

Holy Shoghagat Armenian Church Consecration Committee

2 December 1978

PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN

George Marifian

COMMITTEE COCHAIRMEN

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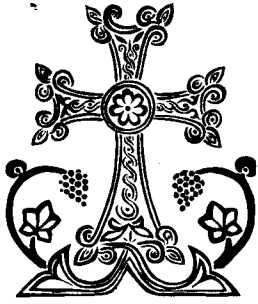
ADVISER

Paylag Boghosian

Dear Surpoghan Hays,

Initially I wish to thank you very much for all your help and encouragement regarding our Consecration. Indeed, the past few months have been difficult, but all the effort was well worth it.

Surpoghan Hays, I did not have the opportunity to mention a couple of things to you last weekend that I would like you to know. First of all, Hays Paron Avedikian was so very helpful throughout all our planning stages. He even proofed material for me via long distance. He not only helped; he even offered suggestions. I am certain you can realize how much his aid was appreciated as we were without a priest during part of the (over)



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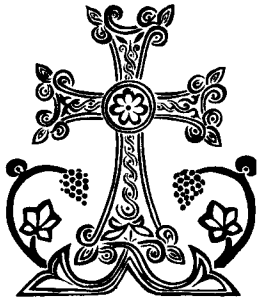
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planning stages. I must admit candidly that I think Hays Paven is a superior clergyman, and I respect him very much.

Secondly, I called Hays Shevont Samosian by phone during the summer and asked him if we could utilize some of the material from the Sports Weekend 4th Booklet which he compiled, and he could not have been kinder regarding this. In addition, Sargis Hays, he provided me with more encouragement in our five minute conversation than I had received locally up to that point.

So often we are quick to criticize but negligent to praise. I feel this is wrong and wanted you to know

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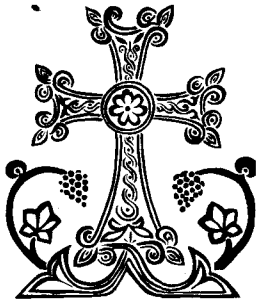
*how very much these two men
aided us.*

*Our own Hays Sasser has
been fantastic ever since his
arrival. He is so prompt -
I asked for some information
on a Friday evening, and he gave
same to me the very next morning.
He went to work immediately and
was so concerned that all he
done correctly. I really like
him - his intellect is overwhelming,
and his wit is superior. Thank
you for sending him to us.*

*I cannot help but
mention that my brother Richard
was invaluable to me. He
provided copy that I needed
and much other expertise.*

*Suzanne Lyp, I am
enclosing a Booklet for you
to make certain you have a fresh
copy. Your kind words concerning*

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the Booklet meant more to me than you can ever know. There were those who wished an ad book and I literally refused to be chairman if I had to do an ad book. Our Parish Council, bless them, supported me in this regard.

Thank you again for every thing. Your comments regarding Liberty Tourigjian were indeed beautiful and so true. She was like an older sister to me and a more beautiful human being never lived. The loneliness of your service helped ease the heart a bit.

May you enjoy a pleasant holiday season. I look forward to seeing you in the near future.

*Very respectfully,
Zabelle*



16 July 1978

Dear Surpazhan Hays,

Today in church I heard an announcement that I knew was impending but seemed unable, or perhaps unwilling, to believe. Yet, as I sat with my children, Rev Hays proceeded to state that his final Badarak in this area will be on August 20, 1978.

Thus it had been said from the pulpit and I had heard it from the pew. It became real — we here are in the peculiar position of proceeding toward perhaps the most important event our community has ever experienced — the consecration of our completely new church — without the benefit of a resident clergy

during, at the very least, a portion of the planning stages.

I do not mind telling you, Surpazhan Hays, that as Chairman of the Holy Shoghakat Consecration Committee, this situation does not exactly thrill me or provide me with any feeling of security. You see, the general aspects of consecration planning pose no difficulties. These I am confident we can handle. The details of protocol that obviously must be dealt with, however, are of concern to me.

To whom are we to turn for guidance? The nearest priest is more than 250 miles away.

Surpazhan Hays, I cannot believe that once again our little community has become victimized. I know not of another community that has been left without a priest in the midst of planning a consecration.

