

Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America

Mission Statement of the Department of Youth Ministry

The Department of Youth Ministry believes in its commitment to develop Diocesan-wide programs for youth and young adults in order to nurture an individual's spirituality and instill in them, knowledge, understanding and love for Christ and His Church, and to enable the youth to express that feeling through the tradition and faith-heritage of the Armenian Church.

It is the role of the department to **design, create, facilitate, promote, manage and implement**, educational programs opportunities, occasions for spiritual growth and understanding, and foster one's commitment to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the context of the Armenian Christian community.

The Department of Youth Ministry focuses on five major areas in which these goals are accomplished:

Worship-relating to God and each other through Liturgy, prayer and the sacramental life expressed in the context of the Armenian Church

Witness- reflecting that relationship in daily life in a Christ-like way, confessing the faith in a lifestyle and action.

Service- exercising Christian charity and the sharing of one's gifts; loving and serving humankind by responding to the call for "active ministry" in the Armenian Church.

Education - nurturing of one's spirituality and enabling the expression of the Orthodox Christian teachings found in scripture, the sacraments, doctrine, rites, history and traditions of the Armenian Church.

Fellowship- daily bringing the faith into secular life while remaining conscious of the Christian call.

The end goal of the Department of Youth Ministry's work is the Christian Formation of the young church in the Armenian Orthodox Tradition; assisting young adults to assume their roles in society and as leaders in the present life of the Armenian Church and community.

Age Groups for the Department of Youth Ministry

Youth - Ages 13-17 yrs.

Young Adults - Age 18 and over

Staffing

Department Head- Laura Gononian

Young Adults-

Youth-

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Job Description of the Department

- Responsible for design and implementation of youth and young adult (c. ages 8-17, & 18-35) activities throughout the Diocese.
- Conducts various educational forums, in parishes on issues facing today's young people.
- Plans, implements and oversees the Diocese Internship Program, Jerusalem Internship Program, Armenian Youth Workforce Program in Armenia.
- Acts as primary liaison between the Diocesan Primate and the ACYOA. The Director is responsible also to oversee activities of the ACYOA and Central Council.
- Attends all ACYOA CC meetings and events.
- Directly administers all young adult programs that place within the Diocesan complex in New York.
- Responsible for youth (ages 13-18) programs throughout the Diocese. This includes, but is not limited to: ACYOA Juniors, Sports Weekends, educational retreats, service projects and youth periodicals. Reports to the Chancellor.

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Meeting the Needs of the Youth

Presently the Department of Youth Ministry as the sole and central organ of youth programming for the Diocese has been serving the 53 parishes and mission parishes within our Diocese.

The department is a relatively new one in the framework of the diocesan structure, having been established for a little over two years. Essentially the work of the DYM is not a new ministry but a continuation of a focus on Christian formation for the young church and specific programming which, since the mid 1940's, has been part of the overall ministry of the Armenian Church in America. However, with the creation of the Department, its work has been amplified, expanded and more broadly focused on a multiple of youth and young adult concerns.

Father Mardiros Chevian served as the Director of the Department for the first two years during which ministry to our youth became better understood in his successful and even failed attempts to tune into the spiritual needs and Christian formation of youth in the 90's and entering a new millennium. It must be honestly acknowledged that the reason for the creation of this department was to rescue somewhat a rather weakened national youth organization [ACYOA] which for many complex reasons had throughout the 80's declined in membership, lost its sense of mission and purpose and sought newer and more meaningful spiritual satisfaction from their Christian Faith-heritage. The later became a major factor for many young adults to drift.

With this concern, the Primate consistently has attempted to meet the youth of all ages in our communities and begin meaningful dialogue with them thus demonstrating and assuring them that their Church cared for them and

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wanted to hear what they felt.

At the same time the DYM began to expand its ministries with added personel. A director of Young Adult programming was added to the staff i.e. addressing the needs of College age students and older- ACYOA and as well a director for the Youth of the or juniors was added. The need for both was to balance the ministry in the department so that the Youth would be able to maintain their identity within the Armenian Church as they traversed the bridge from youth through adolescence to Young Adulthoold.

A variety of programs were implemented beginning with Camps, St. Nersess Summer Conferences, Junior Sports Weekends, Youth retreats, Senior Retreats and Cultural weekends, Young Adult Forums with the Primate, Sporting events, Internships at the Diocese, Trips to Armenia and Jerusalem and the Annual ACYOA General Assembly and National Sports Weekend.

The staff of the DYM provided not only the materials and man power to make these events happen but extend their physical presence at the camps, at the weekends and retreats and other programs that were held.

A major problem in the expansion of their efforts was the ^{lack of} willing and committed co-operative efforts from the local parishes. The best and most meaningful programs can be designed and planned, [and I must say that is a good part of the staff's work effort] however if it cannot be planted within the parish community to take place than all these programs remain good ideas.

