



from the office of the

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

"A WIDOW'S MITE"

In our Church life, it rarely happens that a benefactor comes forward—without being solicited—to make a substantial donation to one of our churches or to the Diocese. Recently, a humble Armenian woman—Mrs. Anahid Verdanian from Methuen, MA—set an example by voluntarily donating a part of her life's savings to further the cause of our faith and nation.

A long-time supporter of her local parish—the Holy Cross Church of Lawrence—the Armenian School and a number of other organizations, Anahid Verdanian is a survivor of the Genocide. In a recent telephone interview, when she found out that an article about her was being prepared, she insisted there was no need for it. "I gave a gift to my Church and to my people," she said.

"I am a *Zeytoontsi* and a survivor of the Genocide," Mrs. Verdanian continued. "I saw with my own eyes the torments my people fared in Der Zor at the hands of the Turks." As her voice broke and she began to sob, she stated: "I care deeply for my people and for my Church."

Mrs. Verdanian was indeed born in Zeytoon, known as "the nest of eagles." She was only four years old when the Turks took away most of her family, including her father and mother, and left her an orphan. Only an aunt and her grandfather, Panos Khochovian, survived the holocaust. She remembers with affection her elderly grandfather, who was a devout Armenian Christian and had donated a beautiful cross to the local St. Asdvadzadzin Monastery. Later in life, that cross—which was taken to Der Zor by some relatives during the deportations—was used as a barter to save her from annihilation.

Reflecting upon Der Zor—where thousands upon thousands perished—brings back to Anahid the horrors and the bitterness of death she tasted every day for forty days. She and several other Armenians survived thanks to the philanthropy of an Egyptian-born Syrian Christian by the name of Georgy Sukkar, who was a resident of the Syrian desert town. He and his mother fed the starving Armenians. She remembers how every morning they went to the Euphrates River to wash themselves, and how pieces of

cloth given by local people were used by the Armenian women to cover their naked bodies.

Because of his frequent contacts with these refugees, Georgy Sukkar came down with typhoid and died. In spite of the passage of seventy-five years, Anahid is still grateful to that kind man, and continues to have *hokehankisd* said for him, no less than for her own relatives.

The young Anahid was miraculously saved from certain death and adopted as a foster-child by the Armenian writer and teacher Sahag-Mesrob, who was himself in Der Zor. With this family, young Anahid went to Bagdad, where Sahag-Mesrob was employed as a teacher.

In 1921, with World War I already a bitter memory, the Mesrob family moved to Constantinople, and Anahid was placed in the Kalfayan Orphanage, which was run by the nuns of the Armenian Kalfayan Convent. After some time in this institution, the orphan girl wished to become a nun of the Armenian Church, but the Kalfayan nuns were not eager to enlarge their order. Like many other orphans, young Anahid was transferred to orphanages in Greece. Life in these institutions was very difficult as the funds were limited. Every morning the young orphans were required to bathe in the Aegean Sea, since there was shortage of running water.

In 1926 Anahid Verdianian was one of many other girls who travelled to Marseille, France, to work and support herself under Armenian supervision. Here she was in contact with the local school committee, and participated in its drama group and chorus. Since she had a good singing voice, she took roles in operettas and dramas. She also came to meet certain renowned intellectuals such as Arshag Tchobanian, the writer, Ashod Badmakrian, the composer, and Shavarsh Nartuni, the editor, among others.

At that time her greatest wish was to learn a professional trade and go to Armenia. Even today, her voice cracks at the realization that she will not fulfill that wish. "I was short of funds, and could not learn a trade in order to go to Armenia and lay a couple of bricks in my homeland," she recalls. Anahid's love for her people and homeland led her to seek an outlet in the ranks of the Social Democrat Hunchag Party, which she joined in Marseille.

In 1934 Anahid married Sarkis Verdianian of Methuen, MA, a young Armenian immigrant from Chimishgadzak. Life for the young couple was not easy. For many years the young bride took care of her in-laws. Both husband and wife worked laboriously in the Massachusetts mill town. Anahid's horrendous childhood experiences in Der Zor and in the orphanages prevented her from becoming a mother, something that she wished more than anything else in life.

The Verdanians gave all their love and devotion to their church and people. Sarkis in particular tended to the needs of the Lawrence Church more than he did to his own house. He was a kind man and a devout member of the Armenian Church, the likes of whom were to be seen among the immigrant generation in every Armenian church.

"In comparison with the large gifts given to the Diocese, mine is "the widow's mite," said Mrs. Verdian modestly. She is right, since her life's savings were accumulated over the years, penny by penny, dime by dime, from weekly paychecks earned in the factories of Lawrence, MA. "As an orphan I suffered greatly. I do not want to see our people suffer any more. I wish to see my nation live and my faith prosper." This is her motto in life.

Mrs. Anahid Verdian belongs to that generation of Armenians that was responsible for our revival as a people—a generation that, alas, will very soon no longer be with us. She believes that Vartan Mamigonian's blood circulates in her veins. She deserves our respect not only for her gift but also for what she is—a true Armenian from Zeytoon.

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