Enacting the biblical episodes is a real experience that involves us mentally, emotionally, and of course, spiritually. Day by day, as we walk with Christ through the Holy Week, we strive to correct our lives and purify our souls, so that we may be worthy of His Resurrection.

And here we go 2000 years back in history to join the men and women of Israel, the innocent children clad in pure white, who came to witness the triumphant entry of the King of Kings riding on a donkey. The scene itself is so profound that we stop for a moment and reflect on its meaning. There is so much humility, innocence, and purity in the person of Christ that the crowd gets enchanted and starts crying out "*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!*" (**Matt. 21:9**).

Then, we continue to walk with Christ. We pray with Him, serve with Him, witness His miracles, listen to His sermons and lessons of life, experience with Him moments of despair and hope. The life with Christ is a life lived to its fullest. We come to understand that whoever lives a prayerful life with faith, can witness numerous miracles happening today and every day around us. In fact, miracles have never ceased to happen. It is the evil, who casts a dark shadow over them and hides from our sights, so that we may live in deceit, deprived from the grace of God.

In the next vignette, we find ourselves in the temple. Here we see the zealousness of Christ, who cleans the holy shrine from smear merchants. The notion of holiness and divinity is above materialism of any kind. Unfortunately, today's society is buried deep down in the filth of materialism and selfishness. Ungodly people care more about their riches than sacred values and morality.

We are the temple of God. When we are emptied of spirituality, the temple no more serves its primary mission, which is to be a house of prayer. Only with faith, prayer, and repentance can we cleanse our inner world so that God himself may dwell in us.

During this Holy Week, we strive to resemble the wise virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), who brought with them the oil of faith to refuel the torches of their lives, so that they may be ready to welcome Christ, the Groom.

The next vignette is from Maundy Thursday, which starts with Jesus breaking bread with His disciples.

There He explicitly reveals His salvific plan and discloses the whole scenario of events that would follow. He opens the sacrificial way of the Cross leading to Golgotha, which would become the way of life for humanity through His redemptive blood.

Then, the Son of God, who humbled Himself and became a man like us, kneels down to wash the dusty feet of His disciples to better explain His worldly ministry and show the ultimate example of humility.

Following in the footsteps of Christ on the weary pebble stones of Jerusalem, we pass the Stations of the Cross. This city has changed a lot since Palm Sunday. The air is full of anxiety, fury, and betrayal. The same people who were laying flowers and palm branches on His path, were surrendering him to the justice of Pontius Pilate. The latter, for the sake of political correctness, washed his hands in order not to take a stance in that matter.

Today, too, the lures of life and societal pressures tempt us to betray Christ by our look-warm attitude, indifference, and hypocrisy, as we turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to absolute truths.

As we contemplate on the meaning of Good Friday, it is important that we focus on repentance. Unless and until we die on the cross with Christ, we cannot gain the eternal life through His Resurrection.

Dear faithful, the Passion of Christ, especially the crucifixion is a true ordeal from human perspective. Only through faith and spirituality can we grasp the salvific act of Christ. In our daily lives, we too may

experience tribulations and ordeals of all kinds. However, as true Christians, we should not let that notion suppress our desire for a new life. Therefore, as we have started this journey with Christ, we have to complete it with Christ, without giving up halfway. Let us revive the strong faith of our forefathers in our hearts and revere the Holy Bible as our father and the Holy Church as our spiritual mother.

I earnestly urge you to continue your walk with God throughout the year, through all the stages of your lives so that you may not be stranded in the wilderness of life and estranged from your own Creator. For, when you walk with God, your heart and soul become a censer full of prayerful and fragrant incense.

May the new person born in you during this Holy Week house the Holy Light of Christ's Resurrection.

Christ is Born and Revealed!

Blessed is the Revelation of Christ, our Lord!

April 14, 2019

SPIRITUAL CALL FOR AWAKENING

“We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body” (2 Corinthians 4:10-11).

Dear faithful,

We celebrate the Holy Easter with the firm belief that through the mystery of the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the life of the Only Begotten Son would appear in us. As Paul, the Apostle states, *“while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh” (2 Corinthians 4:11).*

It’s part of the human vulnerable nature to strive for the divine, to carry at least a fleck of holiness and thus, be purified. We feel the living presence of the Teacher within us and the Christian urge to live creative lives.

Through the celebration of the Holy Resurrection of Jesus Christ, we delight with joy and vivacity, for the dawn of the new life is upon us. For, if there was a time when we were carrying around in our body the death of Jesus, now through the Resurrection of Christ we become the *“gold jar filled with manna.”* To put it in simpler words, in the mystery of the Holy Resurrection, we experience the entire circle of life from birth to death, and from death to resurrection. Similarly, the history of

our nation, who rose from the ashes like a phoenix, can be compared to the Passion of Christ, culminating with Crucifixion and ultimately with Resurrection. Indeed, the physical and spiritual salvation of our nation is vouchsafed through the mystery of Christ's Resurrection, in which we firmly believe like our ancestors who came before us.

It does not really matter to us what the newspapers and the social media disseminate in terms of moral values. We know the moral values that emanate from the teachings of Christ through the Holy Scriptures. We know for sure that despite the anti-church propaganda and spiteful intentions of preaching fake values, our people, more than ever, direly need spiritual nourishment from the pure spring of truthfulness, found only in the bosom of the Mother Church.

We simply cannot live a wasteful life. Jesus saved us with His innocent blood so that we may reject sin and live fruitful lives dedicated to His glory, the holy church, the well-being of humanity, and to our Motherland Armenia. Only thus, we can preserve our national and Christian identity in the face of all adversities. As the offspring of St. Vartan, we should live *“for Christ and for the Fatherland.”*

Three years ago, in April of 2016, when the military troops of the sinister enemy tried to penetrate through the borders of Artsakh, our brave soldiers confronted them and marched toward their death so that we *“may have life in us.”* At their tender age, our selfless soldiers sacrificed their lives and carried the death of Christ

around their bodies, so that we may carry the vision of the victoriously resurrected Armenia.

With the same ideology, the Armenian Diaspora tries to resist the challenges of today, often times becoming an easy target for vicious attackers. Nevertheless, the Diaspora strives to educate the coming generations with the love of Armenia and Etchmiadzin through its two venerable institutions, namely the Armenian Church and the Armenian School.

Dear faithful,

On this Easter Sunday, we urge you to live your lives with the truths of the Holy Scriptures. May this Easter serve as a spiritual call for awakening. Let us contemplate on the message of St. Paul the Apostle that we quoted in the beginning of our sermon and remain steadfast in our ancestral faith as the world goes through many temptations.

A few months ago, His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of all Armenians, proclaimed 2019 as the year of the Armenian family. In our Diocese, we dedicated the year to the Armenian literary heritage. Therefore, we should join forces in illuminating the lives of the Armenian people with the spiritual light that radiates from the rich treasury of our sacred heritage – one family at a time. If we succeed in this, we would carry the life of Christ and the mystery of His Holy Resurrection within us. Every word that comes out of our mouths, every step we take, and every

thought we cogitate should reflect the uncompromising faith of our forefathers and martyrs.

Inspired by Holy Easter, let us instill the love and power of prayer in the lives of our children so that they may feel the strong faith of the Armenian nation and commit their lives to the Motherland and the prosperity of the Christian faith.

Inspired by Holy Easter, our nation is walking through the paths of Resurrection.

Christ is risen from the dead.

Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ.

Easter 2019
Burbank, CA

HOLY ETCHMIADZIN AND THE FUNDRAISING EFFORTS OF THE RENOVATION OF THE CATHEDRAL

“Armenia’s acceptance of Christianity as its state religion is not an ordinary occurrence. It is life and that life is a perpetual force.”

- (H.H. Karekin I Sarkissian, Catholicos of All Armenians)

Prominent foreign encyclopedias state that **“Armenians were the first people to accept Christianity as an official state religion.”** This statement has significant historical value in the history of entire Christendom. Additionally, this historical fact is a source of pride and honor for our people.

Since Armenia’s conversion to Christianity in 301 A.D., our Christian Faith has been deeply enrooted in our people. Therefore, in the words of the Vartanants martyrs **“no force can deter us from our Faith.”** (451 A.D.). In the centuries which followed, the Christian Faith was the unifying force of the Armenians, becoming an inseparable part of our identity. At the center of this unifying movement, was the Armenian Apostolic Church.

From the days of St. Gregory the Illuminator, Holy Etchmiadzin became the spiritual birthplace of the Armenian people, the religious and ecclesiastical center, the See of the Catholicoi of All Armenians, and through

its national and cultural activities, Holy Etchmiadzin became the expression of our national identity.

In the words of the 18th century Armenian historian Arakel Vartabed of Tavriz, **“the entire Armenian nation was bound by the ‘Right Hand’ of St. Gregory the Illuminator and Holy Etchmiadzin.”**

Driven by this unshakable faith and resolute conviction we have sought refuge, spiritual power and consolation in the Armenian Church, in Holy Etchmiadzin.

Today, as the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin is undergoing the costly renovation, it is our expectation from our people to extend a helping hand and to provide financial support for this God-pleasing mission.

Participating in the renovation of the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin ought to be the obligation of each Armenian. Through our heartfelt donations, let us take pride and ownership in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. As we have noted in the past, we wish to reaffirm our conviction that **“Under the blessed arches of Holy Etchmiadzin, the prayers of every Armenian faithful have echoed throughout history. Those prayers resonate in the hearts of the faithful today who have taken on noble mission as architects to preserve the sustainability of the Mother Cathedral.”**

July 17, 2019

THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

The Christian Church (and the Christian faithful) venerate the Holy Cross with the deep understanding and vision that in the Holy Cross we see Christ, our Lord, the crucifixion of the Son of God for the salvation of humanity.