The toughest part of the DYM minsitry regarding any programs is **getting people to work together** with a common desire and goal. Christian formation happens within the context of the entire community. Granted, parish priest are expected to do many things from playing basketball with the youth to raising funds for the Parish treasuries to rolling out dough in the kitchen

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with the women. It is unrealistic to think that one person is an expert at all these things. Nonetheless, the pastor as the key figure to all that happens in the parish is a necessary force. And, with regard to local youth activity, his cooperation as with all the diocesan departments helps move the effort.

The initiatives of the DYM in their attempts to implement their programs and bring their presence to local congregations was often deflated because the climate of the community and local conditions would not, or could not support their mission. Herein lies one of the pitfalls and problematic areas not only for DYM but for all diocesan departments.

Since a parish priest is very busy with every specialized ministry in the parish, it might be considered to establish a **Youth Staff** - not just one person but a select group in the parish to shoulder the work of interacting with the young people in the congregation.

The DYM is ready to help in this effort and to help build and foster relationship in order to assure that youth ministry can grow and develop from age 8 to age 28. This can only happen when a trusting attitude, sincere co-operation and committed concern prevails.

Now the DYM has been reduced to one person directing and attempting to address the multiplicity of concerns that we all have. While it is necessary to maintain the office of the Director and his/her work as described, it is essential to augment the DYM effort, enlist others who may function as the arm of the department within the regions of the Diocese. Persons who are immediate to the locals and readily accessible can bridge the gap that distance creates between the DYM Central office and the parishes.

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In noting this, we offer a networking system of Youth and Young Adult ministry within our Diocese. Already in the Midwest we have a staffed Program Co-ordinator who as an official worker of the diocese has met with success in the area of youth ministry.

We need two additional Program Co-ordinators for Christian formation of the Youth and Education of the young adults- one in the New York Metropolitan area and one in the New England Region. Their work would intensify the ministry of the DYM, build toward more consistent and frequent Religious, Cultural and Social programs [after all the youth and young adults need all the time and attention we can give them], establish a healthier and more committed relationship with the Church through the DYM.

That's what this is all about.... relating to God, acknowledging oneself and identifying with the Armenian community.

Archbishop Khajag Barsamian

**Remarks: Ann Arbor Youth Forum—January 27, 1995
(Based on ADRS/950114 Special Dio Asmbly/Catholicos Election)
Michigan State University, Ann Arbor, Michigan**

1150 words

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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SAINT JAMES
ARMENIAN CHURCH

V. REV. FR. NAREG BERBERIAN

MY PERSONAL COMMENTS ABOUT OUR MISSION TO ARMENIA

The following are recommendations that I believe would improve the process for this summer.

-Please schedule our trip in July. My school starts at the beginning of August.

-The group should have a complete day of orientation at the Diocese consisting of two parts. In the first the leader could explain to them the lifestyle in Armenia, the camp's activities and the rules in detail. We may watch our tape to gain some knowledge about the mission. The second part of the orientation should be social. The group should get acquainted with one another by spending some time together in recreation and conversation.

-Before we leave for Armenia, the group members need to know exactly what their roles are in the camp. There was confusion this summer in this regard.

-I would advise you to purchase the tickets to Armenia through Europe. Moscow is a city of chaos and they created many problems for us.

-Etchmiadzin should be well informed of the number of days we are expected to stay. Perhaps the first weekend and the last 7 days.

-I suggest that the duration for the camp be just for 15-18 days. After two weeks, the group was already tired. They accomplished their mission and felt they needed closure. The participants should have at least a week to visit different sights of Armenia.

-Any type of meeting should not be conducted with the absence of the group leader in Armenia. The leader **must** be present in every discussion and meeting.

-The daily schedule and the activities of the camp should be finalized by Fr. Apraham and by our Primate to avoid misunderstandings and confusions.

-I believe that there should be a short daily morning and evening service as well as daily Bible Study sessions for children. It would be more appropriate if Fr. Apraham translated the two services in eastern Armenian. If he sends it to me prior to our trip, I will type it and bring it with me. I will gladly conduct the services at the camp.

-Before we arrive in Armenia, we should have a pre-arranged bus. This year there was no bus arrangement for us and it was chaos. The bus we used was old bus and in despair. It made everyone tired. I encourage you to inform Stepan that he be the one responsible for renting us **usable and movable** bus for our trips. He did a wonderful job for us.

-Etchmiadzin should be informed that we will stay in Vanadoon the last 7 days. The dates should be clear and perhaps in writting. If Etchmiadzin is reluctant to accept us, then other arrangement should be considered.

