

ARCHIVE COPY

Please return.



Armenian Apostolic Church of America
138 East 39th Street, New York, New York 10016

Volume XX, Number 1 — May 1997



National Representative Assembly Convenes in Providence, Rhode Island

Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church was the host of the 1997 NRA. Lay and clergy delegates deliberated on issues of importance making decisions for the coming year. With an overall theme of "Renewing Our Commitment on the Threshold of the 21st Century," all delegates participated in three panels: "Meeting the Needs of Our Younger Parishioners;" "Spiritual Issues Facing the Armenian Church in America;" "Administrative Issues Facing the Armenian Church."

Concurrent with the NRA was the annual conference of the National Association of Ladies Guilds.

See page 3 for more on the NRA

Photo by Berge.

Mrs. Alice Mekhjian is Honored as Mother-of-the-Year



Guests from distant cities in the U.S. and Europe joined the NY-NJ metropolitan area in honoring Mrs. Alice Mekhjian as the 1997 Mother-of-the-Year at the Mothers' Day Luncheon hosted by the Prelacy Ladies Guild on May 8 at the St. Regis. This year's luncheon was also a celebration of Hampartzoum with a beautiful musical program presented by baritone Vagarchak Oganian and soprano Anait Zakarian. They were accompanied by Dzovinar Mnatzaganian-Vartanian. Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian announced a \$2,000 donation by Mrs. Alice Mekhjian for the Prelacy's orphan and elderly program, and a \$25,000 donation from Dr. and Mrs. Harout and Shaké Mekhjian, in honor of Dr. Mekhjian's mother, for the benefit of the village of Talish which is being reconstructed with the Prelacy's sponsorship. *Photos by J.K. Hovhaness*



The Prelacy Ladies Guild with Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian and Mrs. Alice Mekhjian (right), and Mrs. Isabella Avedissian, a member of the Ladies Guild, whose \$50,000 donation for the Prelacy's renovation project was announced during the luncheon.

From the editor...

Throughout my school years my best friends were invariably first-generation Americans. Nationality and religion mattered not. I felt comfortable with my fellow first-generation Americans.

At a young age I did not necessarily understand the reason, but as I grew older I realized that although our backgrounds were very different our values, our home life, our problems were almost identical.

Many years have past since my school days, but every now and then I am again reminded that the situation, the problems and the concerns that we face are quite similar to those faced by others.

A case in point is an article which appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* early this year and which was passed on to me by a friend.

The title of the article is, "Orthodox Leader Transcends Language," and it concerns the Greek Orthodox Church in the United States and their new leader, Archbishop Spyridon.

The article begins like this:

"Nicholas Kirkeles jokes that once upon a time, Chicago's thick-accented Greek-Americans uttered two questions at the start of any conversation with a compatriot: 'What village are you from?' and 'What local church are you from?'"

"But when the Oakbrook Terrace attorney leans over in a pew at one of the area's 23 Greek Orthodox churches, he is more likely to be asked, 'Where's the English?' by a convert to the Orthodox Christian faith."

The article continues to describe how as Greek immigration to the U.S. dwindles, the amount of English used, rather than Greek, especially in church services, has become a major issue for Archbishop Spyridon, who spoke of his greatest current concerns, including unity among diverse members, education of the laity, interfaith marriages, clergy training, and the language of the liturgy.

Many disillusioned Orthodox have left the church. Of the estimated two million U.S. Greek Orthodox, about a third are dues-paying members. The Archbishop wants to bring back those who have strayed and he has set up a department of evangelism and several task forces to, as he says, "bring back thousands of faithful we have lost along the road."

On the on-going debate of the language of the liturgy, (he himself is fluent in five languages), he did not endorse Greek or English, but rather wisely said:

"It is important that our priests, that we as a church, do not impose a certain language on our congregations... What is important is to see what the congregation wants. We have certain priests who are trying to impose either their Greek or their English, but this is not what we should allow to happen... Let us look to better articulate our faith as a church so that all the other issues with which we deal can be answered with wisdom."