The Holy Cross mirrors the life of the Christian faithful. In the Holy Cross we not only see the sacrificial life of the Son of God, but also see the source of inspiration of our spirituality. As the faithful children of the Church our spirituality is enriched with the life-giving power of the cross. Thus, today, as we celebrate the exaltation of the Holy Cross, we equally thank the Almighty God for gracing humanity with Incarnation of His Only Begotten Son. Christ our Lord continuously leads us all to live a meaningful and sacrificial life. Through the power of the Holy Cross the faithful people have put their faith in God and have built this Cathedral.

A decade ago, this Cathedral was built as a firm testimony of our Christian Faith. Today's procession has a symbolic meaning. The elders of the Church have taken a powerful and insightful step in passing the torch to the new generation, for them to become the young leaders of the community and carry on the mission of the Church with dignity and commitment.

The feast of the exaltation of the Holy Cross challenged us all to reflect in our hearts and souls the renewal of our commitment to service, to live a meaningful life and to become a close friend of Christ, our Lord.

September 14, 2019

HONORING THE UNDYING LEGACY OF DIANA APCAR

Distinguished guests,

Tonight's event truly marks a milestone in the life of the Western Diocese. A tribute to honor the legacy of Diana Aparcar is historic and most meaningful. A visionary leader who had the foresight to serve her ancestral Motherland of Armenia and the Church with resilience and professionalism. As the first Ambassador of Armenia in Japan, she played a powerful role to facilitate the relocation of close to 1,500 orphans in Japan who fled the first genocide of the 20th century perpetrated by the Ottoman Turks.

In a letter dated February 10, 1920, Diana Aparcar addressed the reverend clergy of the Armenian Church in the United States with the following words: "The Armenian Church is unmatched with its lively spirit and soul consoling and captivating prayers. Nothing comes close to the jubilation one feels during the Divine Liturgy. I do not know whether I would be blessed enough to once again stand before the Holy Altar to hear and embrace the divine chants and prayers."

Honorable Consul General Akira Muto,

Personally, and on behalf of our community, I would like to extend to you our wholehearted gratitude for the collaboration between the Consulate General of Japan and the Western Diocese. You have certainly shown

immense respect for a nation which has refused to die. I assure you that Armenians in our ancestral land of Armenia and dispersed in the Diaspora will forever be grateful to you in the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

Every step that we take reflects both the pain of our people and the strong commitment to be peace-loving and justice-promoting advocates. History cannot be adjusted to political implications, for then history is tainted and generations lose the sense of truth and justice.

The beautiful country of Japan is known as the land of the rising sun. The horror of the Armenian Genocide filled the hearts of Armenian people with darkness. Our ancestral Christian Faith coupled with the luminous hearts of such astounding people as Diana Apcar ensured that the sun would also rise in our hearts as well.

Tonight's event is truly a visit and visible act of the collaboration between the Consulate and the Western Diocese in honor of the "Legacy of Diana Apcar." This event will further develop the friendship of the Armenian and Japanese people. We are also extremely grateful to have with us as the main speaker Dr. Meline Mesropyan as well as the great-granddaughter of Diana Apcar, Ms. Mimi Malayan.

In closing, I would like to thank all those who have taken an active role in the organization of this most educational event, which sheds light upon the mission accomplished by Diana Apcar and the bond established between the two nations.

September 17, 2019

ANCA GALA BANQUET 2019 RECIPIENT OF THE KHRIMIAN HAYRIG AWARD

Միրելի եղբայրներ ի Բրիստոս,
Գերաշնորհ Սրբազան Տ. Մուշեղ Արքեպիսկոպոս,
Վերապատուելի Պերճ Ճամբազեան,
Հոգևոր հայրեր,
Distinguished guests, brothers and sisters,

Receiving awards and acknowledgments is quite a humbling experience. For a servant of Christ, however, first and foremost it is a renewal of calling and covenant with God. For when we surrender ourselves to Christ and shoulder His yoke, we do not seek personal gratification but the glory of the Almighty God, the Giver of Life.

Today, as I receive the “*Khrimian Hayrig*” award, I bow my head in admiration and reverence before the venerable *Mkrtich I Vanetzi* Catholicos, also known as *Khrimian Hayrig*, pledging to continue his eternal legacy to the best of my human abilities.

A devoted religious leader, esteemed educator, distinguished scholar, leading publisher, and brilliant statesman, *Khrimian Hayrig* was a father figure in the truest sense of the word. Catholicos *Vazken I* called *Khrimian hayrig* the “greatest revolutionary of the Armenian peasantry” for committing his entire life to the betterment

of life-conditions of common people and to the protection of rights of the Armenian people. He awakened the muffled voice of the prophets and emphasized the role of the priest in advocating justice and righteousness, standing for the truth, and supporting the oppressed. Like the prophets, Khrimian Hayrig earnestly strived to bring justice and righteousness.

The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), being the largest Armenian American advocacy organization, pursues the same goal – to foster public awareness about Armenian issues, especially about the Armenian Genocide, influence policies on matters of interest to our nation, voice the concerns of the Armenian community and protect the rights of our people.

This is how ANCA carries on Khrimian Hayrig's legacy. This is how I humbly pledge to carry on the legacy of this award's inimitable namesake.

Seizing the opportunity, I would like to express my appreciation to the ANCA - Western Region board members, headed by Chairlady Nora Hovsepian, Esq. for nominating me.

I salute with deep gratitude the presence of my spiritual brothers in Christ – Abp. Moushegh Mardirossian, V. Rev. Berj Jambazian, and diocesan clergy. Through close collaboration, we have held within us the firm belief, vision, and urgency to uphold unity in the life of our community.

I extend to you all my love and respect, for your presence armors my spiritual life, strengthens my commitment to serve my ancestral land of Armenian, the Mother Church of Armenian. It deepens in the

depth of my heart the reverence for the United States of America, which has been the land of the rebirth and the resurrection of the orphaned children of the first Genocide of the twentieth century.

Thank you and congratulations to all the honorees – Honorable Judy Chu (United States Congresswoman), Honorable Kathryn Barger (Los Angeles County Supervisor), Araksya Karapetyan (Journalist and TV personality) for the instrumental role you play in your respective fields for the prosperity of Armenia and the wellbeing of the Armenian people.

You have honored our community. With unwavering respect and commitment, you have valued the journey of the Armenian nation – nation refusing to die and striving for life.

Today, with genuine reverence, I also remember Mr. Hagop Baghdassarian, a noble and lifelong community leader and benefactor, whose life journey has been the fulfilment of the dream of Armenian.

Finally, I thank each and every one of you for your unconditional love, respect, and support.

May God's blessings be with you always. Amen.

Աստուած օրինէ մեզ բոլորս իր իմաստութեամբ, հայրենական տեսիլքով, ազատատենչ ու ամբողջական Հայաստանի տեսիլքով, հայ դատի հաւատքով, որուն ռահվիրան եղաւ Հայոց Հայրիկը եւ իր պատգամներու հաղորդութեամբ ներշնչեց մեր ազգի զաւակունք հայոց ազատագրութեան անմահ ոգիով, ինչը եւ դարձաւ դաշնակցութեան կեանքի նշանաբանը: Այսօր, Մեռակի պատգամը թող արձագանգի մեր հոգիներու մէջ. «Կանք, պիտի լինենք ու դեռ շատանանք»:

October 20, 2019

“GLENDALE GIVES THANKS”

Reverend clergy, dear brothers and sisters,

On this beautiful Thursday morning, as we have gathered from different faith communities to offer our thanksgiving prayers and celebrate our unity in diversity, first, I would like to thank God for this marvelous opportunity and for shining His sun on us.

Giving thanks is an inner urge unique to human nature. It defines our *communal* faith, *own* spirituality and *personal* relationship with God. “Glendale Gives Thanks” Community Prayer Breakfast held for over 55 years comes to prove that despite our ethnic, religious, cultural and other differences, we are ONE THANKFUL community united through the power of prayer.

Glendale is truly a jewel city. With more than 40% Armenian population (...and, yes, we do take pride and ownership), it is a multicultural mosaic comprised of many pieces. With gratitude and respect, let us remember all the 72 mayors of Glendale, who throughout the history have served this community diligently and selflessly.

We are grateful to Glendale City Council members of all times for their leadership and desire for excellence.

With its 15 departments and 17 boards and commissions, our beloved city strives to cater to the needs of this diverse community.

Glendale Unified School District has a very special place on the city's mosaic. It is comprised of 32 schools serving more than 26,000 students in transitional kindergarten through 12th grade, providing quality education to our beloved children.

Eight libraries, 36 parks, the Civic Auditorium, 4 community centers, 6 sports facilities, 4 historic buildings, 4 theatres, a Community College, an aquatic park and many other crucial landmarks adorn this beautiful city.

Glendale is home to close to 100 churches, Temple Sinai and Chabat synagogues, the Islamic Center and many other houses of worship.

Let us thank God for these precious gifts bestowed upon the City of Glendale and its residents.

We may come from different backgrounds. We may speak different languages. We may practice different religions and have our own distinct ways of worship. We may have different political views and ways of expressions. Nevertheless, we constitute the community of God united in the spirit of love, tolerance, good will, and respect. These are fundamental values for peaceful and cohesive co-existence.

We have all heard Aesop's fable about the old man, who calls his sons and asks them to break a bundle of sticks. As each son tries and fails to break the bundle, the man asks them to separate the sticks and try breaking them again, which they do very easily.

In the New Testament, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus touches on the same subject, "*Every kingdom divided*

against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand” (**Matthew 12:25**).

It is unfortunate that disunity and disagreements still exist in the religious complexion of the world and in society, especially pertaining to issues that are so sensitive to every one of us.

Faced with major global issues, namely *climate change, large scale warfare in Syria and elsewhere, social inequality, poverty, food and water security, religious conflicts, safety of human lives, lack of access to quality education and healthcare, growing unemployment, blatant corruption*, we ought to join forces and create a united front in the face of all the adversities. Our local endeavors can potentially have a global impact on the issues mentioned above.

In order to succeed, we have no other choice but to embrace unity in diversity. One of the church fathers formulated this thought very eloquently - *unity in essentials; liberty in secondary things; love and charity in all things*.