-I encourage you to add a dally Armenian class to our program for the participants. This summer most of them were interested in learning Armenian so I had a few sessions with them in the evenings. I tried to improve their vocabulary and communication skills. This met with great enthusiasm.

Archbishop Khajag Barsamian

**Address: ACYOA Annual Assembly—October 14-15, 1995
St. David Church, Boca Raton, Florida**

1750 words

Reverend Clergy, ACYOA delegates, honored guests, and friends:

It is a pleasure to address the ACYOA National Assembly as it convenes at the St. David Church, in Boca Raton, Florida. For the second year now, we are meeting in isolation from the social festivities of Sports Weekend, and I think this is a worthwhile development for this organization.

It is also fitting that we have gathered during the month of October—traditionally observed as "Armenian Cultural Month" in our Diocese, and a time when local Armenian communities sponsor a variety of programs and activities. I would like to reflect briefly on one aspect of this observance, and on the example it offers to direct our actions today.

Today marks the centerpiece of Cultural Month: The Feast of the Holy Translators, which commemorates the scholars who first translated the Holy Bible into the Armenian language. Having the Scriptures available in the native tongue of Armenia seems to have brought out all the creativity in our ancestors. Inspired by the word of God, the Armenian people went on to develop a distinctive and beautiful culture. The two individuals who first envisioned the Armenian Bible—St. Sahag Partev and St. Mesrob Mashdotz—are called "the enlighteners of the mind," for the vital role they played in this flowering of the Armenian arts and letters.

Creating the Armenian alphabet and translating the Bible into our native language were acts of incredible foresight. But they served a single, basic purpose: bringing the word of God to the Armenian people. Even so, the task was a complex one, which involved travelling to the great intellectual centers of the world, where rare Biblical manuscripts were kept, and where faithful translations of these manuscripts could be made.

Needless to say, travel in the fourth century was not the simple task it is today. The Holy Translators had to travel on foot, often through difficult and dangerous territory. It took vigorous, strong individuals to do this, so the ranks of the Holy Translators were drawn mostly from among the younger generation of priests and monks. It is profoundly meaningful to me that the word of God was transmitted to the Armenian people, because of the bravery, enthusiasm and determination of a small army of youthful scholars.

That blessed generation literally changed the face of the Armenian nation. Over the succeeding centuries, Armenians would find many creative ways to transmit the word of God: through poetry, architecture and music, among others. Taken together, this Christian culture helped our people to hear God's call, and more importantly, it has led us to implement God's word in our daily lives.

In the case of the Armenian Bible, St. Sahag, St. Mesrob, and the Holy Translators read the signs of the times, and identified the one thing most needed by the people, so that the Armenian Christian heritage could be handed down to future generations. We should keep that example in mind, as we meet the challenges of our own age. The Church as a whole, and each of her children, needs to be aware of the signs of the times: of where we were, where we stand presently, and where we would like to be in the future.

There are many indications—from the creation of a new Republic of Armenia, to the election of a new Catholicos this past spring—that the Armenian people have begun a new chapter in our national and spiritual life. As a result, we are called to evaluate ourselves, so that we may be prepared for the prospects which the future holds.

That call to self-evaluation seems especially important today, as the ACYOA approaches its fiftieth anniversary. Fifty years ago, in a flash of great optimism and inspiration, the Armenian Christian Youth Organization was created out of the same sense of purpose which guided the Holy Translators: to make sure that the word of God would be heard by a new generation of Armenians.

After half-a-century of operation, the ACYOA has achieved many powerful successes. But in that time, too, the surrounding cultural environment has changed—and the characteristics of the group called "Armenian Christian Youth" have changed as well. Today, you are more educated, more mobile, spread out over a larger geographic region, than your predecessors. At the same time, certain things have not changed: namely, the human need for spiritual nourishment. The signs of the times seem to indicate that the ACYOA should begin the process of forging a new understanding of itself—one more suited to the demands of the present and the future, while more focused on the eternal truths which motivate man's spiritual life in all ages.

Along these lines, in the coming months, I would like to see the ACYOA—at its national, regional and local levels—focus its activities more on the teaching and service aspects of your mission. The call to educate, to inspire, to deepen the understanding of our younger generation, has been a function of this organization from its beginnings. And it continues today, as well. But so much more can be—and needs to be—done. The current teaching and

outreach functions of the ACYOA should be considered the seeds, out of which a stronger and more wide-reaching mission may grow.

None of this means that ACYOA should abandon its social function. That has been a successful, useful and durable component of ACYOA for many years, and ought to remain so. But what I am saying is that all ACYOA functions—whether educational, social or service-oriented—should be centered on fostering and developing the Life-in-Christ: that special way of living which originates from the teachings and example of Jesus, and which is preserved and transmitted by the Church. This life path is not restricted to the times we spend in a religious sanctuary: it encompasses our activities at home, at school, at work, in public and private. It is an entire way of living. ACYOA is one of the ways our church draws young people into that Life-in-Christ—and each of you has a role to play in that mission.

