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This has been a remarkable year in the life of the Armenian Church—a season of endings and beginnings, of sadness and renewed hope. Late this summer, our Church suffered a great loss, when the Catholicos of All Armenians—His Holiness Vasken the First—was called to his Creator. Because our Church is like a family, the passing of His Holiness was like losing a father, and it has been deeply felt by our people all over the world.

But as we respectfully mark the end of one era, we also look ahead to the beginning of a new one. Our first task in that new beginning is to elect a successor to the office of Catholicos—and that will take place this spring, during the first week of April. But the election is really only the most visible aspect of a door which has been opened for us. It is a door to the future—for our Church, for our people, for each of us as individual souls. This year, we shall take the first steps into that doorway. I would like to focus my remarks tonight on this development.

Today, the people of the Armenian Church stand on a threshold. Behind us is a rich history of intellectual and moral achievement, which we are just barely beginning to re-discover. In front of us lies that doorway to the unknown: a new century, a reborn "body politic," an evolving relationship between diaspora and homeland—in short, a host of challenges and opportunities which our people have not encountered before.

The role our Church will play in this future is complex. The Church must address our unique historical moment, to be sure. But it must also stand beyond time, reflecting the eternal, unchanging truths about Man and God, and reminding us that our generation is merely the current keeper of a treasure which belongs, not to us, but to the ages.

The Church must be active in the world, and speak to the everyday concerns of our people—in our homes, our families and our local communities. But the Church must also transcend this world, pointing beyond politics, beyond human institutions—beyond even itself—to that one, true Kingdom, which is the source of all earthly authority, and which is the homeland of all who bow their heads in humble love of God.

Even though the precise shape of our future is unclear, one thing is certain: in the twenty-first century, the Armenian people throughout the world will

turn to their Church as the great source of life, inspiration and creativity. Like a loving mother, the Church has lived up to this responsibility for the past seventeen centuries.

Of course, during recent generations, the Church has been performing double-duty, because it was required to be the vessel containing both the Armenian national as well as religious identities. This was a true labor of love; but having carried the responsibility for the Armenian national identity for so long, today the Church has gratefully handed it to the authority of the independent Republic of Armenia. At last our nation has a legitimate political body, and the Church may concentrate on its traditional mission of guiding and shaping the national soul.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the source of that great mission. But the ministers of the Church's mission—the agents who take the teachings and example of Christ, and bring them to life in our world—are people just like you. Your faith, your convictions, your enthusiasm to perform God's work—these are what our Church is all about. The doorway to the future of our Church begins with the people.

The upcoming election of the catholicos is a good illustration of this. In other religious traditions, choosing a leader is a matter performed by a small group of individuals behind closed doors. But the Armenian Church is different: from the very beginning, the average people of our Church have had a voice—and the majority voice—in electing the catholicos. This is a testimony to the wisdom, foresight and faith of our church fathers. The faithful sons and daughters of the Church are invested with the authority to choose the spiritual father of all Armenians.

Two weeks ago, as the first step in that process, the people of our Diocese elected twenty-four individuals as representatives. These will travel to Armenia—along with representatives from all the Armenian Church jurisdictions in the world—to decide upon a new catholicos. That is a serious and solemn decision—the first of many which await our people as we cross the threshold into our future.

Taking those steps through the doorway will not always be easy. But as we stand on the threshold of our future, we should be aware that we are not alone. God stands with us—and He has stood with our people through all our national turning points, lending us strength in our days of sorrow, joy in our days of victory, and wisdom in our days of decision. We have only to invite Him, and he will be our guide through this doorway as well.

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