

160 Conklin Avenue  
Binghamton, NY 13903

October 7, 1987

His Eminence  
Archbishop Torkom Manoogian  
Diocese of the Armenian Church  
630 Second Avenue  
New York, NY 10016

Your Eminence:

When I first enrolled as a student at the State University of New York at Binghamton two years ago, I was very pleased to be welcomed into the Armenian Community by Professor Hrayr Dekmejian. After one year, I found him to be a good friend and an excellent professor (I took his last class taught at SUNY-Binghamton). He was a very positive influence and helped me find and understand my Armenian roots,

This summer, I had the wonderful opportunity to participate in the Armenian Assembly Summer Intern Program in Washington. Unfortunately, I grew up as a very Americanized person. The opportunity the Armenian Assembly gave me to better understand our roots and the rich culture and history associated with these roots was an exhilarating experience.

While there, I had the strong desire to expand my involvement in the Armenian Community in Binghamton, so I mailed my dues to the Church. However, upon my return, I found a very curious set of circumstances surrounding the Church. I discovered there was no priest! Your Eminence, I find it very difficult to continue my expansion of knowledge regarding our culture, language, history, and religion in the absence of an operational Church with a priest. I am only twenty years old. There are so many things in this world I do not yet understand due to my youth and inexperience. I am hoping that studying Armenian history, culture, language, and religion will help provide a common thread of meaning between my various life experiences.

What I found most upsetting were the circumstances under which Father Sooren was dismissed. From researching the situation, I have discovered that personal conflict and the personal power of a small minority lead to the dismissal of Father Sooren. Why was this small minority listened to, Your Eminence, and not those who have worked so hard on behalf of our Church? Why are the doors of the Church locked and bolted, with only two people holding the keys? Why is this minority that was responsible for the dismissal of Father Sooren being allowed to divide the Armenian community?

As a famous scholar once said, "Either we stand together or we die together." In the past two years, with the guidance of Professor Dekmejian, the Armenian Assembly, and my own curiosity, I have discovered a rich history of SURVIVORS; a people who have endured and fought back. If the membership of the Armenian Church in Binghamton chooses to betray this tradition of survival by acquiescing to a small elite minority that claims the right to dismiss priests, lock church doors, divide the community, and stifle the development of youth, I fear cultural genocide will commence. This genocide will not be carried out against people, it will be carried out against ideas; against our history, our language, our customs, our music, and our religion. This time, the blood will be on our own hands.

I have grandparents who lived through the massacres. I have a grandfather who fought back, who escaped from slavery and came to this country to raise a family. He taught me that our heritage is so valuable that we must fight all attacks that threaten it. I am not going to let my grandfather, Professor Dekmejian, my people, and myself down. I am prepared to take a strong stance in defense of our heritage, against the small elite minority that is polluting our Church in Binghamton. Please help us save our Church. We can't do it without you. Please write back soon, and please help us!

Respectfully yours,

*Dana Barooshian*

Dana Barooshian

October 23, 1987

Ms. Dana Barooshian  
160 Conklin Avenue  
Binghamton, NY 13903

Dear Ms. Barooshian:

Thank you for your letter dated October 7, 1987. We appreciate your interest to learn more about your church and ethnic background. This is a most commendable feeling and it is hoped that many others will follow your example and expand their involvements in the Armenian community wherever they live.

We regret for whatever happened in the Binghamton parish. Arrangements have already been made for Fr. Sooren to serve elsewhere. We realize the importance of having a spiritual leader in the community to nurture the love and understanding of our church to the children and other members of the flock, and it is hoped that the parish council will soon realize this importance.

May the Lord bless you and your loved ones, always.

Prayerfully,

Archbishop Torkom Manoogian  
Primate