Our entire Diocese will be observing the year 1996 as "The Year of the Youth," and I hope this will be an opportunity for all of us—not just your generation, but our entire community—to look at the prospects and challenges facing the youth of the Armenian Church today. With this in mind, let me offer some practical ideas on how the ACYOA can sharpen its focus in the coming months.

First, I feel it should be a top priority for ACYOA to sponsor at least one teaching workshop in each region of our Diocese. The day-long workshop format has been very successful for other Diocesan organizations, like the Choir Association, and I believe our young people would benefit from a similar series of ACYOA-sponsored events.

Second, ACYOA should emphasize the idea of service to the church, community and people in general. A wonderful example of a successful program is the ACYOA Armenia Service Program, which takes a group of young Armenian-Americans to our homeland during the summer. As you will discover from talking to the participants of this past summer, re-focusing our sights on service can be exciting and revitalizing, to individuals and to the community as a whole.

Third, I feel the ACYOA should give some thought to revising its definition of membership. We need to ask: How can we include the greatest number of young people as active ACYOA participants? Among our local communities, I frequently find that there are many young people involved in various ways in parish life—they are just not a part of ACYOA. How do we attract them? How can we reach out more to those who are already interested in the Church, but who, for one reason or another, do not feel at home in ACYOA?

Of course, if we are truly serious about ACYOA's mission of outreach, we need to reach beyond the boundaries of our parishes, and bring in people who, left to themselves, might have little to do with the Church. In this

mission of evangelizing to our younger generation, we have a greater opportunity today than ever before in recent history. Across this country—indeed, around the world—there is a tremendous revival of interest in spiritual matters, especially among the young.

I have seen this development here in America, and in my travels to Armenia. And I saw it on an enormous scale two weeks ago, when Pope John Paul the Second visited New York City. The wholesome love of God, church and family, which was on display by so many Christian youth, was a refreshing change from the usual expressions of our culture. In place of the usual stereo-types of alienated, complaining and rebellious youth, millions of people saw young Christians who were filled with enthusiasm for the Godly life, and for a strong teaching on moral values.

I believe these and other expressions of the power of the Christian spirit are the signs of our own time. They suggest to me that the present moment offers a unique opportunity to evangelize the young people of our community. This effort will need leaders—just as the effort to translate the Bible into Armenian required the leadership. And as the example of the Holy Translators suggests, that leadership may come from the younger generation of the Church.

I expect each of you, as ACYOA delegates—who have, over the years, proven your own enthusiasm and commitment to Christ and His Church—to take the lead in your local parish activities. I want you to draw on your own faith experiences, to share your Armenian Christian heritage with others, and hopefully to inspire your youthful brothers and sisters to become active in the Church themselves.

In a moment, I would like to invite you to offer your comments and questions on my remarks today. But before closing, let me leave you with this thought. Our heritage of faith and devotion to God is a treasure: a gift that God has given our people, and that He renews with each passing generation. Sadly, the world often tries to distract us from recognizing this gift, and young people are especially vulnerable to these distractions.

But as Christians, we are commanded to focus our attention on the truth. In the upcoming "Year of the Youth," all ACYOA members should commit themselves to the task of helping your peers discover—and re-discovering within your own hearts—the true value of the gift God has given us. And in doing so, we may all re-discover our true identities, as the sons and daughters of God.

Thank you.

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

MESSAGE FROM THE PRIMATE

It gives me great pleasure to extend my heartfelt greetings and congratulations to the members of the Junior branch of the Armenian Church Youth Organization of America, on the occasion of the 1995 ACYOA Juniors Sports Weekend.

There is no greater satisfaction for me than to see the youngest members of our community gathered together in the loving embrace of the Church. Although many of you have come from distant communities and are staying with people you have never met before, I hope you have come to realize that you are not among strangers. The Armenian Church is like a large family: we may be spread out geographically, but we all share something in common that is deep and lasting.

While this event is called a "sports weekend," its emphasis is less on competition than it is on friendship. The bonds that you create or renew during these few days will last a lifetime, and will enrich your experiences within the Church. And the Church itself will be enriched, to have a community of faithful parishioners who have grown up together, and who come together not out of a sense of solemn obligation, but because they love one another, and enjoy each other's company.

I also wish to commend our hosts for the weekend, who have shouldered the task of organizing these festivities. The parishioners of the Holy Martyrs Church, their pastor, the Very Reverend Fr. Samuel Aghoyan, and his Pastoral Assistant, Dn. Greg Doudoukjian, are exemplary in their serious commitment to the youth of the Armenian Church. Keeping alive the tradition of the ACYOA Juniors Sports Weekend is vital work, because the future health of the ACYOA Seniors—and of the Church in general—depends on how we reach out to our Juniors today.

