

# AN CHURCH

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## ՆԿԵՂԵՑԻ



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1993

# A Celebration of Youth

## "Miracle on 34th Street"

By Brunelle Arakelian



John Walsh

The birth of a child is a miracle. But this summer, it was the Diocesan youth who were giving birth to a "miracle" of their own in New York City. "Miracle on 34th Street", a three-day festival of the spirit of Armenian youth from July 29 through 31, was the brainchild of the Diocesan Department of Youth Ministry and the ACYOA, part of the ongoing 25th Anniversary celebration of St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral.

The kick-off event was a Friday night "Party on the Plaza", one of the cleverest youth events I've ever experienced in Armenian circles. The Plaza, directly in front of the Cathedral, is usually associated with the release of doves on Easter Sunday. But it took on a completely different feel on a cool summer evening, splendidly decorated, boasting a generous mezzeh table, with the brightly lit Empire State Building looming above. It was the perfect setting for a hip Manhattan evening — like something out of a Noel Coward play.

The music, along with the ambiance, made it special. The John Walsh Company played terrific jazz standards throughout the evening, and the cool sounds delighted close to 300 young people — mostly between the ages of 25 and 35.

One thing that left an impression on the people I spoke with was the sense that the cathedral was theirs! That it wasn't some monument that other people had built, but rather a place that welcomed people of our generation and invited us to feel at home. That genuine "homecoming" feeling was a part of the entire weekend.

Of course, in another sense, St. Vartan Cathedral continues on page five

# ACYOA Assembly Focuses on Christian Vocation

By Mgrditch "Mitch" Hagopian

Those dour voices of the community perpetually bemoaning the lack of youth involvement in Armenian causes received a rousing response by the 1993 ACYOA Assembly and Sports Weekend, and a lesson on how to do things right. The annual event was hosted by the St. James ACYOA of Watertown, MA over Labor Day Weekend.

One thread which ran through the weekend was the emphasis on worship. Each session of the Assembly, which ran from Wednesday through Friday, began with religious services, a home blessing, a matins service or a Badarak. This particular badarak was a debut, appropriately celebrated with the youth leadership. This Divine Liturgy, called "The Common Liturgy," featured a modern text in English for use at conferences and retreats. It was prepared by the Departments of Youth Ministry and Religious Education.

This year's Assembly theme was Christian action in the world. The notion that Christians have a special vocation and duty, and are called to act upon their convictions in everyday life, was stressed by the Primate, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, during both his informal and formal remarks. The vocational spirit was also evidenced by the reports of young participants in a number of Diocesan summer programs,

including internship programs at the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, at the Diocesan headquarters, and the Armenian Studies Program.

The notion of vocation was also movingly articulated by Fr. Stanley Harakas, a renowned Eastern Orthodox scholar and pastor, who screened a video entitled AIDS: An Orthodox Christian Perspective, followed by a spirited discussion on AIDS.

Later in the Assembly, Laura Gononian of the Department of Youth Ministry presented a plan to revitalize and bolster existing ACYOA chapters. "Project Growth" gives every indication of becoming a very powerful ministry to young people in the Armenian Church. The Assembly gave serious consideration and priority to the creation of a genuine ministry to the younger generation, a welcome change from the "we must preserve our youth" platitudes of the past. What emerged was a clear-sighted, honest reflection on what it means to be young, Armenian and Christian in America.