Together we should mold the spirituality of our communities. Together we should set high moral values that we can commonly hold in reverence. Together we can become an influencing power, guiding our communities through the paths of justice and righteousness. Together we can make quality education and healthcare accessible to our brothers and sisters of Glendale. Together, we can initiate dialogues on matters pertaining to mental health, homelessness, domestic violence, drug abuse and other horrid issues that continue to plague our beloved city of Glendale. Together we can uproot

crime from our neighborhoods and communities. Together we can make our houses of worship safer. Together we can make better environmental choices and keep Glendale clean and green. Together we should cherish the power of togetherness amidst religious, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity.

In his First Epistle, St. Peter urges us to be *“like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble”* (*1 Peter 3:8*).

Roxanne Lalonde, in her writing titled *“Unity in Diversity: Acceptance and Integration in an Era of Intolerance and Fragmentation,”* beautifully explains the underlying concept of *unity in diversity*. She asserts that unity without uniformity and diversity without fragmentation shifts focus from unity based on a mere tolerance of physical, cultural, linguistic, social, religious, political, ideological and/or psychological differences towards a more complex unity based on an understanding that **difference enriches human interactions**.

When we discern things from Lalonde’s perspective, we realize how rich we are as a community and how colorful of a mosaic is our beautiful city of Glendale.

In closing, I would like to leave you with Apostle Paul’s lasting message addressed to the Ephesians, *“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace”* (*Ephesians 4:3*).

May God bless the city of Glendale and you all.
Amen.

November 7, 2019

THE CATHEDRAL OF HOLY ETCHMIADZIN

What unites us all and keeps us together is the centuries old Holy of Holies – the Mother Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin. For centuries, the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin, being the birthplace of our Christian Faith, has nourished the spiritual lives of our ancestors, has led us towards God and enlightened the minds and souls of generations with the messages radiating from the Holy Gospels.

The Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin has become the symbol of our Christian and national identity. When we speak of the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin, we then reawaken and rekindle in our hearts the sacred vision of St. Gregory the Illuminator, the Patron Saint of the Armenian Church.

In one statement, the journey of our nation has been towards God, with God and in God.

Throughout centuries, the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin has been renovated several times. The past few years, based on the instructions of Japanese and Italian experts who have visited Armenia, it has become clear to us all that a major renovation was much needed to secure the sustainability of the centuries old Cathedral for the upcoming generations. This mission can be fulfilled when we all respond to God's call and bring our share of participation. The same mission will also be a call to unite us all in our Christian Faith, renewing our

commitment to serve God and the faithful with love and true dedication.

Let us all remember that Etchmiadzin is the key word, which tells us about the vision of Saint Gregory the Illuminator. The same vision needs to be lived by each of us there to see the presence of God on the sacred land of Armenia.

November 24, 2019

THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF ST. LEON (SRBOTS GHEVONTIANTS) ARMENIAN CATHEDRAL AND HER VISION

The year 2020 marks the 10th anniversary of St. Leon (Srbots Ghevontiants) Armenian Cathedral. It is our heartfelt desire that we celebrate this milestone collectively, as the Cathedral opened the doors to envision a New Life with God.

This house of prayer and worship has a distinct and special place in our hearts and in the pages of history of the Western Diocese. The Cathedral instills Faith and Piety in the souls of the faithful and as the Lantern of Hope, the iconic edifice serves as a Christian site of pilgrimage.

The Cathedral is a gift bestowed upon us as we reflect on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians **“The Church is His Body, the fullness of Him fulfills everything in every way”** (Ephesians 1:23). And **“you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.”** (Ephesians 2:19-21). We, the believers, **“are the Body of Christ”** (I Corinthians 12:27-28). In this image of **“The Body of Christ”** we see the communion of the faithful with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We also believe in God's spiritual GRACES bestowed upon the collective Body of Christ, in other words, each faithful of the Church to implement and utilize (Romans 12:5-8, I Corinthians 12:4-31). The Same Apostle says **“grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift”** (Ephesians 4:7). These ultimate expressions of these graces are the ways in which we emulate Christ, our Lord, and render our service within the Body of Christ for the glory of God.

Deeply rooted in this religious belief, we witness the miraculous vision and message which radiates from the walls of the Cathedral:

a) Firstly, the Cathedral is the reflection of our collective vision...the vision of former Diocesan Primate, Clergy and faithful.

b) The Cathedral is not solely a stone structure. Rather, the edifice signifies the presence of God and the reflection of religious and spiritual missions of the Christian Faith.

c) The Cathedral's 10th anniversary is indeed a milestone. The momentous occasion grants us the opportunity to awaken in our hearts the vision to live a pure Christian life. The Cathedral serves as the tangible presence of God and it remains up to each of us to enlighten the souls of our community and lead them to the “Divine Life.”

The 10th Anniversary of St. Leon (Srbots Ghevontians) Armenian Cathedral is a “Celebration of Faith.”

January 1, 2020

EMMANUEL – GOD IS WITH US!

The significance of Christmas is embedded in this simple affirmation. As we celebrate the miraculous birth of Jesus, we become more cognizant of God's perpetual presence in our lives. With the birth of Baby Jesus, God himself visits the human race, embarking on His earthly redemptive mission. God becomes incarnate to dwell with us, to give us spiritual birth so that we may align our paths and live according to His commandments and personal examples.

When we celebrate the Nativity and Theophany of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, first and foremost, we confess His divine intervention and lasting presence in our lives. We proclaim that God is with us and therefore, with that conviction, we direct our lives toward the good and the beautiful, toward divine perfection and creativity.

When we reflect on God's presence in our lives, we experience a revelation and a spiritual rebirth, which in turn fill our lives with new resolution, commitments and visions.

Engulfed in the spirit of New Year and Christmas, as a spiritual servant of the Holy Armenian Apostolic Mother Church, I pray to God beseeching that He transforms our hearts and makes them a warm manger for the newborn King to abide. In our prayer, we recall the words of St. Nersess the Graceful found in the Service of Peace Hour, where he says, "*And a child is born,*

*a son has been given to us, **for God is with us.** And his authority is upon his shoulders, **for God is with us.** And his name is called messenger of great counsel, **for God is with us.** And wonderful counselor, **for God is with us.** And God the mighty prince, **for God is with us.** And prince of peace Father of the One to come, **the Lord God is with us.**”*

Our ancestors lived their lives with that strong conviction that God was with them. That notion gave them strength and confidence to build the Fatherland and the Church, to create spiritual values and missions, high moral standards and culture, science and arts. They have created a great future for the generations to come, for they knew that God was with them.

Emmanuel – God is with us. When we declare this affirmation out loud, we experience a moment of self-reflection, spiritual transformation and a beginning of a new life. In addition, we acquire a higher level of spiritual self-awareness or self-confidence, if you will, to answer God’s call and re-evaluate our lives with His presence.

It is unfortunate that due to today’s life circumstances, we often times fail to season our lives with prayer. As a result, we distance ourselves from God and reject His presence, resembling an uprooted tree doomed to die in a short period of time. In our case, having time-limited lives means being deprived from spirituality, which is fatal. It is part of the human nature to be inseparably united with God, without forgetting that we have been created in His image and likeness. Otherwise, we will cease to live and will wither like the uprooted tree.

Beloved in Christ,

In the Nativity and Theophany of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, try to discover new life perspectives. Abide in faith, uphold spiritual and moral values, open up your souls to God and keep your hearts warm for the Fatherland and the Holy Church. Do not hesitate to pass on the sacred values and traditions of our church and nation to your children, so that they may be spiritually armored to withstand any and all challenges of the time.

Christ is Born and Revealed!
Blessed is the Revelation of Christ!

May God grant peace and prosperity to the world, continued success to Armenia, strength to the church and longevity to our Pontiff, His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians.

Emmanuel –God is with us. May God be with our nation today, tomorrow and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Feast of the Nativity
2020

TO EVALUATE AND EMPOWER OUR LIVES

Dear Brothers in Christ,
Dear ACYO delegates and youth,

I extend to you all a warm welcome and pray that the Good Lord will lead you into a productive convention during which time you will all have ample opportunities to develop discussions and forums to better organize your personal life as well as the life of the organization.

Conventions are designed to evaluate and empower our lives. Thus, the time and the energy that you are graced with need to be used for the fulfillment of the will of the Almighty.

As you are aware, this year marks the 10th anniversary of the consecration of St. Leon (Srbots Ghevontians) Armenian Cathedral. In addition to being briefed on reports and activities of the past year, this convention aims to address issues that are relevant to you and it will equip and strengthen you with the essential arsenal in order that you may thrive in society. I firmly believe that this convention will also empower you to embrace the precious gift to stand tall, strong and wiser in life in general.

Undeniably, each of us is challenged by inner struggles. Physical, mental and emotional issues, set strict limits and boundaries in our lives. We face a number of uncertainties and at times, feel imprisoned in a free

society. Uncertainties about the future are derived from the crises of today. Political and civil unrests, revolutions, economic sanctions, plague the world. Consequently, our spiritual peace and harmony is devastated.

The question must be asked. How does one prosper in such a society? It is through our complete reliance on our ancestral Christian Faith that allows us to not only survive but to thrive as well. And the key message which I want to share with you is embedded in the word *identity*. Our identity is conditioned on the intangibles graced upon us by God. We are born into a family, a race and a religion. In the first year or so of our lives, we are helpless and are fully dependent on our parents for food, shelter and comfort. From a young age, our identity is molded by our parents. We abide by and adhere to the rules set forth by our parents. We embrace the values which are handed down to us and incorporate them in our lives. However, we must understand that God's presence in our lives has been eternal, for God said to the prophet Jeremiah "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you." (Jeremiah 1:5). Hence, we ought to cherish this bond with Christ, our Lord. The bond with Christ implies the journey with Christ. Through the baptism from the Holy Font of our Church we have been anew, as the adopted children of Christ. Thus, we ought to walk with Christ. And what are the steps that would help us realize our calling?