Sound familiar?

OUTREACH

A publication of the
Armenian Apostolic Church of America
Eastern United States and Canada
138 E. 39th Street, New York, NY 10016
Tel: (212) 689-7810 Fax: (212) 689-7168

Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian, *Prelate*

Iris Papazian, *Editor*
Mardirous Minas-Haftvani, *Business Manager*

OUTREACH (USPS 426-490) is published monthly, with the exception of a combined June-July-August issue by the Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America, 138 E. 39th Street, New York, NY 10016. Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome; please include a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Signed articles do not necessarily reflect the policy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America. Send all correspondence to the above address to the attention of the Editor. Printed in the United States of America. Periodical rate postage paid at New York, NY 10016. Postmaster: Send address changes to OUTREACH, 138 E. 39th Street, New York, NY 10016. ISSN: 10643087

Q&A: An Interview with Archbishop Ashjian

by Heggineh Mkrtychian

[Editor's Note: This interview appeared in the February 5, 1997 issue of the *Noyan Tapan* "Highlights," which is published in Armenia. It has been lightly edited for language and clarity.]

A joint statement, which was signed by Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin I and the Pope last December, found great resonance in different circles. A NT reporter asked the Prelate of the Diocese of North America's Eastern Region of the U.S. and Canada, of the Cilician Holy See, Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian, to comment on that document.

Q. As the head of a diocese of the Cilician Holy See, how did you take that statement and was Antelias notified about it beforehand?

A. I do not know if Antelias was notified beforehand, however, I know that the two Catholicosates always maintain communications with each other.

As for the statement, I have no objections about it. The statement consists of numerous parts and touches confessional problems. However, today it is not the question of adoption of the Chalcedon Council. Some individuals have made a mountain out of a molehill.

I personally am a participant of the ecumenical movement and often met both with catholics and orthodoxes. For example, within the framework of the ecumenical movement, together with orthodox churches, Catholicos Aram I [prior to his election as Catholicos] and I drew up an important statement providing more precise positions over the theological problems and especially those concerning the nature of Christ. That statement was presented to the heads of churches and was accepted by some of them. However, our catholicosates are more restraint and have not yet said their word.

Every morning during the Liturgy we repeat the expression of Grigor Tatevatsi: God is perfect, a man is perfect, they are united.

There are many definitions as to the nature of Christ, but definitions are always fraught with errors. When trying to explain the inexplicable with precise philosophical formulas you always face difficulties. And that is the source of appearance of discords as to the human and godlike nature of Christ. However, the fact that we did not adopt Chalcedon helped us to preserve our independence and national features. Today we are under historical pressure. We do not want to do what was not done by our fathers in the course of 15 centuries.

Q. In other words, from the pure theological point of view Chalcedon's repudiation is not grounded?

A. If we seriously go into the problem, like we did with orthodoxies in Geneva, we will see that speaking of one nature we mean two unified natures. When speaking of two natures the orthodoxies realize that they are united. Now it is much easier to approach these problems and analyze them then in the times of Chalcedon.

Q. Is it possible to unite Christian churches around a single denomination as a result of the ecumenical movement.

A. No. Once St. Augustine pronounced a principle: "The unity is in the freedom from ambiguity and love to everything." In other words, it is necessary to be united around essential problems, be free from dubious tasks, in order that everyone should remain at his religion. This formula, to my mind, should play a significant

role in the ecumenical movement.

We are losing our religion. In the century of materialism and atheism we have to see what unifies the churches. Ninety-nine percent of us are alike, but we distinguish only what makes us different. We should try to drive people to religion and only then get into the details.

Q. Is it possible that the Armenian Church admits the priority of The Vatican under such conditions?

A. Absolutely not. Such a question must not arise. We cannot be subordinate to the Pope's supremacy. We should not even think about it.

Q. Today much is spoken about the division between Catholicosates of Etchmiadzin and Cilicia. As a representative of the Cilician Holy See, how can you assess the relations between the two currently?

