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**Remarks: Arm. Students' Cultural Assoc. of U. Michigan—January 28, 1994
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Let me begin by thanking God that we could all be here tonight. I would also like to thank Fr. Baret Yeretzian and the St. John Church, the Armenian Students' Cultural Association, and especially the members of this vital, new community here in Ann Arbor, who have been so generous with their warm hospitality, and so enthusiastic about creating a new Armenian parish in this city.

The story of our faith is the story of the greatest turning point in history: the life, teaching and victory of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who brought light to a dark world, and hope to the human heart. Today, we live in a world where each new day seems to bring a new turning point or milestone, and for us as Armenians, these are indeed historic times. We have seen the establishment of an independent Republic of Armenia, and will soon celebrate the 1700th anniversary of the conversion of Armenia to Christianity.

Closer to home, across our Diocese I see a new spirit awakening: people—especially young people—are expressing a serious interest in their heritage, and want to make their "Armenian-ness" a more vital part of their lives. I hope we will discuss these matters tonight. But first, let me offer some food for thought as a springboard for our discussion.

I know that some of you have begun families of your own, and most of you are at an age when marriage and starting a family are part of your plans for the not-too-distant future. Issues surrounding family life and family values are very prominent in America today. I welcome this development, and I would like to see Armenian Christians become a part of this national conversation. We have a special insight into the subject, and a great deal to say to the world at large. For this reason, throughout 1994, our Diocese will be observing the Year of the Armenian Family: a series of projects which will explore the importance of the family in our lives and in our society.

Among Armenians, the family—as opposed to the individual or the state—has always been considered the basic unit of human society: only the family can promote and pass on the virtues and habits that make living in society peaceful and just. It is hardly a coincidence that the shocking breakdown in

civil peace in America has followed on the heels of a breakdown of the family structure.

Now of course, in saying this, I don't mean that family-life everywhere is perfect. But it would be fair to say that, in order for society to survive, we must view the family as a powerful force for good. And it is not just cities and nations which depend on the family: institutions like the Church depend on it too. The difference is that the Church goes beyond just supporting the family. The Church actually works to strengthen it, by recognizing that the family is above all a sacred institution. From the perspective of the Church, the family at its best is a reflection of the relationship between humanity and God. We pray to God as "Our Father"; we regard our fellow Christians as "brothers and sisters in Christ"; and we respect the dignity of all human beings because we are all truly "children of God."

As Christians, we move from the blood ties of our immediate families, to a kind of spiritual solidarity symbolized by the Church. We become a family of fellow believers—a family united in Christ.

Now unfortunately, even while we Armenians are united in the family of our Church, the Armenian Church itself remains divided in this country. This division within the Church is unnatural and shameful. There are many evils which have come from it, but I believe the worst evil is that the problem of disunity has turned many members of our younger generation away from the Church.

There is no simple solution to this problem, although I believe that the events of the past few years have completely destroyed the political foundations for our separation. The divided Church is a problem that was created in an earlier generation, and we have inherited it. Now, it is up to our generation to end it once and for all. But we cannot accomplish this if we simply give up on the Church altogether. That would be throwing the baby out with the bath water.

Making our Church whole again is a challenge—but it is only one part of the greater challenge of leading a truly Christian life. In the Middle Ages, they called this "the imitation of Christ"—meaning to live your life, to make your life's choices, to deal with society and other people in accordance with the teachings and example of Jesus. The basic textbook of our faith is the Bible, and this single book is the cornerstone of the Armenian Church. The worship service we repeat every Sunday is alive with the language and symbolism of the Bible, and one cannot understand the Divine Liturgy without knowledge and love of the Scriptures.

At the same time, participating in the worship service enhances our understanding of the Bible, helping us to live the Scriptures, and not simply

read them. For Armenian Christians, the Liturgy and the Bible reinforce each other. Both are indispensable to the full Christian life.

Of course, the Christian attitude towards life is difficult to act out in today's culture, which at times seems to be hostile to Christianity. Today's secular society sets itself up as an idol to be worshipped, and wants to create its own rules to justify its own appetites and desires. This creed can be very seductive, because it tries to offer a vision of luxury and an easy life as the key to human happiness. In contrast, the Church stresses the need for disciplined conduct, and offers guidelines that aim not at the easy life, but at the good life, and at the salvation of the human soul.

An important part of the good life involves moral behavior, and the Church presents certain strong recommendations about how we ought to live, and about the life-choices we ought to make. But it is important to understand that the doctrines of Christianity are not "opinions" or "viewpoints"—the sort of changeable things which one measures through political opinion polls. Rather, they are fully developed teachings, which are rooted in the life and words of Jesus Christ.

The Church makes no apologies for the difficulty of the life it recommends. Christianity is not easy—indeed, sometimes, it can be painfully difficult, as the history of our people makes plain. But nothing of value comes easily. God has created us to be moral beings, and He asks much from us because He knows we can achieve the highest objectives.

Let me close on this thought: Christ was sent into the world for a purpose—He had a specific mission. Likewise, we have not been placed here simply to pass the time: we all have a mission, a role to play in God's drama—both as a community of faithful, and as individual souls. As part of the responsibility of that mission, we must evaluate ourselves. We must ask: Are we—as a Diocese, as a community, as individuals—being good missionaries of the Church? Are we being true to the light that shined in the world through the Only Begotten Son of God? This is the guiding principle of what we are trying to do in this Diocese. I would like to invite you all to become a part of this exciting adventure.

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