May God bless you all, and may you continue to serve Him in the church of your ancestors.

With prayers,

Abp. Khajag Barsamian

Archbishop Khajag Barsamian
Primate

October 1995

Shining the Light of Christ on the Next Generation

The year 1996 has been designated as the "Year of the Youth" by our Primate, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian. This year-long observance is in part a tribute to the proud history of the ACYOA, which will celebrate its milestone 50th anniversary in the coming year. More generally, we hope that the "Year of the Youth" will help to reinforce our mission to shine the light of Christ on the next generation.

That mission—long a priority within the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America—took on an official status in 1991, when the Diocesan Assembly created a Department of Youth Ministry. The department was charged with helping a new generation of Armenians to understand and grow in their Christian faith and cultural heritage, as well as to apply the teachings of the Church to their daily lives.

In the time since its founding, the Department of Youth Ministry has pursued its objective by developing Diocesan-wide and parish-based programs for youth and young adults, in order to nurture each individual's spirituality; to instill in our young people knowledge, understanding and love for Christ and His Church; to enable them to express that feeling in the context of the tradition and faith-heritage of the Armenian Church; and to empower them as disciples to share the Good News with others.

However, the Department of Youth Ministry is hardly alone in its outreach to youth. Indeed, all of the Diocesan departments concentrate some part of their efforts on our younger generation. The **Department of Religious Education** is responsible for Sunday School and St. Vartan Camp, among a host of youth programs. The **Department of Social Services** plans college admissions programs and internships for immigrants and native Armenian-Americans, and helps place refugee children in schools. The **Armenian Language Lab and Resource Center** creates Armenian language and cultural education programs geared specifically towards young people. The **Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center**, the **Choir Association**, the **Women's Guild**, the **St. Nersess Armenian Seminary**, and other departmental and auxiliary organizations, each reach out to our youth, inviting them into the wide circle of educational, liturgical and charitable activities available in our Church. At the Diocesan headquarters, we are all youth workers—and the same ought to be true in our local parishes.

Needless to say, we all must work together to provide our youth with the tools they need to become strong Christian leaders in the Church and in their communities. This seems especially imperative in today's fast-paced media age. With countless messages bombarding us from all quarters, it is becoming more and more difficult for our young people (and the rest of us, for that matter) to discern what is true and what is God-pleasing.

Against such a barrage, what are we teaching our children in response? As clergy, parents, teachers, youth workers and parishioners, we need to help our children and

young adults understand what is important—to understand what is right and understand what is wrong—whether we are talking about spiritual or secular matters. As Armenian Christians, we believe Jesus Christ to be "the Way, the Truth and the Light"; His teachings will set children and parents alike free from the false idols of the contemporary world, and light our way to God's eternal kingdom.

The upcoming "Year of the Youth" promises to be the proper forum in which to focus on and explore these matters. As an ongoing reminder of our year-long observance, we offer this calendar as a survey of various youth-related activities that have taken place at the Diocesan headquarters and its local parishes over the years. It is our hope that you will be touched by these pictures and their accompanying Biblical passages, and that they will inspire you to work with us to provide quality opportunities for the youth and young adults of today—and for the generations yet to come.

END

655 words

Archbishop Khajag Barsamian

Speech: ACYOA Sports Weekend Banquet—September 3, 1995
Sheraton Meadowlands Hotel, Fair Lawn, New Jersey

1230 words

Reverend Clergy, Honored Guests, Friends:

Let me begin by congratulating the St. Leon chapter of the ACYOA for the splendid job it did in making the 1995 Sports Weekend such a success. Fr. Vahan, the committee chairs _____ and _____, the committee members and the entire Fair Lawn community deserve our thanks and appreciation.

I am especially pleased that the ACYOA chose as its theme the motto "Run the Good Race"—a phrase which fits the athletic competitions of the past few days, while reminding us of the spirit of St. Paul's letters to the early Christians. Throughout the past year, our Diocese has been observing the Year of the Holy Bible, and I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on the idea of "running the Good Race" in light of the importance of the Scriptures in our lives.

The world in which St. Paul lived and preached was that of the classical Romans, and sports were as much a part of that world's everyday experience as they are in our own. Again and again, St. Paul returns to the image of the athlete to describe the Christian life. The runner, the boxer, the gladiator—all of these kinds of sportsmen were familiar to the people St. Paul was trying to reach, and like a good teacher, he used what his students already understood to bring them closer to understanding God.

In general, human life can be compared to a race, because both have a definite beginning and a definite end. St. Paul deepens this idea by emphasizing three things when he compares the sporting life to the Christian life. First, both the athlete and the Christian find themselves in competition against an opponent. For Christians, sometimes that opponent is invisible, like the fallen angels—the powers of evil—who tempt us to wickedness. Or like the animal instincts within us, which need to be mastered by reason and the will.