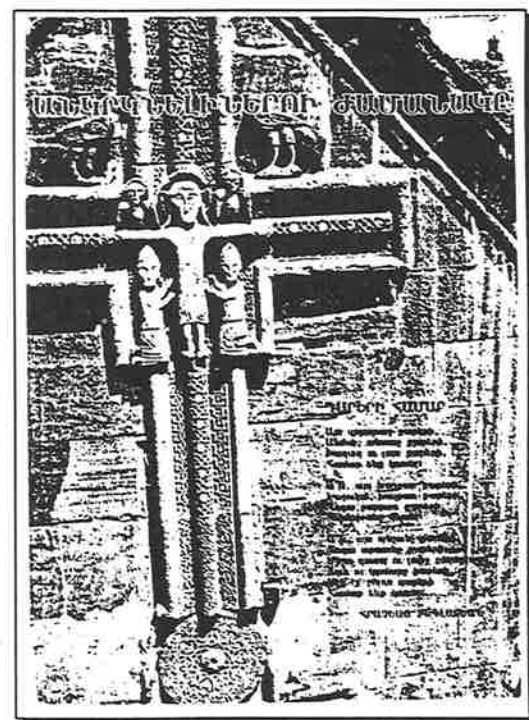
A. The two catholicosates have never been so united as today. We cannot say that there are no discords and administrative problems, in particular in the dioceses of the United States, Iran, and Greece. I think that these problems will be solved. It is known that the discords were of a political nature, and they will be settled as soon as the political problems are settled. Catholicos Aram has said that those dioceses historically belong to Etchmiadzin. Time is needed to get back to the old scheme. It is not necessary to have unity established with a stroke of the pen.

One May Have Good Eyes and See Nothing.
—Italian Proverb—

ԳՐԱՏՈՒՆ ԱԶԳԱՅԻՆ ԱՌԱՋՆՈՐԴԱՐԱՆԻ

Արցախի Հերոս Նահատակներուն մուրհուրած «Բագին» մատենաշարի առաջին թիւը՝

ԱՆԿՐԿՆԵԼԻՆԵՐՈՒ ԺԱՄԱՆԱԿԸ



Խմբագիր՝ Պողոս Սնապեան
Պատկերագրող, 400 մեծադիր էջ, Թղթակազմ, Տպարան «Կիլիկիա», Հալեպ 1996
Այս հատորի արժեքն է \$25.00 առանց \$4.00 առաքման ծախս: Իւրաքանչիւր յաւել-
եալ գիրքի համար աւելցնել \$1.00:
Ստանալու համար հանցե՛ք ամբողջացնել ներքոյ ապսպրանքի կտրօնը:

_____ օրինակ «Անկրկնեւելիներու ժամանակը» գիրքին

Name _____ Checks Payable to: _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Tel. (day) _____

Armenian Prelacy Bookstore
138 East 39th Street
New York, NY 10016
Tel. (212) 689-7810

Providence Hosts 1997 National Representative Assembly

Delegates took time out for a memorial service at the Martyrs Monument in historic North Burial Grounds in Providence. In photo at right V. R. Anoushavan Tanielian lays a wreath at the monument.

Delegates also visited Armenian Heritage Park in the Smith Hill section of the city where early Armenian immigrants settled. The Park was created and donated to the city in 1995 by Kazar and Nevert Aramian.



Photo by Berge

Senator Jack Reed Receives "Spirit of Armenia" Award



Rhode Island's Senator Jack Reed was presented with the Spirit of Armenia Award during the closing banquet of the NRA. In introducing the Senator, Archbishop Ashjian outlined the Senator's support of questions of importance to the Armenian American community, describing him as "a valuable friend of the Armenian American community, always ready to listen and to act."

New Executive Councils Ratified

The final session of the National Representative Assembly concluded with the election of the new religious and executive councils.