One thing for certain is that today's occurrence has vividly

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evoked memories regarding the religious environment I have experienced during my lifetime.

I was sixteen when our first church was consecrated. I was one of the original Sunday School teachers. I have, in addition, served the church and myself, of course, in numerous capacities throughout the years.

A few years ago when I elected not to run again for Parish Council after serving both as secretary and as chairman because of the physical and emotional strain, I promised myself to refrain from assuming responsibilities for a time. Needless to say, I did not adhere to this vow. Instead, I have assumed chairmanship in the ensuing period of every major function we have had culminating with the Consecration Committee.

Such, obviously are entitles of my doing, and I do not regret my participation as my church is important to me, and I have grown in many respects (regardless of several questionable consequences) through my church-related activities.

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In short, on a very personal plane, I have given and I have received.

On the other hand, I have been exposed to a continuing procession of clergy and circumstances so erratic that they seem incredible but which you know to be fact. At any rate, I had begun to think that at long last our community was no longer symbolic of a Diocesan orphan. I guess this was not to be.

The part that hurts me the most, Surpoghan Hays, is that I do so want my children to experience a more normal and amicable religious life than I did. I am certain the majority of the "younger generation" here feel this way as the bulk of us have donated generously (for us) toward the construction of the new church. We are willing to sacrifice, and we have done so and will continue so as to assure ourselves of our own church once more. The thunderbolt hurled at us today, however, certainly has placed a damper on our spirits, to say the least.

Surpoghan Hays, I have always respected you highly not only because of your position but also because of you as a person. I feel in my heart that even though you have, as Alex Hays expounded, "accepted the Holy Spirit" and his decision to leave, you will not abandon us in our hour of need.

I pray that you will provide us with a resident clergy in the very near future. In the meantime, I hope you will enlighten us concerning whom we may approach for aid during the interim regarding consecration planning.

In addition, I hope you do not mind my taking the liberty to write to you once more. As I have expressed to you previously, I feel an affinity where you are concerned and thus do not feel it necessary to hesitate when the mood and need arise to contact you directly.

May you be enjoying a pleasant summer. I do look forward to seeing you in November.

Very respectfully
Zabelle Norrigan Vastanian

January 18, 1980

Your Eminence
Archbishop Torkom Manoogian
630 Second Ave.
New York, N.Y. 10016

Dear Surpagan,

Two days ago I was made aware of a letter written by persons who are Council members. A letter written and mailed long before Hayr Saarp or any parishioners had any knowledge or approval of. I was deeply saddened and ashamed since I serve in the church as a church school teacher.

I am writing this letter to you personally because my conscience would bother me if I let this slip by with only a shrug. For many years Der Hayr Yeghrem Kelegian (former pastor) asked me to help organize the church school. I had to refuse and it hurt me more than he realized. In Sept. 1979, I felt I had to change my mind and with Hayr Saarp's help we brought the attendance up from 4 or 5 small children to 16, mostly teenagers. I was astonished how Hayr Saarp could take a small thought of mine and develop it into something out of the ordinary. In this short time with his full cooperation, advice, and help, I am proud to say the Church School has become the most constructive,

interesting and enjoyable part of our church. I anticipated some problems from 2 or 3 persons (on the council only) since I stood firm in my convictions that I would answer to Hayr Saap since he is the clergy and head of church and Armenian School. But because of the visible progress seen, there is just a little rumble which I overlook. I cannot and will not serve God or the church if I have to show disrespect for the clergy.

The year ~~Dear Hayr Yeghrem Hetejian~~ was here I am happy to say my family and I respected him as the man of the cloth and upon leaving we were and still are best of friends. The year Hayr Saap has been here we are again happy and proud to be able to say we respect him now and always as he truly deserves.

I know these problems exist all over the country and will continue to do so if some changes are not made. Cannot there be amendments or changes in the rules or by-laws to give the clergy a little more authority than council members who generally are not even qualified or even attend church? Why cannot the clergy be allowed a few months to work with and know the people and choose his own council members whom he will recognize as qualified and cooperative instead of families electing their relatives for glorifying purposes only. It seems some people are so obsessed by recognition (in any parish) and refuse to accept the clergy as the head of the church.