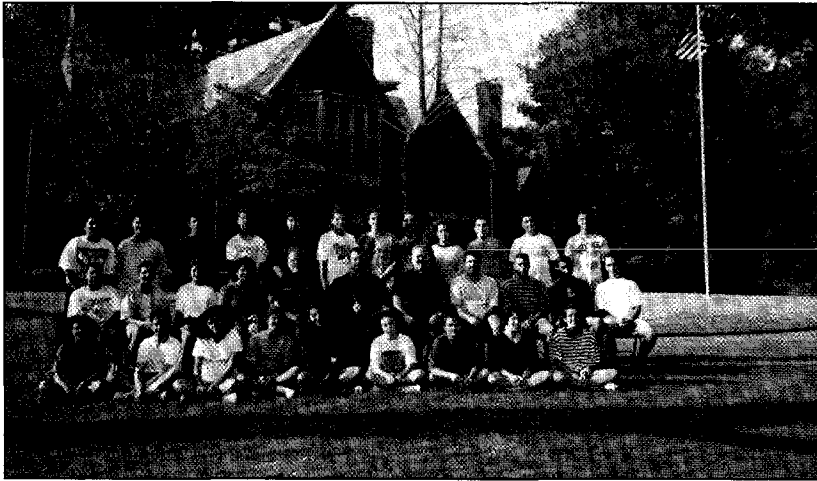
## Sports Weekend and the Social Scene

The Sports Weekend's social scene included a trolley ride through old Boston, a dance-mixer at historic Fanieul Hall, and a charming cruise through picturesque Boston Harbor.

continues on page two

# POINTS OF LIGHT

*A monthly overview of highlights from our parishes, the Diocesan departments, the Armenian and Ecumenical communities...*



*Participants in the St. Vartan Summer Conference.*

## Home Away from Home

St. Nersess Armenian Seminary served as a second home for junior high and high school age Armenians from July 26 through August 8. The Seminary was the site for the St. Vartan Summer Conferences, sponsored by the Department of Youth Ministry, directed by Fr. Mardiros Chevian, and assisted by Stephen P. Megrđichian.

The conferences gave young people an opportunity to learn, worship and share fellowship and fun. The purpose of the conferences was to expand the participants' knowledge of the faith and history of the Armenian Church, our cultural heritage and to explore how to apply these to their lives today. Worship, Bible study and lectures by educators

were a part of each day. Topics explored included "Contemporary Issues in the Armenian Church", "The Life of Christ", "the New Testament", "Church Doctrine", "The Sacrament of Baptism and Chrismation", "Church Doctrine" and "Modern Armenian Church History."

*Stephen P. Megrđichian*

## Young Visitors from Armenia

Seven young people from the Araratian Diocese of Yerevan, Armenia were the guests of the Department of Youth Ministry this summer. The young people were part of an exchange program under the auspices of Archbishop Karekin Nersesian, Vicar of the Araratian Diocese and Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate. The program was directed by Fr. Mardiros Chevian. As a part of the exchange, the Araratian Diocese hosted seven young adults from the Eastern Diocese who participated in this summer's month-long Armenian Studies Program.

Araratian youth an opportunity to visit the United States for a month, staying with Armenian-American families, youth groups and the community at large. The young people participated in the St. Vartan Summer Conferences, St. Vartan Camp and the ACYOA Sports Weekend and General Assembly. They also visited several parishes, participated in Divine Liturgy and met local parishioners and youth. Cities visited included Boston, New York, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Hartford, New Britain, Fair Lawn and Bayside.

The exchange program, now in its third year, offers the

*Laura Gononian*

## Sports Weekend

*continued from page one*

There were sports competitions, too, but it seemed that although the weekend's events attracted record numbers of youth, the field of sports competitors was thinner than in previous years. Still there were the highlights. The "Superbowl" event of Sports Weekend, the men's basketball final, was won by the Holy Martyrs chapter of Bayside, New York. The Cleveland ACYOA received the annual "A" Award as best ACYOA chapter. Sara Andonian of Detroit was presented with the 2nd annual Greg Arpajian Leadership Award.



*Nicole Matolan, chapter chairman from Detroit reporting on chapter activities.*

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# Reflections of a Still Untamed Rebel

One of the most memorable ACYOA Labor Day Weekends that I can remember took place at George Williams College on placid Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. It was 1968, not a very placid year. It was a time of volatile protest throughout the world. Young people took to the streets to protest against war, to protest against the status quo, against selfish exploitation, against worn-out political opportunism. Young people were literally changing the course of history.

Just one week before the 1968 Labor Day weekend, and barely fifty miles from the site of the ACYOA Assembly, the national convention of a major political party was disrupted by massive demonstrations. It was inevitable that such a climate, that such events would find an echo among the youth of our Church. The product of that ferment was the "Williams Bay Manifesto", presented at the General Assembly of the ACYOA on September 2, 1968. The Manifesto was not formally adopted by the Assembly, but it was personally endorsed by many delegates.