Elected to serve on the religious council were Rev. Nerses Manoogian (reelected) and Rev. Gomidas Baghsarian. Re-elected to serve on the executive council were Professor Hratch Zadoian, Mr. Haroutium Chitilian, and Mr. Bedros Tashjian.

The election was ratified by His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, on May 22, and subsequently the Councils' executives were formed as follows:

Religious Council: Very Rev. Anoushavan Tanielian, chairman; Rev. Nerses Manoogian, secretary; Rev. Gomidas Baghsarian, advisor.

Executive Council: Mr. Onnic Marashian, chairman; Professor Hratch Zadoian, Vice-Chairman; Mr. Haroutium Chitilian, Secretary; Mr. Hagop Kouyoumdjian, treasurer; Mr. Bedros Tashjian, assistant treasurer; Dr. John Arakelian and Jack Mardoian, Esq., advisors.

The newly formed councils will meet in a two-day seminar on July 18 and 19 to review the resolutions of the National Assembly and to plan the Prelacy's programs for the coming fiscal year. ✦



The flamboyant and charismatic mayor of Providence, Vincent Cianci, thrilled the banquet audience with his anecdotes and ended by presenting Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian and Rev. Dr. Mesrob Tashjian, pastor of the host parish, with bottles of his special "Cianci Pasta Sauce." The mayor was presented with a special plaque by the Archbishop in recognition of his devotion and service to the Armenian community in Providence.

Address to the 1997 NRA

by Onnic Marashian
Chairman, Executive Council

This is my third address in the past three years as chairman of the Executive Council, not to mention the two in the early 1980s, and my problem is how to convey the Prelacy lay council's message without repeating myself about our serious endemic concerns and without raising apocalyptic visions of our community's future on the threshold of the twenty-first century.

Our problems on the prelacy and parish levels remain the same as last year, and the year before, and the year before that—only more so, with more intensity, and solutions are sought with a greater sense of urgency.

In an effort to involve a greater number of delegates in the deliberations and resolution process, the council has introduced several changes to streamline procedural matters and make deliberations more productive.

Ever since I remember, and that goes back a long time, the same delegates attended the same permanently standing panels to thrash out the same problems, ending with the same set of resolutions that had difficulty being implemented by the Prelacy because of financial and other constraints.

The central theme running through all our panel discussions will be the renewal of our commitment on the community as well as the parish level on the threshold of the 21st century. Except for the Audit and Budget panel, the workshops have been structured so that delegates will have the opportunity to participate in the deliberations of all the panels on a rotating basis. It is hoped that this innovative approach will go beyond the usual soul-searching and will be more representative and action-oriented.

Meeting the needs of our younger generation is the topic of our youth panel, with a discussion on Christian education, Armenian education, and youth outreach programs within our communities and in Armenia. The panel on spiritual issues facing the Armenian Church in America will seek to emphasize the role of the clergy in communicating our religious heritage and traditions, as well as the teaching of moral, spiritual and ethical values as a key priority; it will discuss the role of the parish priest, as an administrator, as an educator and as a comforter of the needy, in addition to his liturgical and sacramental duties; it will take up the critical shortage of qualified pastors in our parishes; it will propose ways for the recruitment and training of serious candidates for priesthood to better meet the needs of our parishioners and better attuned to the needs of the new generation.

The third panel will tackle the administrative issues facing the Armenian Church in the Eastern United States and Canada. Part of the work of this panel will be a review of the work done by our respective committees (Diocese and Prelacy) to pave the way for an eventual administrative union of the Armenian Apostolic Church on these shores.

On this matter, it should be stated that this has been a year of mixed signals. Diocesan Primate Archbishop Khajag Barsamian's unprecedented gesture of allowing the Diocesan clergy to celebrate the sacraments with the Prelacy clergy in churches of both jurisdiction was indeed a breakthrough in bringing the clergy and the flock of the two dioceses closer than ever in the last 60 years. Its case-by-case implementation was a success hailed by all sides. The Prelacy welcomed the Primate's initiative as a positive step toward our common goal and subsequently resumed the unity discussions.