Firstly, we ought to pray and lead prayerful lives. We must embrace our Heavenly Father through prayer. In the Gospel according to St. Matthew, Christ, our

Lord exhorts us *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* (Matthew 11:28-30). Setting time for spiritual conversation with God allows us to gaze at the reflection of our soul. Whether it is in solitude, or in a sanctuary with the members of the Body of Christ, prayer is the perpetual force which unites us with the Almighty. Prayer need to be an inseparable part of our spirituality. Through a prayerful life we bear within us the presence of God, who leads us toward the Truth and Life.

Secondly, we ought to cherish and revere the sacred traditions of our Church and our family. In modern-day society, we witness a significant push toward subjective moral reasoning. The “compass” or the guide to differentiating between what is right and wrong is the Holy Bible. Inspired by the teachings of God, our parents instilled in us the reverence for those Christian values. They include the love for God and the Church, the relentless persistence to preserving the sanctity of family, the respect for humanity and God’s wondrous creation, and the drive for those intangibles which enrich and strengthen our spirituality. Given this titanic force toward subjectivity in morality, according measures need to be implemented to combat this movement. I trust your wisdom and the strength of your faith life and you have the vision to become true and dedicated ambassadors of our Church.

Thirdly, your arsenal must include the emotional and spiritual connectedness to our Motherland Armenia and to Holy Etchmiadzin, the spiritual birthplace of our nation. As sons and daughters of the world's oldest Christian nation, a magnanimous force exists between every Armenian and our ancestral biblical Homeland. Prominent foreign encyclopedias state that **“Armenians were the first people to accept Christianity as an official state religion.”** This statement has significant historical value in the history of entire Christendom. Additionally, this historical fact is a source of pride and honor for our people. Since Armenia's conversion to Christianity in 301 A.D., our Christian Faith has been deeply enrooted in our people. Therefore, in the words of the Vartanants martyrs **“no force can deter us from our Faith.”** (451 A.D.).

In the centuries which followed, the Christian Faith was the unifying force of the Armenians, becoming an inseparable part of our identity. At the center of this unifying movement, was the Armenian Apostolic Church. Today I see the Armenian Church in you. You are the torchbearers of the mission of our Church. I urge you to be cognizant of this reality and respect the calling graced upon you by God.

From the days of St. Gregory the Illuminator, Holy Etchmiadzin became the spiritual birthplace of the Armenian people, the religious and ecclesiastical center, the See of the Catholicoi of All Armenians, and through its national and cultural activities, Holy Etchmiadzin became the expression of our national identity.

Driven by this unshakable faith and resolute conviction we, as a people, have sought refuge, spiritual power and consolation in the Armenian Church, in Holy Etchmiadzin.

Therefore, as your spiritual leader, I call upon you to make Armenia and Holy Etchmiadzin a destination in your life's journey. Be enthralled and captivated by the power and mystery of our Homeland. Organize pilgrimages, take part in humanitarian missions, form friendships and establish a lasting bond. Be fully immerse in the bountiful offerings of Armenia.

Lastly, share your gifts with those around you. God has graced each of you with multiple gifts and talents. Become the architects of peace by sharing your God-given gifts with the world. Use the graces bestowed upon you by the Almighty to help, encourage and comfort others for the life of a true Christian is defined by faith and good deeds. Together with your pastors present here tonight, we look at you with pride and trust your wisdom and commitment that growing in the Church as members of the ACYO all of you have the inner strength to unceasingly be spiritually transformed and be the spiritual engine of transformation in the life of the Church.

Beloved youth, I pray that God lead and guide you in your noble endeavors.

ACYO Convention

January 17-19, 2020

St. Leon Armenian Cathedral, Burbank, CA

HOLY WEEK

The Holy Week is the apex of Christ's earthly ministry – the remembrance and enactment of His final days. Hence, we are called to follow in Christ's footsteps during this epic journey, stretching from Palm Sunday to Holy Easter. Not only do we need to follow the stations of the cross that lead us to Golgotha, but also walk in His shoes, perceiving the world with His own eyes.

Palm Sunday has always been one of the most favorite feasts of children. Dressed in luminous white, all the children would convene in our neighborhood church to celebrate the entry of Christ into the Holy City of Jerusalem. We are so thankful that the childhood memory and that pure feeling of elation continue to live with us.

The entry of Jesus into Jerusalem was indeed triumphant. Jerusalem is not merely a geographic location but rather a truly holy city sanctified by the life of Christ. His resounding voice continues to echo in our ears with the most powerful affirmation, "*I have conquered the word.*"

It's Palm Sunday, when Jesus enters into our hearts and illuminates our souls. Very often we forget that we are in the presence of God. As fallible human beings, we act contrary to His teachings and our Christian calling.

In the readings of the Holy Week, the dominating presence of Christ prevails. One of the gospel readings

that falls on Holy Tuesday is the parable of the Ten Virgins. What does Christ want to convey through this parable? We learn that our lives resemble the lamps and the oil symbolizes our faith. In order to receive the bridegroom in our lives, we ought to be filled by faith. Similarly, we have to spiritually prepare ourselves and celebrate the resurrection of Christ with utmost faith, for the mystery of Holy Easter is grandiose and the prayerfulness is the only way to comprehend and internalize that mystery.

Then, Christ enters into the temple and drives out all the merchants, the Scribes and the Pharisees. Today, we represent that temple. Christ is coming to cleanse our temples corrupted by multitudes of sins. Let us be reminded of the Apostle's words, "*You are created in the image of God and are temples for His dwelling.*"

This statement bears a profound meaning. When we read this passage, we realize that we are called by God to carry His presence, which is nothing but a privilege.

The Holy Week is a time of spiritual enlightenment. On Maundy Thursday, the sacrament of Holy Eucharist is celebrated as we commemorate the Last Supper. At this time, the Only Begotten Son of God makes a reference of His ultimate sacrifice on the Holy Cross. This is very fundamental to our spiritual life and ought to be the leading thought of our lives.

The touching ceremony of Washing of the Feet is then followed by a vigil that commemorates Christ's betrayal. With gospel readings, prayers, psalms, and liturgical hymns, we continue our spiritual journey atop

mount Golgotha, the final station of the holy cross, where Christ would offer Himself for the salvation of human kind.

In our personal or pastoral lives, when we face difficulties, we are reminded of Christ's passion, the tortures He willingly accepted to bear for us. Can our sufferings ever be paramount of Christ's sufferings? In the Service of Betrayal, we experience the divine love of God for the humanity that knows no boundaries. On the other hand, we see our human weaknesses and shortcomings.

Dear faithful,

We exhort you to follow Christ through the stations of the cross and partake in his passion, so you may also partake in the mystery of resurrection, which bears the invitation to the new life.

Some of you may wonder why the church celebrates the passion, the crucifixion and the burial of Christ. The reason is that our holy fathers realized that the Holy Sepulcher is the source of light, the doorway to the eternal life.

This year, the Great Lent and the Holy Week are very special for us in every aspect. The forty-six days of lent were opportunities of self-reflection and prayer. As we observe self-quarantine during this pandemic, the Great Lent have become days of spiritual quarantine for us in its literal meaning (the word quarantine is derived from Latin *quadraginta*, which means *forty*). This period of time is very obliging for us to re-evaluate our lives and re-think about are responsibilities toward the

planet Earth and mother nature entrusted to us by God. We have to assume full responsibility for what happens today in the world, for God has given us this beautiful world in a perfect condition. It is our spiritual obligation to care for the creation of God.

As we mentioned, this year's Holy Week and Easter celebrations are going to be different. We know that you all have waited anxiously to celebrate these major events in the life of the Armenian Church. However, given the current circumstances and out of abundance of caution, we are not going to be able to hold regular church service. Instead, everything will be live streamed for you to participate.

Let this be a period of repentance for all of us. Let us renew our commitments to live more responsible lives with a deeper understanding of our Christian calling and God-given mission. Only then we may have a more meaningful Easter.

April 5, 2020

DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26).

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

We would like to commence this year’s Easter message with the above-mentioned words of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ addressed to Martha, for we believe they resonate with the spirit of the day and hearten us against the distress of current times.

To better understand the context of the biblical verse, let us mentally travel back in time to Bethany, where Lazarus, the beloved of Christ, had been dead for four days. When Jesus arrived there with His disciples, Martha, the sister of Lazarus, said the following to Him, *“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died” (John 11:21).*

Martha, who had faith in God and believed in the resurrection of the dead, in the anguish of bereavement, experienced a moment of theodicy, which may have contained elements of distrust. Genuinely empathetic to Martha’s sorrow of loss, Jesus made the following affirmation, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”* To further emphasize this statement and challenge Martha spiritually, Jesus asks, *“Do you believe this?”*

In fact, this question was not directed to Martha solely but also to the disciples who accompanied Jesus. It is noteworthy to mention that Thomas, also referred by the Evangelist as the Twin, was among the disciples – the same Thomas, who in doubt, wanted to “*put his finger into the print of the nails on Christs’ hands and into His side*” (John 20:25).

“Do you believe this?” Jesus asks this question to each and every one of us. “Do you believe that I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die?”

Today, when the world is still suffering from the snares of the invisible enemy, namely the COVID-19 Coronavirus, in a moment of spiritual distress, many of us may question the existence of God in the words of Martha by saying, “*Lord, if You had been here, this would not have happened to us.*” Of course, it is part of human nature to feel weak, afraid, panicked, suspicious or doubtful. During disastrous times, when we are in danger of perishing and imminent death seems so near, in the state of total perplexity, we may experience a spiritual breakdown in our very core, which can undermine the strongholds of our faith. Often times, we feed our fears, instead of bracing our faith, forgetting the veracious promise of our Lord, who asserted, “*I am with you always, even to the end of the age*” (Matt. 28:20).

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, many institutions, houses of prayer and worship, businesses, and schools closed down. The CDC and other public health officials instructed us ways by which we can

protect ourselves and prevent the spread of the virus. We were advised to isolate ourselves and practice six feet social distancing. In our precautionary efforts, as we were focused on social distancing, our intimate relationship with God was compromised.

