



DIOCESE OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH OF AMERICA
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Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate

May 24, 1995

Mr. Aram Sarhadian, President
Armenian Independent Cultural
Association of Atlanta, Inc.
P.O.Box 72582
Marietta, GA 30007-2582

Dear Mr. Sarhadian:

His Eminence Archbishop Khajag Barsamian has received your letter of April 17, 1995 and asked me to answer it.

His Eminence regrets that in his last visit to the Armenian community in Atlanta, Georgia you were unable to meet him. It is always a pleasure for our Primate to meet with the faithful of our church wherever they are. His Eminence's pastoral visit was another joyous occasion during which the members of our church in Atlanta had the opportunity to pray with his Eminence and later had the opportunity to meet him where they expressed their comments and expectations.

As for the issues you raised in the rest of your letter, I have sent a copy of your letter with this response to the Reverend Father Nersess Jebejian, who is in charge of the mission parishes in the area. We hope that in the earliest possible opportunity he will be able to meet with you and listen to your suggestions. Once Father Jebejian reports to us we shall act upon it accordingly.

In the meantime we pray for the unity of our church in general and for the well being of all the faithful of the Armenian church in Atlanta, Georgia.

With prayers,

Father Haigazoun Najarian
Vicar General

c.c. Father Nersess Jebejian

FHN/as

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**ARMENIAN INDEPENDENT CULTURAL ASSOCIATION
OF ATLANTA, INC.
(AICAA)**

P.O.Box 72582 Marietta, GA 30007-2582

April 17, 1995

Archbishop Khajag Barsamian
Primate, Armenian Diocese
630 Second Ave., New York, NY 10016

Your Eminence:

I regret deeply that, during your recent visit to Atlanta, Georgia, you were unable to meet with the leaders of the community to discuss and resolve the outstanding issues in our growing and vibrant community. Also, I am distressed that the reception given in your honor, a Prince of the Armenian Apostolic Church, was poorly handled by the Diocesan Council operating under the name of the Armenian Church of Atlanta Parish Council. I am told by reliable sources that approximately 40 community members attended that reception which must have been a real personal disappointment to you. Please believe that I take no pleasure in your council's failure to bring out the community to meet and hear you. However, I hasten to say that, had the Atlanta Armenian Community's democratically elected and legitimate representatives been consulted, the reception given in your honor would have been magnificent with probably 150 to 200 community members attending.

Prior to your visit to Atlanta, church services organized by the Unified Armenian Church Council of Atlanta (a democratically elected body contrasted to the appointed members of the Armenian Church of Atlanta Parish Council), attracted close to 120 community members. Being unable to meet, we lost a truly golden opportunity. This occurred primarily because we (the AICAA board, the Unified Council, and all those who want this community to govern itself without outside interference) were not informed of your visit nor invited to your reception. We were removed from the Diocesan Council's mailing list (which was ours to begin with) as if we were heathens, an unwelcome action, intentionally undertaken to create discord and further widen the division. Please be assured that the lack of attendance at your reception was not a show of disrespect to your Eminence.

Following your departure from Atlanta, I met with Father Nersess Jebejian, who may have already briefed you on our conversations. The purpose of this letter is to reiterate and document my conversation with Father Nersess in order to eliminate the possibility of any misunderstanding and further explain to you the issues involved and the potential avenues of re-uniting the Community. Perhaps now, with the election of His Holiness, Karekin II, as Catholicos of all Armenians, we can put the power struggle, the politics, and the unpleasant atmosphere in our spiritual lives created following the Sovietization of Armenia, behind us and come together as "One Nation and One Church", regardless of what happens with the See of Cilicia. Our Church's aim should be to liberate: not to enslave and/or dominate our communities.

As you are aware, the Atlanta Community was united before the re-appointment by the Diocese of a new parish council sometime in 1993 without any serious effort of consultation with the Community as a whole, its only legitimately elected secular leadership (the AICAA board), or the prominent and active members, the pillars of the community, in a manner of speaking. On the contrary, the appointments were made (contrary to church bylaws and we don't know by whom) and the council forced upon us without taking into account the sensitivities of the plurality of the community, and putting faith into a small group of somewhat connected, but inappropriate individuals, some of whom are best known for their intolerance, misleading statements, slanders, and continuous attempts at character assassination. In my previous correspondence with your eminence, I have stressed this point and expressed the opinion that it is inappropriate for such individuals to represent your eminence or our church. I hope your eminence can be persuaded to rectify this situation.

Unity is easy to achieve if there is the necessary will, Christian tolerance, and understanding. We are one nation and must act as such to promote our interests. The plurality of our community members and its elected representatives believe that the primary need for the Atlanta Armenians is a Community Center where the various segments of the community can come together, learn about their church, nation, culture, language, etc. For years, the trend has been to postpone building a church or organizing separate Diocesan and Prelacy councils until such time as the Church leadership itself can reach an appropriate accommodation. Also, one must not forget that not all Armenians are necessarily apostolic. The Community Center can bring together all Armenians, whether Catholic, Protestant, Episcopalian, etc., (and there are many of them here in the South) under one roof. The absolute majority of our community members believe (it also is a recognized fact) that a rush to establish separate councils and build churches under the present conditions will be inappropriate, divisive, and a tremendous drain on the community's finances. It is tragic, there are two churches, side by side, in Niagara Falls, New York, but none had Easter services this year because of the lack of priests.

Following my meeting with Father Jebejian, during which I expressed the wish that he or another Diocesan priest come to Atlanta at the AICAA's invitation to perform Divine Liturgy, I met with the AICAA board and the Unified Council. Both groups have given me their blessing to continue to pursue the resolution of this issue on the community's behalf, despite the fact that the AICAA is not formally associated with any church group or other faction. Also, on April 2, 1995, at a community meeting, we discussed this issue and the consensus was that there must be unity through the legal election of a representative council. Those who still want to remind our communities of the events of 1933 must remove themselves from public life so that the younger generation can move forward without prejudice.

Your Eminence, it is time. I appeal to your vast Christian Wisdom, knowledge, and sense of fairness to take a step forward. The Atlanta Community wants unity; don't let the Church leadership stand in its way. I understand, Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian, Prelate (who must also be consulted in this matter again), had given his blessing to unity in Atlanta years ago. Won't you also?

I will be more than happy to visit with you in New York at a mutually convenient date in order to develop a plan of action. Eagerly waiting for your positive response soon,

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Aram Sarhadian", written over a horizontal line.

Aram Sarhadian, President