On the other hand, the failure of the Unity Committees to compromise on a timetable for a series of seminars has cast a pall over the future of the unification process. As you've seen from the detailed account in the Executive Council's

(Continued on page 4)

Dr. Chaké Minassian Receives "Woman-of-the-Year" Award



Dr. Chaké Der Melkonian-Minassian was honored as the "Woman-of-the-Year" in appreciation of her lifetime achievements in the field of education and her continued service to the community. A prominent educator with an impressive list of publications, Dr. Melkonian-Minassian's textbooks are used in many Armenian schools. Seen in photo above with Dr. Melkonian-Minassian are Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian who presented the award, and Professor Hratch Zadoian, vice-chairman of the Prelacy's Executive Council.

Awards to Local Parishioners

Each year several members of the host parish are awarded with Certificates of Merit in appreciation for their years of devoted service to the church.

Honored during the closing banquet were the following individuals:

- Mrs. Nevert Aramian
- Mr. Kegham Balemian
- Mrs. Baidzar Garabedian
- Deacon Hagop Khatchadurian
- Mr. John Varadian
- Mr. Ramon Zohrabedian

A special award was presented to Mr. Russell Gasparian, in appreciation for his years of service as host of the popular Armenian Radio program in Providence.



CROSSROADS

A Review of Prelacy and Parish Activities



Monument to Armenian Genocide Dedicated at Sts. Vartanantz Church in New Jersey



Photo by Harry Koundakjian

A twelve-foot monument made of marble and brass in remembrance of the Armenian Genocide of 1915 was dedicated at Sts. Vartanantz Church in Ridgely, New Jersey on April 20. The dedication coincided with the 82nd anniversary of the Genocide.

Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian presided over the dedication ceremony and the Divine Liturgy which preceded.

The monument was designed by an Armenian artist, Tom Kevorkian, who arrived from Armenia on the eve of the dedication in order to witness the official unveiling of his work.

Funds for the monument were donated by a survivor of the Genocide, Mr. Garabed Kinosian, who passed away three years ago and saw only sketches of the final design. His widow, Keghanoush, as well as his niece and nephew, Lucine and Mihran, helped unveil the monument in the presence of a dozen survivors, led by 95-year-old Mr. Souren Papazian of Teaneck, New Jersey, whose miraculous story of survival took him from his home village of Palu-Havav to the middle east, and finally to the United States.

The monument was commissioned by Sts. Vartanantz Church, through the initiatives of Archbishop Ashjian, who organized a competition in Armenia in which more than 80 artists participated. The 60 entries were exhibited in the House of Architects in Yerevan, Armenia. Of the 60 entries, six were selected by judges in Armenia. A five-member committee from New Jersey selected the final design. The marble was carved in Ijevan, Armenia, and the brass portion was made in Yerevan. The final constructed piece was transported to the United States with the cooperation of the United Armenian Fund. ✦

**That Which Must Be Done
Can Be Done.**
—Eleanor Roosevelt—



Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian with some of the survivors attending the dedication service.



Mrs. Keghanoush Kinoshian, Lucine and Mihran Kinoshian help unveil the monument which was funded by their husband and uncle, the late Garabed Kinoshian.

Address to the NRA

(Continued from page 3)

report, it is unfortunate that the forthcoming maiden pontifical visit of Catholicos Aram I was turned into a stumbling block in the negotiations. This take-it-or-leave-it attitude regretfully took the form of an orchestrated campaign causing confusion in the community and impacting negatively on the painstaking progress that has been made in our unity talks.

It is not the first time that a Catholicos of the See of Cilicia visits this diocese. Some of you will recall that His Holiness Karekin II, then Catholicos of the Cilician See, paid a lengthy pontifical visit followed by several short ones until his move to Etchmiadzin in 1995. None of these visits were seen as a challenge to the authority of His Holiness Vazgen I. This time, however, the legitimacy of the centuries-old See of Cilicia was being questioned and open hints were made that the reunification of our diocese in America should signal the demise of the historic See of Cilicia, so vital in the lives of a large segment of Armenians in the Diaspora.