The period of the Great Lent, which is a time of spiritual quarantine (from the Latin *quadraginta* and the Italian *quaranta*, both meaning “40”), for many of us became a time of self-isolation with our own fears, resembling the prophet Daniel, who was imprisoned in the lion’s den (*Daniel 6*).

We all remember how during the first weeks of the outbreak, people rushed to invade the grocery stores to stock pile on essentials. The whole panic-shopping craze had a catastrophic impact on America’s supply chain. The scene reminded us of the Final Days as described in the Book of Revelation. The national news disseminated through various media platforms and social media outlets added more fuel to the fire rather than soothing public emotion. It is very unfortunate that many of us succumbed to the “fake news” instead of embracing the Good Tidings.

Out of anxiousness, we hoarded excessive amounts of food and supplies, forgetting the words of Christ addressed to the rich farmer, “Fool! *This night your soul will be required of you; then who will get what you have stored up?*” (*Luke 12:16-21*).

John the Baptist cried and said, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*” (*Matthew 3:2*). After John’s imprisonment, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the

kingdom of God, and saying, “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel*” (Mark 1:14-15). He was preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and disease (Matthew 4:23). Even after witnessing those healings and divine miracles, people did not listen to the exhortations of the saints and did not prepare themselves spiritually. Whereas, a subtle hint coming from media instilled panic in our hearts and made us invade the grocery stores for our bodily needs.

A few days ago, on Holy Tuesday, our church observed the remembrance of the ten virgins. The parable, which is from the Gospel of Matthew, recounts the story of ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. When foolish virgins woke up from slumber to refuel their lamps, they found out they had no oil. Therefore, they went to buy some. And while they were shopping, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut (Matthew 25:1-12).

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The lamps described in the parable of the ten virgins symbolize our souls and the oil is the Word of God. Woe to us, if our souls are emptied of the divine messages and we find ourselves unprepared for the second coming of Christ.

Jesus says, *“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). Indeed, Christ has defeated this world. In the words of the liturgical introit, *“He trampled down death by death and by His resurrection He has given us the gift of life”* (Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Church).

On this Easter morning, the all-merciful God has shone the dawn of the new life upon us. Today, we celebrate that new life. By proclaiming the resurrection of Christ, we reaffirm the presence of God in the depth of our souls. By sharing the luminous greeting of Holy Easter, we strengthen our faith, for Christianity is not merely a philosophy but a way of life. By celebrating Christ’s resurrection, which revolutionized the history of humanity, we renew our commitment to become teachers of faith for our children so that they may not stumble from the path of righteousness.

The recent temptations taught us a good lesson. In the words of the disciple, *“We had the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead”* (2 Corinthians 1:9).

Besides fear, anxiety, and panic, we have witnessed practical expressions of a living, conscious faith. We have all seen the sacrificial service of doctors and other health care professionals around the globe, who put their own lives on the line to save those who were affected by COVID-19. We saw numerous expressions of humanitarianism and acts of kindness. With great admiration, we saw young volunteers delivering food

and supplies to the most vulnerable segment of our society - the elderly. We were amazed by the generosity of individuals and companies who donated medical supplies and other life-saving essentials. With a debt of gratitude, we recognize the men and women in uniform, the military, the police, firefighters, paramedics and other representatives of government agencies, who continue to serve our communities around the clock. It was especially delightful to see the consolidation of wonderful men and women in our motherland Armenia, who spared nothing to deliver much-needed help to the less fortunate. In these heroic and compassionate actions, we perceive the power of the victorious resurrection of Christ.

The Armenian nation survived many perils throughout history, including natural disasters, warfare, famine, and disease. Nevertheless, we have always risen from ashes like a phoenix by virtue of our ancestral Christian faith. As St. Paul states, *“We were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life”* (Romans 6:4).

Dear faithful brothers and sisters,

Our exhortation to you is to pray unceasingly for the sick, the distressed and the needy around the world. Please pray for the motherland Armenia, Holy Etc-hmiadzin and its Holy See headed by His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of all Armenians.

Believe in the miraculous resurrection of Christ and bear in mind that this too shall pass. We urge that you lead your lives with this message of Christ's resurrection, despite the circumstances. Do not forget your Lord during times of joy and prosperity, rather glorify His holy name always, for to Him befits the glory, the power and the dominion. Amen.

Christ is risen from the dead.
Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ.

Easter 2020
Burbank, CA

REFLECTION OF OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH

My dear faithful in Christ,

This is the luminous day the Lord has graced upon us all. This day will undoubtedly be remembered in the life of the San Diego Armenian community and Western Diocese. The historic day which becomes the reflection of our Christian faith and witnesses the vision of our ancestry, for their life's journey has been with God, a journey of resilience and resurrection, a journey looking beyond the horizons.

In the past few days, I have keenly followed the progress of your new church project and have been spiritually empowered, viewing the steps you have taken despite all the countless hurdles you had faced along the way.

And yet all of the hurdles have become the testing ground of our unfailing Christian faith. As I look at you today, under the pastoral leadership of our beloved brother in Christ the Very Rev. Fr. Pakrad Berjekian, I read the history of this community.

The day has come and the mission of the new church has already started. The arrow has left the bow. The vision of the new church is the arrow and you are the bow, who for sometime have cherished the vision of the new church and responded to God's call with courage and commitment. You are victorious and your reward will come from God.

Today, we will be blessing the corner stone of the new church in the name of the Apostles, and all of us together, we will carry on our Christian mission with renewed dedication and zeal. This act of blessing will be the “vaccine of the coronavirus.” This historic ceremonial rite is an act of faith which strengthens our faith in God, our bond with the history of our nation and bridges of life to the future.

Dear Father Pakrad
Beloved faithful in Christ,

I wholeheartedly congratulate you as you launch the start of this monumental project. Be not afraid for the Lord will guide you and protect us all as long as we stay united in our prayers. I salute all the Godfathers and all those who have taken an active and leading role in this project. God, our Lord, will strengthen the foundation of our new house of worship through your dedication.

Dear Hayr Pakrad, I extend to you my deep gratitude and appreciation. Since your assignment as the pastor of this community, peace and prosperity has been reclaimed and regained for the well-being of our faithful. Let us all celebrate this historic day and praise the holy name of the Almighty God.

*Ground blessing ceremony of the new church complex
in San Diego
May 31, 2020*

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FEAST OF HOLY ETCHMIADZIN IN MY LIFE

Today, our Church is celebrating the Feast of Holy Etchmiadzin. Truly, as the name Etchmiadzin is interpreted as the descent of the Only Begotten, we are thus celebrating the visit of Christ, our Lord in the life of our nation. Էջ-Միածին, the descent of the Only Begotten Son, has been the vision of St. Gregory the Illuminator, the patron saint of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

This celebration becomes more meaningful only when we carry the same vision within or spirituality.

Throughout centuries, Holy Etchmiadzin has been the spiritual Mother in our nation's life. All the necessary ingredients of our identity as a nation were infused in the mystery of Holy Etchmiadzin, bridging the past, present and future.

In my personal life, the Feast Day of Holy Etchmiadzin has a greater significance and impact, for it was on this Feast Day, when in 1980, I was ordained and consecrated as a priest of the Armenian Apostolic Church by the late Catholicos Vazken I. Today, as I celebrate the 40th anniversary of my ordination into the priesthood, I lift up my heart and thank God for setting the new path in my life, which has been a journey towards God.

As I celebrate the 40th anniversary of ordination into the priesthood and the 30th anniversary of my ordination as a bishop, I renew my promise of servitude

to continue my ministry with a stronger faith and commitment. I thank God for gracing my life with the calling of priesthood and empowering me with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. My gratitude to Vazken I, of blessed memory, and to my people for the love and care extended to me throughout my life's journey.

June 14, 2020

60TH ANNIVERSARY OF ST. VARTAN ARMENIAN CHURCH OAKLAND

Beloved faithful,

It is with immense spiritual joy that we greet you with the love and peace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and convey to you our genuine pastoral wishes.

As you know, the year 2017 is significant as it marks the 90th anniversary of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America. In the great mural of nine decades, we see the committed leadership of all Diocesan Primate and clergy as well as the unwavering loyalty of the Diocesan faithful.

Coincidentally, the formation of the Armenian community in the Oakland area dates back ninety years as well, as the settlers, inspired by the land of opportunity, made their mark in the Bay Area. Community wide events and fellowships were organized in efforts to preserve and promote the Christian values which they commonly held in reverence. A long-awaited dream came to fruition in 1957 with the completion of St. Vartan Armenian Church, allowing the faithful to unite in the House of God through worship and prayer.

Sixty years later, the heartwarming church on Spruce Street has become the symbol of the Armenian people. The sanctuary is a testament of our commitment to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our enduring affection for the Armenian Apostolic Church and a unifying bond

to one another as the descendants of the first Christian nation. The latter title is humbling, indeed. However, let us not limit ourselves solely as title holders. Let our noble deeds and God-pleasing endeavors contribute to the livelihood of our communities. Continue to instill the Christian values in the hearts of the youth. Be actively engaged in parish life. Cherish the sacred traditions of the Armenian family. Respect and love one another as Christ loves us. Our hearts are enrooted in the Church. We are the Church with our presence and our service.

We are delighted in hearing about the joint pilgrimage to Armenia organized by St. Vartan Armenian Church of Oakland and St. John Armenian Church of San Francisco. Together, you will be inspired by the wondrous beauty of Armenia. You will be captivated by the number of awe inspiring historical and religious sites. The land of Armenia is an open-air museum and undoubtedly you will create a lifetime of memories.

We extend our wholehearted gratitude to the Rev. Fr. Hovel Ohanyan, for his love and pastoral guidance of the flock of Christ. Your resolute leadership and motivated Christian spirit is commendable, indeed. Our sincere appreciation to the Parish Council and all auxiliary bodies of the church for your unwavering loyalty and dedication.

May the Good Lord bless and protect St. Vartan Armenian Church and shower you with heavenly blessings, granting you health in mind, body and spirit.