The "Williams Bay Manifesto" was rebutted, attacked and reviled by leaders of the Armenian community throughout the world as dangerous, puerile and superficial. Perhaps much of the criticism was justified, but not the vitriolic manner in which it was conveyed. From the perspective of twenty-five years, the manifesto does appear much too confrontational and probably goaded its critics to make their angry responses. One fundamental criticism of the document, that its critics never made, is that not once does it mention love, the most basic value of Christian life.

What was the whole point of the "Williams Bay Manifesto"? Simply that young people, then as now, want a church that is relevant to their needs. They want to be a part of growth. They are not satisfied with answers that make no sense and do not relate to their own experience. Young people always question, if they are on a quest, particularly if they are looking for ultimate meaning, seeking God. In the life of any community, it is the function of youth to ask questions. That community is dead, whose young people do not question. If they are able to see past the rhetoric, we can discover this quest in the manifesto.

1993 is not 1968. Much has changed, and yet much remains the same. An independent Armenian state was an impossible dream then, but now the problems of freedom need to be resolved. "Poverty, hunger, disease, wars, racial tensions, social discontent and turmoil" are our social problems now and not just "the world around us". The Armenian Church in the homeland of our fathers now has the opportunity to grow without fear of repression, and the Armenian Church in the diaspora has the opportunity to assist both spiritually and materially. We continue to fear assimilation, even though we now have more priests in our diocese who were raised in America than in any other country. The Manifesto has been almost forgotten, and yet it is a part of ACYOA history. However much it be a product of its time and circumstance, however purple the prose, there is truth in it. According to St. Paul, the church is a living organism (Romans 12:4-8, I Corinthians 12:12-27). As such, the church must be able to reason, which is the ability to discern, to examine, to be self-critical, else it become uncritical, irrational or petrified. Youth plays the vital role of asking the questions. Those who answer must first listen with understanding and respond with love, without hypocrisy and always by example. We should not fear youth who are involved and vocal in their criticisms, rather we should be afraid of youth who are silent and manifest their antipathy by simply dropping out.

The importance of the "Williams Bay Manifesto", however, is not in what it said, but that it was said. Here were young people asking their adult leaders to listen to them. Perhaps they were too strident, but they were heard, even as they were put down.

In the final analysis, the "Williams Bay Manifesto" in its own way is indicative of the strength of the Armenian Church. It was not a destructive statement, but the passionate cry of young Armenian Christians, who loved their Church and its ancient heritage. They felt comfortable enough within its bosom to criticize a parent, their mother church, whose future was of deep concern to them, because it was their future.

Fr. Dajad Davidian  
Watertown, MA

## 1968 "Williams Bay Manifesto"

Presented at the ACYOA General Assembly, September 2, 1968—Williams Bay, Wisconsin

The world is in an age of revolution, a time of changing and becoming. The Church, if it is to be relevant to the world, must speak of God's will in terms of today. Christianity is not a religion for the timid, for it takes courage and strength of conviction to resist that which is comfortable, convenient and traditional in favor of God's will, which may at times be difficult. Christ continually calls His followers to renewal, reform, and revolution.

As the youth of the Armenian Church, we are disturbed by our Church's refusal to be a part of the twentieth century, to face the urgent and real problems of today, and to seek Christian solutions to them. Poverty, hunger, disease, wars, racial tensions, social discontent and turmoil sear the world around us, and yet our Church concerns itself mainly with erecting costly buildings and monuments and amassing material goods, rationalizing that it is necessary to self-preservation. We want our Church to see beyond its own interests, to share others' sufferings and problems.

At present, in the mind of many Armenians, the Armenian Church's primary function is to act as the defender of nationalism, to protect Armenians from assimilation. This is indicated by their fear to reform, for they worry that with change would come a certain loss of identity. On the contrary, we feel that specific reforms would bring increased dedication and enthusiasm, a renewal and rebirth of our Church.

