

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the  
Merrimack Valley Diocesan Churches  
Held on October 6, 1994

There was a special meeting of the three Merrimack Valley Diocesan Churches on October 6, 1994 at the St. Gregory The Illuminator Church in Haverhill, Ma. at 7:30 PM. This was a follow-up meeting to the special meeting held on June 3, 1994 which was called by His Eminence Archbishop Khajag Barsamian. The attendees at the October 6th meeting are listed in the attached schedule. The meeting was opened with a prayer by the Reverend Sahag Kaishian.

Sahag Sahagian was elected to chair the meeting and Patricia Amboian was elected to record the minutes.

Although a formal agenda was not distributed, the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the following items:

1. Talk about merging two or three of the Churches
2. Statements from Parish Council member who wish to be heard.
3. Joint activities of the Merrimack Valley Diocesan Churches.
4. Discussion of the 80th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.
5. View of the Primate regarding the potential merger of the Churches.

The minutes of the special meeting held on June 3, 1994 were read and accepted.

Prior to this meeting, an earlier meeting was held on September 22, 1994 in Haverhill which was attended by the Parish Council Chairpersons and Pastors of the Merrimack Valley Diocesan Churches, to discuss the feasibility of merging the churches. There was particular focus on the potential merger of the Holy Cross and St. Gregory the Illuminator—since the majority of parishioners from Lawrence and Haverhill would not have to travel to Chelmsford.

The following comments were made:

Steven Bogosian indicated that it would be a tough decision for him to have to close the Lawrence Church but he is concerned about the poor location and one has to be realistic.

Sahag Sahagian does not believe that the present location of the Holy Cross Church is a problem. He feels that people just do not want to attend church. He revealed that 227 questionnaires were distributed to the parishioners on two separate occasions. The first received a response of 72 in favor of relocating and the second received a response of 53. The Parish Council has appointed a special committee who is looking for future sites for a church in Lawrence, North Andover and Salem, New Hampshire.

Rafik Papalian does not blame Sts. Vartanantz for not wanting to merge. They do not have a location problem as does Lawrence.

Allison Basmajian observed that Lawrence and Haverhill Churches could merge and build a single church in an appropriate location, however, she believes that the parishioners from each of the two parishes should be polled to obtain their input.

Der Sahag stated that it is attractive to look at strength in numbers of parishioners. The churches in a 25 mile radius made sense when travel was less convenient. Merger possibilities should be received despite some strong feeling on the part of some parishioners who played a part in the building of the present churches. However, unless there is strong support by the committees to combine the churches, a merger would be harmful.

Joe Tavitian questions whether the merging of the churches will actually increase the number of parishioners or increase the community spiritually. He states that long time members of the Haverhill church would not want to travel to Chelmsford. He believes that the Haverhill church has the potential to expand and build a Youth Center and classrooms on its present site. He doesn't believe that Haverhill wants to relocate. In any event, he feels that any merger would take at least five years.

Edgar Movsesian sees a merger as being inevitable. He feels that older parishioners resist a merger, but financially a merger should take place. He went on to state that it is necessary to get to the pulse of the community regarding a merger by sending a comprehensive questionnaire to all parishioners.

Charles Diman outlined a perspective of what it means to move or merge. Sts. Vartanantz went through the process of relocating in the late seventies. It was difficult for some parishioners to accept that decision, but most have returned to supporting the church.

Der Zenob stated that the idea of merging the churches was brought up by His Eminence Khajag Barsamian and he thought it was a good idea. Der Zenob feels that finances should not be a major reason for merging, but that it should be for the good of the Armenian Church.

The Primate's earlier view was the possibility of merging the parishes. Sahag Sahagian states that the Primate now feels that merger of the Lawrence and Haverhill parishes is appropriate, with the Chelmsford parish continuing on its own. He believes that the distance between Haverhill and Chelmsford would be difficult for Haverhill parishioners to attend services in Chelmsford. Therefore, the focus of a merger should be to find land to service the Lawrence and Haverhill communities. In conclusion, the Primate suggested that the Lawrence and Haverhill parishes focus on a merger by discussing it at respective parish assemblies and then report the results to the Diocese.

Discussion at the meeting then turned to cooperation among the three churches in commemorating the 80th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. It was indicated that the churches should get involved because of a directive received from the Primate. There was a lengthy discussion whether the three Diocesan churches in the Merrimack Valley should jointly sponsor an event separately from the annual event sponsored by the Ad Hoc Genocide Committee of the Merrimack Valley. Der Zenob and Der Sahag are both supportive of combining our efforts, including a Requiem Service with all churches in the Valley.

John Amboian was asked to contact the Ad Hoc Committee to have them invite Pastors and Parish Council Chairpersons from the Diocesan churches to become a part of the Ad Hoc Committee and participate in a Requiem Service on the occasion of the 80th commemoration.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted

Patricia R. Amboian  
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Chelmsford, Mass.