February 25, 2017

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF ESTABLISHMENT OF ST. JOHN GARABED ARMENIAN CHURCH SAN DIEGO

From the Headquarters of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America, we extend our blessings to the Very Rev. Fr. Pakrad Dz. V. Berjekian, Pastor of St. John Garabed Armenian Church, the members of the Parish Council, the Diocesan Delegates, the members of the Ladies Society, the students of the Sunday School, the Armenian language School, the Trust Fund, the ACYO, the Deacons and Choir members on the blessed occasion of the 40th anniversary of establishment of St. John Garabed Armenian Church in San Diego.

The parish has played a unique role in the life of the Western Diocese. Shortly after its establishment as a result of the dedication of the Parish Council and other auxiliary bodies, a permanent priest was assigned with task to lead the flock of Christ. It is commendable that during the pastorate of now retired priest Fr. Datev Tatouljian, the parish further flourished and thrived. On the auspicious occasion, we wholeheartedly congratulate the Very Rev. Fr. Pakrad Dz. V. Berjekian and commend his dedicated pastoral leadership. We are delighted to know that the parish has been established on a solid financial ground.

On the auspicious occasion of the 40th anniversary of establishment of St. John Garabed Armenian Church of San Diego, we convey our genuine wishes to the Pastor, members of the parish's auxiliary bodies and the entire faithful who continue to serve the Parish and the Western Diocese with the utmost humility and grace. *“giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Ephesians 5:20).

May the Almighty bless and protect you and your loved ones under His Benevolent Right Hand.

May 10, 2017

25TH ANNIVERSARY OF CONSECRATION OF ST. MARY ARMENIAN CHURCH COSTA MESA

“Rejoice O Holy Church, for Christ, the Heavenly King has crowned you with His cross and He has adorned your fortress with His wondrous glory.” (Hymn of the Church)

In the life of our nation, the Church has been the sacred institution, embodying in its keenest sense not only the religious reawakening but also the cultural livelihood of the Armenian people. Our identity stems from the light radiating from the Holy Altar of the Mother Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin. Faith, language, Motherland and all ingredients which comprise our identity are enrooted in the heart of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church.

Indeed, St. Mary Armenian Church in Costa Mesa has been an integral part in the life of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America. Shortly after its establishment, the parish began to thrive due to the collective efforts of the Parish Council and all auxiliary bodies. With the acquisition of the church property and its consecration on June 13 and 14, 1992, the parish unified the community under the pastoral leadership of Archpriest Fr. Moushegh Tashjian. With a sense of a vibrant community, a new property was acquired, expanding the church complex. Shortly thereafter, St. Mary Armenian Church paid off

its mortgage. With the goal ensuring the financial stability of the parish, the Trust Fund was established. On this blessed occasion, we wholeheartedly congratulate “the Courageous Pastor” Archpriest Fr. Moushegh Tashjian for his 25 years of pastoral service at St. Mary Armenian Church. We are confident that through the collaborative efforts of the organizational structures, St. Mary Armenian Church will continue to carry on its God-pleasing missions.

On the auspicious occasion of the 25th anniversary of consecration of St. Mary Armenian Church, we convey our genuine wishes to the Pastor, members of the parish’s auxiliary bodies and the entire faithful who continue to serve with the utmost humility and grace.

With the intercession of St. Mary, the Holy Mother of God, may the Almighty bless and protect you and your loved ones under His Benevolent Right Hand.

June 24, 2017
Burbank

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God,

It is with a grateful and humble heart that I gaze upon You with supplications for lasting peace, prosperity, and commonweal for the great country of the United States, which so many people of diverse backgrounds proudly call home.

As the spiritual leader of the Armenians on the West Coast and in Mexico, I bring the intercession of my flock and ask You O Lord to grant wisdom, compassion, and righteousness to all congressmen and congresswomen so that they may lead this country through the paths of justice, liberty, and equality.

Compassionate God, forgive the sins of all Your servants and make them vessels of Your divine will so that in all their endeavors, they may remember Your commandments and act according to the US national interest in defense of the country's sovereignty.

This I ask in Your holy name. Amen.

*U.S. House of Representatives
Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C.
July 12, 2017*

75TH ANNIVERSARY OF CONSECRATION OF ST. JOHN ARMENIAN CHURCH SAN FRANCISCO

“Rejoice, O holy Church, for Christ the king of heaven today has crowned you with His cross, and He has adorned your fortress with His wondrous glory.” (Hymn of the Holy Church)

On the auspicious occasion of the 75th anniversary of consecration of St. John Armenian Church in San Francisco, we greet you with the love and peace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and convey our genuine wishes to the Pastor the Rev. Fr. Mesrop Ash, the Parish Council, the Ladies Society, all auxiliary bodies and the entire faithful.

We are delighted to reflect on the history behind the establishment of St. John Armenian Apostolic Church 75 years ago. Inspired and led by the divine teachings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, a group Armenian-Americans established the St. John parish with a priest, a parish council, a ladies society and auxiliary bodies aimed at preserving the sacred teachings of the Armenian Apostolic Church and strengthening the Armenian community. Indeed, St. John Armenian Church is one of the oldest parishes in Northern California catering to the religious needs and providing spiritual nourishment to a diverse Armenian community. For decades, the parish has continued to remain loyal to its religious and educational mission. With the establishment of the

Foundation Fund, the parish has avoided financial hardships, prospering and thriving in the process.

In the large family of Christian Churches, the Armenian Apostolic Church has remained true to its national identity, forming an inseparable bond with her faithful. The Armenian Church has been the source of our identity, instilling in the hearts of her faithful the sanctity of Christ's teachings and the love for our Motherland. The Armenian people enliven the Armenian Apostolic Church. In turn, the Armenian Church carries on in the footsteps of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We wholeheartedly congratulate you on the 75th anniversary of consecration of St. John Armenian Church and pray to the Almighty to grant divine wisdom and spiritual renewal to all who selflessly serve the parish under the pastoral leadership of the Rev. Fr. Mesrop Ash. With the unrelenting dedication and enduring affection of the parishioners in mind, we conclude our message with a quote from the Gospel according to St. Paul: *"In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."* (Philippians 4:6-7).

August 3, 2017
Burbank

“TIME TO CROSS THE BRIDGE”

“Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7)

Beloved faithful,

As we celebrate the 90th anniversary of establishment, we look back with pride on the dramatic progress, growth and development of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America and its continuing mission to serve the spiritual and educational needs of our Armenian-American communities. With its vibrant faithful community, St. John Garabed Armenian Church has been a vital parish in the large family of Diocesan parishes.

The rise of future edifices and structures is merely a drop in the ocean for the life of the San Diego parish. With the expansion, each of you becomes a guarantor in the noblest endeavor of the preservation of the Armenian identity. The Southernmost parish of the Diocese, with its unprecedented number of youth, is a testament to your staunch belief in the prosperous future of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The “Bridge to the Future” is being built brick by brick and the end of the completed bridge is in sight. All that remains is that each of you become a steward in the building process. May your stewardship become evident in your generosity. May your Christian spirit

and your giving heart define your gracious character. Through your noble endeavor, St. John Garabed Armenian Church of San Diego will become an architectural staple and the stronghold of future generations of young Armenian-Americans.

We commend the pastoral leadership and guidance of the Very Rev. Fr. Pakrad Berjekian and the relentless dedication of the faithful community. Your committed service has earned you the love and respect of your community. My wholehearted gratitude goes to the Gala Organizing Committee for their outstanding collective organizational efforts.

In my prayers, I ask Christ, our Lord's blessings to be upon you and your loved ones as you spread God's love, grace, and peace.

September 5, 2017

25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SATURDAY SCHOOL OF ST. PAUL ARMENIAN CHURCH FRESNO

On the blessed occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Saturday School of St. Paul Armenian Church of Fresno, we greet the Rev. Fr. Yessai Bedros, the Spiritual Dean, the Principal Margaret Doumanian, the teachers, students and parents with the divine love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Indeed, this Saturday School, just like all Saturday Schools of the Western Diocese, which operate under our auspices, are educational centers which are worthy of commendation.

It is inspiring to know that the Saturday School which was established 25 years ago continues to carry out its educational mission under the leadership of the Parish Priest the Rev. Fr. Yessai Bedros and the selfless dedication of the Principal and the Teaching Staff.

Indeed, culture and literature have distinguished the Armenian people who, through their spiritual treasures, have influenced their own and have inspired the lives of those around them. A nation's cultural life is shaped by creativity of its people and such a life has a biblical basis, for to a Christian, to create is to follow in the example of the creative life of Christ, our Lord. The appreciation for culture become sacred when we render our love and respect for all cultures.

On the auspicious occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Saturday School of St. Paul Armenian Church,

we wholeheartedly congratulate the entire parish family. In our prayers, we ask the Almighty to ensure grant you continued strength and vivacity as you collectively progress in the noble educational mission of the Saturday School. May the wisdom of the Holy Spirit guide you in your God-pleasing endeavors.

Indeed, above all values, spiritual and cultural values ought to be prevalent. To educate is to share our God-given graces and the luminous light, through a prayerful life, fills our souls. One of the dear missions of the Armenian Apostolic Church is the preservation and the prosperity of the Armenian School in this blessed multicultural and multilingual country of the United States.

“Be you therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in charity even as the Christ also has loved us and has given himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor” (Ephesians 5:1-2).

October 11, 2017

Burbank

TURNING POINT

The 75th anniversary is a turning point, a milestone in our community life. We are launching a new journey with a renewed commitment and the ultimate goal is to secure “Our Christian identity which invites us all.” Our forefathers have lived the Christian faith and have graced us with the gift of witnessing Christ, with the legacy of the Armenian Church.

The Church, namely the congregants of this divine institution, becomes a living, growing, empowering, prosperous institution when we walk with God and walk with the people of God.

“My faith in God has been led by life.”

We remember in our prayers with immense gratitude those who have become the architects of the community life: bishops, priests and lay leaders. The Church and the community mirror their legacy, the journey of their lives.