Apathy and spiritual indifference pervade our Church life. Few Church members have that sincere relationship with God which is the basis of Christian living. We, as the youth, are not simply condemning the adults of our Church; we can see the same problems among ourselves. The ACYOA is suffering from an internal malaise; membership has fallen off, only socials and dances are well attended, spiritual growth has come to a complete standstill.

The time has come when we, the youth of the Armenian Church, can no longer in conscience allow ourselves to be used as instruments for the preservation of a Church which is living in the archaic past. We feel we must make known our discontent with the present antiquated and meaningless structures and institutions and our desire to ameliorate the stagnated condition of the Church which is ours. We are told so often that the Church belongs to us; therefore, we have not only the right, but the duty to see that our Church relates to the present day, and thus, becomes meaningful to its members. We are committed to action... the watchword is revolution. Our revolutionary commitment and action addresses itself to a radical concern of making Christ live and grow in our Church and members. We are now resolved to speak out and act in accordance with the dictates of our conscience in all areas of life within and without our Church, wherever Christ is being crucified anew.

# Annual Meeting of ACEF Board Charts Productive Future

## New Dio Direct Faciliti



**A Winning Team: The Board of Trustees of the ACEF convenes its annual meeting at the Diocese. Pictured are: (seated, l-r) Kacbadoor Kazarian, Suren Fesjian—ACEF Chairman, the Primate, Dr. Nikit Ordjanian, Edward Chapiian; (standing) Col. Victor Arzoomanian, Myron Erkilletian, Haig Deranlian, Hamo Darmanian, Paul Der Boghossian, Hon. Vincent Gurabian, Gregory Zorthian. Missing: George Bashjian Jr., Sarkis Bedevian, E. George Dabagian, Zaven Dadekian, Alex Dadourian, Kevork Hovnanian.**

The Armenian Church Endowment Fund, (ACEF) which distributes income to a host of Armenian Church-related programs and organizations, is one of the genuine success stories of the Armenian-American community, and has been characterized in recent years by record-breaking growth in both its assets and its income-generating power.

The annual board meeting took place on July 20, with Archbishop Barsamian, the Primate and President of ACEF, presiding, and Suren Fesjian, the Chairman of ACEF and one of the fund's founders, acting as chairman.

"I am proud to have you on the Endowment Fund team," Mr. Fesjian announced to the board members; "ACEF has been successful because of your efforts, your expertise, and your generous donations."

Hamo Darmanian, ACEF's comptroller, detailed the positive progress of the fund over the previous year. "We were able to give our beneficiaries 7% interest on earnings—which amounts to \$1,083,000," Mr. Darmanian explained. Mr. Darmanian informed them that ACEF maintained \$750,000 in its reserve fund—a remarkable accomplishment in the current economy, remarked one trustee.

The operating budget was the next topic of discussion, and the trustees agreed that ACEF's long-time policy of keeping expenses to a bare minimum

was the best way to ensure greater income for the various beneficiaries.

In his report as ACEF's Executive Director, Colonel Victor Arzoomanian described the fund's promotional campaign, the In-Lieu-of-Flowers program, the possibilities for transferring local parish endowments into individualized restricted funds managed under ACEF, the official updates each donor receives twice a year, as well as his own speaking engagements and visitations.

One prospect of special note is ACEF's program to contact Armenian lawyers and inform them about ACEF so they can advise their clients accordingly when making out a will or bequest. This program has generated a great deal of interest, and will be a high priority in the coming year.

Archbishop Barsamian expressed his positive feelings towards the efforts of ACEF. "The Church needs a solid financial base," he said, "and through ACEF's activities the Church is better able to pursue its Christian mission to our people in local communities throughout this Diocese."

As the trustees departed, Gregory Zorthian, general manager of Time Magazine—who was attending his first meeting as a member of ACEF's board—commented on the experience: "I'm genuinely impressed with the enthusiasm, commitment and productivity of the people behind ACEF; I consider myself fortunate to be a part of such a team, which is working towards such a noble and vital goal." □

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*What's in a name?*

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