It's painful to say, but it should be said that making Catholicos Aram's visit an issue in the unification process has widened the polarization and deepened the distrust. But we shall ignore the paranoia and proceed with our welcome to Catholicos Aram's first pontifical visit next October with a positive attitude and greater vigor.

As for the unity talks, we should admit that distrust still reigns. Our communities still hold widely different perceptions of what constitutes unity. To us, unity is not a hostile takeover. It is not capitulation of one side to another. To us, it is cooperation, working together to achieve integration, leading to eventual unity.

All this leads me to reflect on the following: Here we are getting ready to celebrate the 1700th anniversary of the Christianization of the Armenian nation, in the year 2001, and we can't even grope our way to the year 2002 and beyond.

Is the Church and all those who serve it equipped to face the 21st century? Is the Church and all those who serve it equipped to provide the spiritual guidance for a new generation of Armenians, demographically, culturally, educationally different than those in the past? Is the Church and all those who serve it equipped to assume the moral leadership that is expected of them?

We better find some answers. For the coming generation is crying for change; it will no longer be satisfied with the status quo. ✦

Granite City Church To be Consecrated by Catholicos Aram I

Many years of faith, sacrifice, and commitment have finally become a reality for the parish community of St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Apostolic Church of Granite City, Illinois. The community's dreams and hopes will be fulfilled with the consecration of their new church on Sunday, October 12, by His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, who will be in the U.S. and Canada on an extensive pontifical visit beginning October 1.

As the new church nears completion and the parish eagerly anticipates the visit of Catholicos Aram and the consecration of their new church, the following statement of faith was issued by the parish:

St. Gregory's Armenian Apostolic Church of Granite City, Illinois, has remained steadfast as a spiritual beacon of hope and a living reality of the presence of God's love and mercy for His people, and continues to serve her children as a ray of light where all are gathered to sing the praises of the Lord and to give thanks to God for His abundant blessings. It is a living testimony to the strong faith of a small community determined to perpetuate the faith of our forefathers, building a new house of faith and worship, to give our best to God for His goodness. It is no small task for this small but vibrant parish, nestled between Chicago and St. Louis, to accept the great responsibility which comes with just such a great undertaking. However, with a dedicated group of workers and parishioners the dream of an authentic edifice in the true tradition of Armenian architecture has finally become the focal point for our dreams and hopes. St. Gregory's Church which is our beacon of hope in this little corner of the world is for her faithful children the altar of light, a place where we witness our children as they so innocently learn the faith of our Holy Fathers. St. Gregory's will continue to be a beacon of light and hope in the world making the Gospel a living reality in the lives of her people. St. Gregory's is built not on a foundation of cement and stone but upon solid rock—that solid rock known as Jesus Christ. We proclaim once again the words of our patron saint Gregory the Illuminator, "Come Let Us Build an Altar of Light." ✦

Cilician Catholicate Participates in Meeting

Very Rev. Nareg Alemezian, the ecumenical officer for the Catholicate of the Great House of Cilicia, participated in an ecumenical meeting hosted by the World Council of Churches Unit II in May. The theme of the meeting which took place in Morges, Switzerland, was "Mission 2000—Vision and Challenges."

The meeting was attended by 19 clergy and lay representatives of the WCC member churches, four representatives of the Catholic and Pentecostal Churches and 11 WCC staff members.

Father Nareg made a presentation on "Contemporary Challenges on Relationships in Mission and Search for Common Witness." The issues of post-modernism, meaninglessness, the search for fulfillment and multifaith situations were discussed. This meeting was initiated for the preparation of a new document on mission and evangelism in light of the findings of Brazil's 1996 conference. This new document will be part of the guidelines of mission and evangelism and will be presented to the WCC General Assembly in September 1998, in Zimbabwe. ✦