We extend our gratitude today to you all for being humble servants of Christ, and responding to God’s call to serve God, the Church and one another. Being created in the image of the Almighty God, we are called to be partners in the Holy work of God, the Creation. We become more human when conversing with God, becoming the Holy Hands of the Almighty God.

The world in which we live today can be turned into a more peaceful place where we are able to move

the mountains, the human lives transforming our lives to be holy in the eyes of God.

Can we make this celebration meaningful? When we are no longer an island in the life of the community, we then grow as a Church. We have a sacred mission to fulfill. The mission of our Church is to preach the Word of God, to live the life of Christ, to relived the vision of St. Gregory the Illuminator, who saw the descent of the Only Begotten Son on our ancestral land. We are the land and through prayer and spiritual journey, our souls will be the birthplace of Christ.

The 75th anniversary celebration becomes meaningful when we learn the history of Church, become the stewards of our Church, and above all, strive to foresee the future beyond the horizon.

The course of our history and the faith life of our ancestors enriched us to be true ambassadors of Christ, so that through our Christian identity, we may be united, stronger and more prosperous for the glory of God.

May the Good Lord bless and protect you all.

*75th Anniversary of St. John Armenian Church
of San Francisco (Gala Banquet)
November 17, 2017*

75TH ANNIVERSARY OF ST. JAMES ARMENIAN CHURCH OF LOS ANGELES

"Heavenly King, preserve the Church unshaken and keep the worshippers of Thy name in peace."

From the Headquarters of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church, we extend to you our blessings and heartfelt wishes to the Rev. Fr. Haroutioun Tachejian, the Parish Council, the Diocesan Delegates, the Ladies Society, the Memorial Trust Fund Committee, the ACYO, the Deacons and Choir members and all auxiliary bodies on the blessed occasion of the 75th anniversary of St. James Armenian Church of Los Angeles.

We are delighted to reaffirm that 75 years ago, a group of faithful, filled with the divine love of Christ, established the St. James Parish in Los Angeles. Through the tireless collective efforts of the Parish Priests, Parish Councils, Ladies Societies and auxiliary bodies, they preserved the sacred traditions of the Armenian Church and strengthened the community.

In the large family of Christian Churches, the Armenian Apostolic Church has remained true to its national identity, forming an inseparable bond with her faithful. The Armenian Church has been the source of our identity, instilling in the hearts of her faithful the sanctity of Christ's teachings and the love for our Motherland. The Armenian people enliven the Armenian Apostolic Church. In turn, the Armenian Church carries

on in the footsteps of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Service is a virtue, a grace bestowed upon us by the Almighty. Our lives are enriched when we serve wholeheartedly and selflessly, thus emulating the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Psalms exhort us to “serve the Lord with gladness.” As Christians, servants of the Armenian Apostolic Church and pious faithful, each of us should gladly contribute to the religious and educational mission of the Church. Spiritual joy entails spreading the radiating light of the Gospel of Christ our Lord, proclaiming the Good News of His Victorious Resurrection and His promise of eternal life.

It gives us great comfort in knowing that through the dedicated pastoral service of the Rev. Fr. Haroutioun Tachejian and the unwavering and resolute support of the Parish Council, St. James Armenian Church continues to serve as a model parish for newly established Diocesan parishes. We are also delighted that the parish is celebrating the Rev. Fr. Haroutioun Tachejian’s 25th anniversary of ordination and consecration into the Priesthood. We wholeheartedly congratulate Fr. Haroutioun on the milestone celebration and wish him continued success in his pastoral ministry.

We are confident that St. James Armenian Church will continue to carry on and fulfill its God-pleasing missions with a renewed sense of commitment and zeal by instilling in the hearts of the young generation the divine love of Christ, our Lord.

We wholeheartedly congratulate the Pastor, all organizations and entire family of St. James Armenian Church of Los Angeles on the auspicious occasion of the 75th anniversary. May you continue to serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the Armenian Church with humility and grace and contribute to the prosperity of your community and the Western Diocese.

May God bless and protect you and your loved ones under His Benevolent Right Hand.

December 5, 2017

Burbank

69TH ANNUAL ACYO ASSEMBLY
ST. JOHN GARABED ARMENIAN CHURCH
SAN DIEGO

“We must strive for holiness with the fear of God.” – St. Paul

The strive for holiness must be our vision. The fear of God should be understood as the wisdom of God. Holiness is one of the most important ingredients of our Christian identity. The ACYO members represent the Church. Your words and action should reflect God’s fear and wisdom.

With these thoughts I call on you all to set a new beginning in the journey of your God-given life. Remember as delegates of the Armenian Apostolic Church, you are privileged to serve and represent our Church today and inspire our youth to continue the mission of the Church.

I remind you all the words of Christ our Lord. Abide in me. As Christian leaders, we need to abide in Christ. St. Paul the Apostle has extended his message to us all in the following words: “To me, Christ is life.”

Dear ACYO delegates,

With a prayerful heart let us all make the promise to become the living gospel (Eglise Vivante) We should respond to God’s call with courage and strive for holiness with the fear of God.

You all are graced with the gifts of God, which ought to be shared with one another, enrich one another’s life.

This year's assembly has been a great success in the life of our youth family and the Western Diocese. The Assembly Sessions have been tremendously productive in many ways. As delegates, you have renewed the past year's activities, made presentations, set new missions and above all renewed your calling to live the Christian faith with a new zeal and vision.

The year 2018 has been declared as the Year of the Youth. Thus, we ought to take on the lead to be unifying strength of the Diocese initializing and organizing many missions and projects to make the ACYO a strong institution for the glory of God.

Dear ACYO, I urge you all to be part of the July 2018 Pan-ACYO pilgrimage to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. This mission will be an exceptional event; the youth rally will be marked as a milestone. The pilgrimage will be a time of praying together, learning from each other, coming closer to God, and living the spiritual rebirth of our youth.

January 13, 2018

HONORING OF THREE PROMINENT ARMENIAN-AMERICAN JUDGES

Tonight's celebration is unique. As we continue to celebrate the Glorious Resurrection of Christ, the celebration becomes more meaningful and visible through the lives of three distinguished judges who have graced the Armenian community and the community at large with their vision of excellence. I have often said that life is a stewardship entrusted to us by God, which needs to be lived wisely enlightening the lives of our fellow brothers and sisters.

To me personally and to the Diocese as well as for the members of the community, the elevation of distinguished individuals to judgeship has greater significance. In all of our successful steps, we want to share the resilience of our nation whose life's journey especially in the last century has been tumultuous and torturous.

Therefore, the revival of our community is expressed through the success stories of our people. I cannot possibly find the right words to express my joy and gratitude to our distinguished judges only because words cannot encapsulate the joy of our people.

Tonight, I would like to implement a new method of introduction of our honorees. Three of our Nerouj young professionals will be given the honor and privilege to make the presentations.

I also would like to note that tonight's art exhibition showcasing the wondrous works of Armenian

classical and contemporary artists, is dedicated to our honorable judges. The beautiful exhibition is held in the Zorayan Museum under the patronage of Mr. and Mrs. Edi and Talin Sarafoglu. As always, Mr. and Mrs. Sarafoglu have been staunch supporters of all Diocesan missions including those aimed at cultural enrichment.

The paintings being showcased is from the personal collection of Mr. Hayk Amirkhanyan, an art aficionado and a devout member of our Zorayan Museum Committee. His presence and valuable insight is commendable and greatly appreciated, indeed.

I personally and on behalf of all of us would like to extend a very warm welcome and deep gratitude to our honorable judges and wish them success in their respective careers.

April 4, 2018

SENIOR ACYO RETREAT

Dearest ACYO members,

Retreat is the blessed time of solitude and prayer in our God-given lives when we stand before the eyes of God, converse to the Almighty from the bottom of our heart, and attain within us the moment purification. This is the time when we surrender our lives into the hands of God and be guided by the divine commandments.

I certainly believe that a retreat is a journey in our spiritual lives, which leads us to New Life: a life with Christ, our Lord, a life with the saints of the Church, a life dedicated for the peace in the world, a life for one another.

Throughout the week, your souls and minds will be filled with the Word of God and with prayers, and you will be enriched with the spiritual gifts you all share with one another. I call upon you to fulfill the message speaking to us through the hearts of laypeople devoted to realizing God's work in the world.

My deep gratitude to the Rev. Fr. Mardiros Chevian, the dean of St. Nersess Armenian Theological Seminary, my Brother in Christ, for his love and dedication for the young leaders of our Church. My love and respect to all of you who make the beautiful family on the campgrounds, a serene and wondrous place where you are closer to God.

November 9, 2018

PASSING OF ARCHPRIEST FR. YEGHIA HAIRABEDIAN

*“Faith is not a garment, to be slipped on and off;
it is a quality of the human spirit, from which it is inseparable.”*

- Bartholomew

Dear brothers in Christ,
Yeretzgin Roberta, Rakel
Deacon and Mrs. Daniel Hairabedian,
Sisters of Der Hayr,
Beloved faithful in Christ,

Truly, this is one of the most painful times in the life of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church. The loss of our dearest brother in Christ, a dedicated husband, father and brother and a true pastor is deeply felt in each of our hearts. We have all witnessed and cherished the devotedness of Father Yeghia and greatly appreciated his loving, caring and compassionate presence in the life of his family and flock. I personally have known Der Yeghia for close to 25 years and can sincerely and wholeheartedly share with you the fact that his journey into the priesthood has been most inspiring, spiritually uplifting and “imitating Christ.” Having this thought in mind, I chose the words of His All Holiness Bartholomew which clearly mirror the faith life of our dearest Der Yeghia.

“Faith is not a garment, to be slipped on and off; it is a quality of the human spirit, from which it is inseparable.”

Truly, Faith has been the most important ingredient of Der Yeghia’s spirituality. His faith in God has been reflected throughout his journey with Christ, our Lord. His empowering messages brought us all closer to God and enlightened the minds and souls of the beloved faithful. He lived a faithful life to God and to the Armenian Church. He not only lived the Christian Faith for himself, but armored the spirituality of his family and the faithful with the same faith in Christ.