At other times, our opponent is visible everywhere around us—like the secular culture, which has rejected Christianity, and which tries to erect false idols to distract us from our true goal. Like runners in a race, we need to be able to identify these phony finish-lines—however attractive they may be. We need to keep our "eyes on the prize," as they say, and not stray from our real objective: Jesus Christ.

St. Paul's second point is that both the athlete and the Christian need to train in order to achieve their goals. Most of you here tonight probably perform some kind of exercise on a regular basis: running, weight-training, or team sports. You do this to keep in condition, so that when you are called upon to test your physical abilities, you will not be forced to give up, but can tackle any challenge with strength and confidence.

But what is true for your bodies is true for your soul as well. Just as stones and obstacles prevent our progress on a race track, so too can moral and spiritual problems slow us down in our lives. We need to prepare ourselves, so we can overcome these problems when they arise. We need to keep in condition spiritually, through self-discipline, moral action, and prayer. St. Paul makes his reasoning plain in one of his letters: "Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do this to receive a corruptible crown. But we are striving for an in-corruptible crown" (1 Cor 9:25). St. Paul is saying that Christians need to train even harder than others, because the goal they aim at is so much greater.

Finally, in drawing a comparison with the runner and his race, St. Paul reminds us that Christianity offers us an opportunity for genuine victory in our lives. This teaching seems to me to be more important today than ever before. So many people in our world appear to believe that, in the last analysis, nothing really matters. Their reasoning goes something like this: Since there is no ultimate right or wrong in the universe, we can behave as we like, according to what makes us feel good, or in order to advance our most selfish interests. No goal that we set for ourselves is better than anyone else's goal—in fact, all such goals are equally worthless. While there may be small, meaningless victories in the short run, there are no winners in the long run, because there is nothing to win.

Against those who think this way, the Church and the entire tradition of Christianity stand firm and shout: "Wrong!" The meaning of the universe, man's place in it, and our true value in Creation have been revealed to us by God Himself, through the prophets and saints, and ultimately through Jesus Christ. The victory of life over death, which Christ holds out to us, is no illusion. It is real—as solid and real as the wounded hand which Jesus stretched forth in evidence, when his disciple Thomas doubted the Resurrection.

As Christians, we believe that there is a victory out there, waiting to be achieved. Striving after it makes life worth living. A man who believes that there is nothing to win must also believe that there is nothing to lose, and he will gradually let his freedom, his self-respect, his very life slip away. By contrast, the man who knows that a wonderful goal awaits him, will find that everything else in his life has taken on a new meaning, a new value, a sense of new possibilities—and even a new hopefulness.

Sadly, that sense of hope is rare in our world today. Think of all the people who spend their whole lives running in various directions. But when they stop and look around, they realize it has gotten them nowhere. They have not found satisfaction: they are lost. For all their efforts, they didn't win the race—indeed, they seem to have missed the track entirely.

What these people never realized is that, no matter how hard they run, they can only achieve victory if they know what direction to go in. But where can we find these directions? The answer which Christianity suggests is that our true direction is revealed through the teachings of the Bible, and the way these teachings have been illuminated and developed, over many centuries, by our Church.

Studying the Bible gives us the directions we need to run and complete the Good Race. God has set a goal for His beloved creatures, and he has indicated the path to that goal. Achievement of that goal does not necessarily mean coming in ahead of all the rest: our goal is the happiness that comes from union with God, and this is not a simple "winner-take-all" victory. With God as our judge, there is room for many winners at the finish line.

But there is something even more wonderful that you should know about the Good Race: God wants you to win. Each of you and all of you. He wants you to win so much that He gave His only begotten Son, "so that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but will have eternal life." The wonderful truth about the Good Race is that Jesus Christ has run ahead of us; He is standing patiently at the finish line, waiting to share His victory with all who have followed Him. Thank you.

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Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRIMATE

Greetings to the 24th Sports Weekend of the Armenian Church Youth Organization of America. We convene this time in our Diocesan Year of the Holy Bible—a year during which we will focus special attention on the central book of our faith, which our forebears dubbed “Astvatsashounch,” or “the Breath of God.”

It is my hope that the same “Breath of God” has inspired the youthful participants in this gathering at the St. Leon Church of Fair Lawn, New Jersey. Our hosts have chosen an appropriately Scriptural theme for the weekend: “I Ran the Good Race”—a reference to St. Paul’s metaphor for the Christian life, and a reminder to us that it is not simply the things we achieve, but *the way we achieve them*, that distinguishes the Christian way of life from all others.

