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This is my first official visit to your parish as Primate and I am very happy to see you, who are all children of this Church, gathered as one family sharing this feast of love. This banquet today is a testimony to your awareness of what the holy church is all about. We are still within the seven-day period, marking the great feast of Pentecost. The great mystery connected with that event is threefold: the Apostles of Christ were gathered together when the Spirit of God descended on them and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. The first mystery, the togetherness of the Apostles, was perpetuated and institutionalized on the day of the Pentecost. Like the Apostles you are here as Christ's family. Gatherings such as this give you an identity as Christians and prepare you to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

You are also a part of Christ's Armenian family which gives you a sense of belonging to a specific church. You must consider yourself privileged to be members of the Armenian Church, which through the centuries has forged the cultural traditions and national identity of our people. Being a full-fledged Armenian means being a good Christian. An Armenian who is not a practicing Christian is not a complete Armenian. This fact was once again reestablished by our people in Armenia who have returned to our ancestral faith. What we Armenians have is a unique situation; we are a Christian people. Our religion and national identity are intertwined like the bones and flesh of of man. A man is not complete, nor can he survive, without one or the other. The Armenian people survived their bloody history because of their faith, and the Armenian Church is still a living organism because the Armenian people have embraced it as their national institution. While churches much stronger and richer than ours are closing down or selling parish churches, we are prospering.

It is essential that we instill in our youth the same sense of identity and belonging we acquired from our parents. A few weeks ago the 89th Diocesan Assembly, which was convened in Tenafly, NJ, spent a considerable amount of time to the issue of youth. I am certain that your delegates kept you informed about the discussions. Considering the value and importance of transmission from one generation to the next and the unity of the Church as a single family or a unit, we shall soon initiate a Department of Family Ministry at the Diocesan Headquarters. In the meantime, it is imperative that each parish, each church organization exert as much effort as possible to instill in our youth our unique Christian tradition. Tomorrow several young men and women will graduate from

Sunday School. Most of these youth, I am sure, were born in this community and baptized in this church. You saw them grow under the protection of God and receive a Christian education in the halls of this sanctuary. Today they are ready to enter parish life as young adults and become full voting members in this community of God. This work must continue; otherwise the community of God will disband. Without Christ's community individuals cannot be eligible to the blessings of the Holy Spirit. You are an active parish with an energetic pastor. The harvest in this parish has always been good. Yet this should not relax you. As good Christians you must always be alert and on the lookout so that the work would not falter and Christ's family would grow in number and in faith.

I am very pleased today to acknowledge the presence among you of one special person who is an Armenian Christian by conviction. It was an accident that he was not born an Armenian, but his services to our Church and people, his love for the Armenians, his family and social life and everything about him say that he is an Armenian. That person is an old member of your parish, Parish Council member and Chairman, a delegate who has served on many committees, including the Building Committee of this church and the Diocesan Council. He is also very active in the AGBU and other Armenian organizations and a distinguished member of our Armenian American community who has been instrumental in inviting the attention of American politicians on the Armenians, the Armenian Genocide and the Armenian cause. The honor of attracting such a person, a benefactor of St. Nersess Seminary, the Sunday Schools and particularly the St. Mesrob Sunday School, belongs to his Armenian wife, his Armenian family and to you. He must have seen something beautiful in this community to have made the choice of joining it and becoming a part of it. The person I am referring to is Mr. George Stevoff whom we shall honor today with the St. Vartan Award, which is given to individuals in this Diocese who have contributed their time, devotion, effort and heart to their Church. With him we are also honoring with the St. Mesrob Award Mr. Michael Garukian, another member of your parish who has served this church for many years in various capacities. Last but not the least, we are here to congratulate Mr. ----- who was ordained a sub-deacon. Serving God's holy altar is a very important task. I heartily congratulate all of these gentlemen and wish them a healthy life so that they continue their service to God. I hope that all of you continue to work together for the same noble cause, live under the aegis of the Holy Church, reach a ripe old age under God's protection and with God's blessings. Thank you.