It is most sad to see intelligent and dedicated persons such as our Armenian clergy to be so abused and humiliated. It is impossible for any clergy to do his duty and fulfill his responsibilities to the fullest under existing conditions. Changes must be made. More people stay away from churches than attend because they don't want to get involved.

I hope my letter is not offensive, if it is I apologise, but I am one of those persons who never wanted to get involved. Again I am saddened + ashamed of the letter sent by council members especially since I am a teacher in church school.

Respectfully yours,
(miss) Rose Sefesian

January 16, 1980

His Eminence
Archbishop Tortorri Maroogian, Primate
630 Second Ave. New York, N.Y. 10016

Dear Synagor,

Enclosed is a copy of the letter I sent to the Parish Council (It would better to call it Norsigian three member "clique") in reply to the copy of the letter sent to your Eminence so that you can have the chance of hearing my side of the story.

The "clique" claims to have the support of the majority of the parishioners for the action it took, but the fact is that the majority of the parishioners were stunned by the action.

Many families are planning to get together tomorrow to discuss the arbitrary acts of the "clique". They intend to voice their indignation in a letter to be sent to your Eminence.

As for me, I thank you very much for giving me the the opportunity to serve in your Diocese. I regret to say that under prevailing circumstances where a "clique" has established dictatorship ignoring the inherent rights and jurisdiction of the pastor, no clergyman is capable of functioning normally, and doing things that his conscience tell him to do.

I will be glad to have another chance to serve in a second church because priesthood is considered my vocation rather than a means of making a living. If this is not possible I will be returning to California.

Please accept my deep thanks and gratitude.

Respectfully yours
Fr. Sooten Chinchinian

Parish Council of
Holy Shoghagat Church
Belleville, Illinois. 62223

January 15, 1979

Dear Members,

By reading your letter of January 7, 1980, I reached the conclusion that you still do not know how to talk and treat a clergyman. It is very regrettable to discover that you have violated the principles of decency and etiquette. I did not believe that you could be so mean as to distort the facts for the simple reason that I refused to become your rubber-stamp.

As a matter of fact your letter is full of lies and slanders. Let me give answers to your unfounded charges one by one. You accuse me of stirring up dissension among the parishioners. Do not make a fool of yourselves trying to look for scape-goat. Many families were alienated from the church as a result of your domineering, uncompromising and bossy tendencies.

You accuse me of being uncooperative. You should be the last persons to advocate cooperation. Prior to the Parish Council meetings, the three members known as a "clique" used to meet secretly for the purpose of preparing the agenda and making decisions in advance. Then, the "clique" came to the meeting of the Parish Council in order to impose their decisions on the rest of the members including the pastor. This is in direct defiance of the By-Laws. The "clique" regarded the Parish Council meetings as mere formality and smoke-screens. Do you call this "cooperation"? It is true that there was a lack of cooperation but not on the part of the pastor.

You accuse me of being lazy. This is a label which fits perfectly the members of the "clique".

You were supposed to install a lock on my door, a heater in my office and a filing cabinet. I waited for one year without getting any result despite my repeated requests.

You openly interfered with my pastoral affairs, and denied me the natural right of being in charge of church school as well as A.C.Y.O.A. When I tried to mediate between two church school teachers, you opposed me strongly stating that only the Parish Council is authorized to deal with the matter. On another occasion, I asked the senior Church School students to continue their education instead of singing in the choir. The next week you instructed them to sing in the choir, thus overriding my decision. Is this considered "cooperation"? You made deliberate attempts to undermine my authority and undercut my efforts.

You entrusted the task of supervising the construction of the Bema and the curtain of the church to a person who had no idea at all about our church rules. I gave him information as to the measurements of the Bema and the curtain but he did the way he wanted to do contrary to the rules of our church. When I asked you to correct them, you accused me of creating dissension. Is this a fair judgement?

I was satisfied with a salary of \$746 knowing well that the minimum salary rate determined by the Diocese amounted to \$1070. Last year you barely met your monetary obligations by means of in lieu of flower donations. Financially you were in desperate situation. Now you found a solution to your desperate situation by deciding to dispense with pastor.

My conscience is clear. I served to the best of my ability under trying conditions. I visited the sick more than two times in each case. I paid visits to homes. Whenever I failed to visit homes, I went to their shops.

My last message. "It is not shameful not to know but it is shameful not to learn."

Fr. Sooren Chinchinian