As the present festivities come to a close, it is important to remember that our efforts in the past few days—as well as in the days and weeks to come—are ultimately in the service of living up to the high standards exemplified in the Holy Scriptures. Whether we are organizing a friendly sports competition, serving in our local communities, or teaching children in our parish Sunday Schools, our highest task is to help the light of Christ illuminate the world, and shine in the hearts of our people.

My congratulations and gratitude go to the pastor of the St. Leon Church, the Very Rev. Fr. Vahan Hovhannessian, to the Sports Weekend Organizing Committee, the Parish Council and parishioners, as well as to the members of the ACYOA Central Council. Your diligent efforts and warm hospitality have made this a memorable gathering.

May God bless all our people, and grant them health and prosperity.

With prayers,

Abp. Khajag Barsamian

Archbishop Khajag Barsamian
Primate

September 3, 1995



Shining the Light of Christ on the Next Generation

The year 1996 has been designated as the "Year of the Youth" by our Primate, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian. This year-long observance is in part a tribute to the proud history of the ACYOA, which will celebrate its milestone 50th anniversary in the coming year. More generally, we hope that the "Year of the Youth" will help to reinforce our mission to shine the light of Christ on the next generation.

That mission—long a priority within the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America—took on an official status in 1991, when the Diocesan Assembly created a Department of Youth Ministry. The department was charged with helping a new generation of Armenians to understand and grow in their Christian faith and cultural heritage, as well as to apply the teachings of the Church to their daily lives.

In the time since its founding, the Department of Youth Ministry has pursued its objective by developing Diocesan-wide and parish-based programs for youth and young adults, in order to nurture each individual's spirituality; to instill in our young people knowledge, understanding and love for Christ and His Church; to enable them to express that feeling in the context of the tradition and faith-heritage of the Armenian Church; and to empower them as disciples to share the Good News with others.

However, the Department of Youth Ministry is hardly alone in its outreach to youth. Indeed, all of the Diocesan departments concentrate some part of their efforts on our younger generation. The **Department of Religious Education** is responsible for Sunday School and St. Vartan Camp, among a host of youth programs. The **Department of Social Services** plans college admissions programs and internships for immigrants and native Armenian-Americans, and helps place refugee children in schools. The **Armenian Language Lab and Resource Center** creates Armenian language and cultural education programs geared specifically towards young people. The **Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center**, the **Choir Association**, the **Women's Guild**, the **St. Nersess Armenian Seminary**, and other departmental and auxiliary organizations, each reach out to our youth, inviting them into the wide circle of educational, liturgical and charitable activities available in our Church. At the Diocesan headquarters, we are all youth workers—and the same ought to be true in our local parishes.

Needless to say, we all must work together to provide our youth with the tools they need to become strong Christian leaders in the Church and in their communities. This seems especially imperative in today's fast-paced media age. With countless messages bombarding us from all quarters, it is becoming more and more difficult for our young people (and the rest of us, for that matter) to discern what is true and what is God-pleasing.

Against such a barrage, what are we teaching our children in response? As clergy, parents, teachers, youth workers and parishioners, we need to help our children and

young adults understand what is important—to understand what is right and understand what is wrong—whether we are talking about spiritual or secular matters. As Armenian Christians, we believe Jesus Christ to be "the Way, the Truth and the Light"; His teachings will set children and parents alike free from the false idols of the contemporary world, and light our way to God's eternal kingdom.

The upcoming "Year of the Youth" promises to be the proper forum in which to focus on and explore these matters. As an ongoing reminder of our year-long observance, we offer this calendar as a survey of various youth-related activities that have taken place at the Diocesan headquarters and its local parishes over the years. It is our hope that you will be touched by these pictures and their accompanying Biblical passages, and that they will inspire you to work with us to provide quality opportunities for the youth and young adults of today—and for the generations yet to come.

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655 words

THE OLD TESTAMENT: HOW WAS IT COMPILED?

By Rev. Zaven Arzoumanian, Ph.D.

The most ancient of the holy books is the Bible, with its Old and New Testaments. Obviously the Bible is a collection of books, a library, written over lengthy periods of time, which encompasses God's continuous intervention in human history since the Creation of the world. This Book contains events, persons, actions, messages, songs, poetry, parables, miracles and interpretations, all of them within the framework of ancient and unbroken history, a kind of history which is spread over centuries, fifteen centuries before Christ and two centuries after, judging from the first known people who spoke and whose words were later "received" and recorded on the pages of parchments in Hebrew.

It is important to know the main purpose of the Bible, which is to provide a religious philosophy by way of divine origin, authority and intervention, warranting human response.

The Bible is One Book, containing 66 individual books of different nature, and yet all of them are united with a bond of divine authority, resulting in one and the same purpose: God's revelation to mankind. This is verified from the first book of Genesis which bears witness to one God, who is consistent with himself and with his revelation. In all succeeding 65 books, this trend is unbroken and God's consistent presence is surfaced in various ways.