At this prayer hour, we are gathered to offer our prayer for his departed soul, fervently asking from God to recon him amongst the abode of the heavenly saints. I am certain that most of us would agree with the thought that Der Yeghia’s humility was exceptional as he touched our lives, preaching the Word of God, bridging our lives to Christ, but above, all he lived his life emulating Christ.

Tonight, in our prayers, we celebrate his sacrificial life. His priesthood was equally reflected in Yeretzgin Roberta and his beloved children Daniel and Rakel. There is no doubt that he followed in the footsteps of his devout parents, who most of us have known closely. What is the spiritual legacy of Father Yeghia? I would say namely Faith, which has become the quality of his spirit which he ensured was never emptied.

Dear brothers in Christ, Yeretzgin and children, dedicated members of St. Gregory Armenian Church,

inasmuch as the loss of our beloved Der Yeghia deepens within us the pain of a tremendous loss, I would also say that his good heart and soul, the Christian spirit keeps us all united in Christ. He clearly perceived that spiritual renewal is possible only in Christ and through a life with Christ.

I extend to you all my condolences. May the Almighty God bless the memory of Fr. Yeghia, a compassionate servant of the Armenian Church and grant us all the wisdom to value the gift of the Christian Faith, for it is through the Christian faith, that one embraces life itself and yearns for the closeness with God.

August 12, 2019

PASSING OF ARCHPRIEST FR. YEGHIA HAIRABEDIAN

(during the Celebration of the Divine Liturgy)

“...There came a sound from Heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind”; and we read that it descended “suddenly” (Acts 2:2)

That is to say unexpectedly, surprisingly, breathtakingly.

My dear brothers in Christ,
Yeretzgin and children,
Sisters of Der Yeghia,
Devout members of St. Gregory Armenian Church
and beloved faithful in Christ,

I purposefully chose this passage from the Book of Acts, which tells us all about the Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the disciples of our Lord, who soon after went into the world to preach the Word of God. Thus, Pentecost was shared with all those who have embraced Christ in their hearts and souls and have felt the transformation of their spirituality.

For the past two weeks I have often thought to myself that all of us as pastors and members of the Christian Church begin our spiritual journey with the disciples sitting in the upper room. And today we are honoring the memory and sacrificial life of one of the most exemplary pastors in the Armenian Church who “heard the sound from Heaven, as of a rushing mighty

wind,” and responded to God’s call with love and compassion. Today, we bid farewell to a husband, a father, brother and a friend to many.

His loss brings much pain to our hearts, yet today, through this Badarak, he brings us all the Kiss of Peace with living and enriching messages:

“Greetings to you all my dearest brothers and sisters. I depart from this world into eternity, into the Hands of the Almighty.”

“Greetings to you all my beloved children, cherish the legacy of the Church and be true stewards.”

“Greetings to you all my brothers in Christ, for together we have taken upon us the yoke to serve Christ, our Lord.”

“Greetings to all faithful. Armor your life with the Christian faith to secure the renewal of our spirit in Christ...”

Our beloved Father Yeghia has been a most loved and respected pastor of our Church. His loving and caring presence will be missed. He touched our hearts with his humility and assisted us all to hear “the sound from Heaven” so that we may all be graced with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The greatest moral victory that we can offer humanity is the virtuous life. Father Yeghia’s life was full of virtuous deeds which glorified God, empowering us all with the same vision.

Dear brothers in Christ,
Yeretzgin and children,
Sisters of Der Yeghia,
beloved faithful in Christ, and dedicated faithful
members of St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian
Church of Fowler,

Be assured that Fr. Yeghia leaves with us all with
the rich legacy of the Christian Faith. I cherish the
words of Bartholomew addressed to John Paul II, of
blessed memory:

*“God’s revelation has promised to those who love the Lord:
A new Heaven and a new earth.”*

May the Almighty God reckon him in the abode
and amongst the heavenly saints and strengthen us all
to live a life with Christ, a journey fulfilled for the glory
of God. Amen.

August 12, 2019

6TH ANNUAL LUNCHEON OF AGAPE CIRCLE

AGAPE is a Greek word, which means universal, selfless, unconditional love that transcends and serves regardless of circumstances. It perfectly describes the kind of love Jesus Christ has for his Father and for his followers. In a nutshell, *AGAPE* is the term that defines God's immeasurable, incomparable love for humankind.

The mission of the Agape Circle of the Western Diocese emanates from that divine love and emphasizes the importance of helping the less fortunate.

Since the official establishment of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America in 1898, and consequently the establishment of the Western Diocese as a separate entity in 1927, our venerable institution has been serving its faithful community with the *AGAPE* love.

That being said, with the formation of the Agape circle of the Western Diocese in 2015, the outreach programs and social services of the church have been elevated to a new level, mobilizing all the segments of the community in mission partnership.

God brought our community together by virtue of Agape Circle's philanthropic endeavors, instilling the powerful but, in the meantime, beautiful grace of giving.

With much gratitude, today we honor those institutions and individuals, who chose us as their missionary partners in sowing the good seeds of charity and giving.

Our special thanks go to Mrs. Sato Yessayan for graciously hosting this event in memory of her late mother of blessed memory Mrs. Arax Barooni.

Last but not least, we extend our love and appreciation to the co-chairs of this event Mrs. Armine Bedrosian and Mrs. Peggy Kankababian headed by committee chair Mrs. Alice Chakrian.

May the Good lord bless you all for your conscientiousness, kindheartedness, and generosity.

October 17, 2019

Senior ACYO Retreat 2019

My dear youth, children of the Armenian Church and members of the ACYO,

I am truly glad to see the growing numbers in our annual senior youth retreat, which unites us all in prayer and paves the way towards God. This is the journey which protects our lives and helps us all to develop within us the deeper spirituality that in God alone we find our peace.

This year's theme for the retreat motivates us all with a firm vision that God is the ultimate destiny of our lives. "Navigating the Storms: trusting the Lord to help calm our lives' waves."

During the course of our lives, each of us is challenged with storms, which can at times shatter our inner peace. What I would like to share with you is my personal experience. In my life, I often experience storms, however prayerful life has given me the wisdom and strength to walk towards God and ultimately win the inner battle.

I fervently ask you to make this retreat a time to come closer to God and make God the mirror of your inner spirituality.

My deep appreciation to my brother in Christ Father Mardiros, the dean of St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, a visionary leader of our church for his dedication, love and passion for the Church and the youth of our Church. I also extend my words of appreciation to Fr. Avedis and Fr. Mesrop and the deacons

who will be joining Fr. Mardiros during this spiritual journey.

Finally, my love and utmost respect and trust to you, my dear youth, for being vigilant and strong in your Christian Faith. You are the young leaders of the Armenian Church.

As ambassadors of Christ, live the Christian Faith and become the light in the life of our community.

November 8, 2019

2ND ANNUAL ARMENIAN AMERICAN MUSEUM GALA BANQUET

Esteemed guests,

The whole vision of the Armenian American Museum came to fruition as a result of the Centennial Commemoration of the Armenian Genocide. In the past few years, major steps have been taken to set the ground for the initial commencement of the construction. The realization of this monumental project will impact the coming generations with the deep understanding that sons and daughters of our nation have always responded to the world with the message of building life and leading a legacy of peace.

Tonight's gathering calls on us all to participate in this most God-pleasing mission to show the strength of our faith and commitment and the depth of our respect for the martyrs and saints of the first genocide of the 20th century. Our nation's life will perpetually remember the martyrdom of our ancestors for their faith and for the freedom of their country. All necessary steps should be taken to infuse in the spirituality of our children the notion of honoring our martyrs. Through the building of this museum, we not only honor our martyrs but equally honor all genocides of the 20th century. In the words of St. Paul, the Apostle "*If one part suffers, every part suffers with it;*" (I Corinthians 12:26).

Inasmuch as we honor our martyrs, we equally honor all those who have been deprived of their God-given lives. My message tonight would be to you all to give generously from your heart so that that the vision of the Armenian American Museum is realized through our collective prayer, through the living Christian faith, through our hard work and dedication. All of these actions certainly show the genuine respect for the blessed land of the United States of America, this freedom loving country which has embraced the children of our nation and has empowered us all to bear within us the aspirations of our forefathers, and gracing upon the pride of becoming honorable citizens of the United States of America.

Tonight, we honor three distinguished individuals Paul R. Ignatius, Former U.S. Secretary of Navy and Former U.S. Secretary of Defense; Kathryn Barger, Supervisor of the 5th District of Los Angeles County and Kenneth Khachigian, Senior Partner at Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck. They are honored for their visionary and inspirational leadership, outstanding excellence in their respective fields. We express to you our wholehearted gratitude and wish you continued success in your noble endeavors.

May the Good Lord bless and protect you all. Amen.

December 2, 2019

SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Dearest and most dedicated stewards of the scholarship mission. My words addressed to you will be short yet from my heart. I truly cannot express the extent of my gratitude for what you do for our children. It is certainly a noble cause which reflects your vision and most of all, exemplifies your faith in action.

My sincerest gratitude to Mrs. Alice Chakrian for being a true leader for many years who inspired the members of the committee. Blessed are those who fulfill the will of God. I have also witnessed the love and dedication of all the members of the board who undoubtedly feel privileged to serve this God-pleasing mission. Here I would like to thank Diran Avagyan for his compassionate work, whose vision for education is most commendable.

Tonight, I congratulate the new chair of the Scholarship Committee Mrs. Eileen Keusseyan, for taking on this most important task to continue what God entrusted all of you to fulfill.

Dearest Alice, Eileen and members of the Board, my deep appreciation to you all on behalf of the diocese and the community. When I say that these ladies move mountains, I truly mean that. In short, I would like to say that its always joy for me to be with you and working for our children. In closing, I want to thank all the donors for their trust and specially the devotion of the husbands of our Board members. Your support is most valuable.

God bless you and I truly love you all and honor you for living the Christian Faith.

February 14, 2020