

File: Armenian Clergy

A Concise Biography of Rev. Fr. Levon Arakelian

Diocese of the Armenian Church
630 Second Avenue " " " " 19016

The infant Hrand who was destined to become the future Rev. Fr. Levon Arakelian was born in Baghdad, Iraq, on August 13, 1918 of "Oorfatzi" parents.

Upon graduating from the local Tarkmantchatz Primary and Secondary Schools, he entered the Seminary of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, remaining there from 1931 to 1937, and was ordained Archdeacon by the late Patriarch Torkom Koushagian. Refusing to be ordained a celibate priest, he returned to Baghdad, studied Civil Engineering with the ICS of London, after which he held responsible offices in Government Engineering Departments, the British Army and the I. S. Railways.

In May, 1949, he came to the United States by arrangement of then Primate, Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, and was admitted to the School of Theology of Temple University, graduating in 1953 with his B. A. and S. T. B. Degrees.

Before ordination, Fr. Levon married Miss Grace Meshejian of Philadelphia in April 1950, and they were blessed with three children, Hrand, Melina and Armen. Father Levon was ordained a priest by Archbishop Tiran in Phila., on Sept. 10, 1950.

Rev. Arakelian was pastor of the SS. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church of West Philadelphia from 1950 to 1962. He resigned and moved to Miami, Florida, where, in a very short time he was instrumental in building a beautiful, modern, Community Center. Fr. Levon also headed church building in West Philadelphia, and after ten years, he was responsible for the purchase of a second church, the present day magnificent property, in which was a stone mansion, which was converted into a church. He also helped towards the purchase and construction of church buildings in Washington, D. C., and Richmond, Va., regularly commuting to these communities from Philadelphia. He was responsible for the organization of the Houston, Texas parish, and the purchase of the estate which is being used as a Chapel and Community Center at the present time. Also, he is now organizing a new community in Upper West Chester, N.Y., for the Armenians living in that area.

At the Annual Diocesan Assembly held in 1954, Fr. Levon was elected a member of the Diocesan Council, an office which he held regularly for nine years. After a short pause, he was re-elected to the Diocesan Council in 1964, an office which he holds up to the present time. In 1958 he was elected Vice-Chairman of the Diocesan Assembly which convened in the Holy Martyrs Armenian Church, L.I., and in 1963 he was elected Chairman of the Diocesan Assembly.

In 1962 he was elected a Diocesan Delegate to represent the Armenian American Diocese at the National Ecclesiastical Conference which convened in "Etchmiadzin" Armenia.

Rev. Arakelian has been active in the Philadelphia Council of Churches, and served on its Board of Directors for many terms. He was also elected a member of the Board of Trustees of the School of Theology of Temple University.

In recognition of Fr. Levon's achievements, both in his parish as well as in Diocesan activities, Archbishop Mampre Calfayan bestowed upon him the privilege of wearing the Purple Brocaded Phelonian, and in 1962, the Catholicos of All Armenians granted him the honor of wearing a Pectoral Cross.

Biography of Fr. Levon Arakelian (continued)

In September 1962, by repeated requests of the Cathedral and Cultural Center Committee of New York, and by special invitation of then Primate, Archbishop Sion Manoogian, Fr. Levon undertook the office of Executive-Secretary of the multi-million dollar Cathedral and Cultural Center Building Project and moved to New York. Ground-breaking for the project took place on May 2, 1965, and was completed and consecrated on April 28, 1968.

In appreciation of Fr. Levon's devoted services in the accomplished task, the Diocesan Council recommended him to the Catholicos for the award of "The Order of St. Gregory the Enlightener First Degree." At the Consecration Banquet held at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel on April 28, 1969, His Holiness, Catholicos Vasken I, more appropriately decorated Rev. Levon Arakelian with the "special honor of wearing the Jeweled Pectoral Cross of Doctorate," which the "Vehapar" had brought along with him from "Etchmiadzin", and which honor is usually bestowed upon celibate priests.

Rev. Arakelian presently continues his services in the Diocese as Administrator of the Complex and Director of its Cultural and Educational Programs.

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