To answer partially as to how the Bible was written, we must bear in mind that transition of time gave the writers progressive opportunity to hear and embellish the laws of God and the priestly applications of the divine instructions which they received orally, and in time they wrote them down according to their individual skill and virtuosity. The subject matter of their writings has been one continuous story, which is the story of humanity in relation to God. The story unfolds the divine truth progressively, which is not told all at once, but only gradually until its consummation.

This task was done by chosen individuals who became the writers of each of those books, datable with approximations and according to historical events and geographical data. God's intervention was as real as the historical events of the centuries, the latter being the only real vehicle of receiving God's ordinances. With centuries in between, one writer of the Bible took up an earlier revelation of God, added to it, laid down his pen, and in due time another man heard God's calling and added more details, and then another, and still another, each with different skills and talents, who responded to God's calling and contributed to the history of salvation, until the entire Bible was compiled. This is particularly

reflected in the Old Testament where patriarchs, kings, prophets and people are directly involved in the revelation of God.

To understand the process of the compilation of the Bible, we should distinguish five categories in this holy book:

1. Preparation (The Old Testament)
2. Manifestation (The Gospels)
3. Propagation (The Acts of the Apostles)
4. Explanation (The Epistles)
5. Consummation (The Revelation).

To tell about the dates and the way the New Testament was compiled is far more within reason and easier than the Old Testament, which goes back at least 1500 years before Christ. Not all events in the Old Testament correspond to the dates of the writings related to those events. Most of them were spoken, and later they were received, and eventually were written. Editing and redaction were exploited all along. Unlike the Apostles, for example, the Prophets spoke, and their messages were received before they were written by men who believed in those messages. Poets sang their poetry in praise of God, and eventually the Psalms came into existence. The authors of the Old Testament are first hand, but the production is for sure second hand.

This is particularly illustrated by the 4 groups of different writings of the Old Testament: The Law (5 books), History (9 books), Poetry (5 books), and Prophecy (17 books), 36 in all. In those four categories the Bible begins with the creation of the earth and of Adam and Eve, followed by the generations of mankind. Then the history of Abraham is given which culminates in the rise of the nation of which he was the ancestor. Abraham and his generations were charged (1) to witness the oneness of God as against idolatry, (2) to serve one true God and thus be blessed by him, (3) to long for the Messiah, and (4) to heed the Prophets who foretold a graceful future for Israel under the reign of Christ.

The first five books, the Law, are ascribed to Moses by implication, himself being a historic personage who led his people from the Egyptian bondage to the Promised Land. The Creation story is obviously a reflection of human mind on a supreme being who started and took the first step by breathing his breath and making man and woman, while the story of the flood and Noah's heroism are verifiable events of ancient history, linked with the land of Armenia. A conventional date for the writing of the Exodus is given as 1450 BC, the time of the journey to Sinai, the giving of the Law to Moses, and the construction of the Tabernacle. The Poetical Books, on the other hand, recorded the spiritual experiences of the redeemed people, who praised God and sang their thanksgiving psalms ascribed to king and prophet David. They also included the Proverbs to pursue wisdom, filial piety, domestic faithfulness and honesty, spoken by king

Solomon who is said to have uttered 3000 proverbs.

The Prophetic books consisted of sermons and messages with connecting historical events, whether catastrophe or rebuilding, exile or return, fall or restoration. The Prophets were real historic persons who lived through the entire life of their people, being the voice and the messenger of God. Their time span ranged from the 9th to the 5th centuries BC, roughly from Joel to Jeremiah (9th-7th c.), from Daniel to Obadiah (7th-6th c.), from Haggai to Malachi (6th-5th c.). Being speakers rather than writers, it is assumed that the Prophets inspired their listeners, and the latter edited or redacted the message for posterity.

The Old testament contains above all 12 historical books, from Joshua to Esther (14th c.). Joshua was appointed by Moses as his successor, who waged war to conquer the Promised Land. The Judges (11th c.), who were 12 men and one woman, from Othniel to Eli, were in charge after the death of Joshua. They were designated by God to deliver Israel in times of disunion and lead them into the Davidic kingdom. The first such king was Saul, whose death is recorded in the first book of Samuel. The two Books of Samuel (10th c.), Samuel being a priest and a prophet, culminate in the establishment of Davidic throne in Jerusalem, while the succeeding two books, the First and Second Kings, relate the history of the division of the united kingdom during the 6th c. BC.

The foregoing sketch is designed to help us locate the historical perspective of the Old Testament as much as possible, on which the dates of individual books in the Bible can possibly be traced, bearing in mind the centuries-long editing and redacting process which have come down until the books were canonized.

10/13/95