

Some particulars about the Reverend Father Aramais Mirzaian
of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Sydney.

Father Mirzaian was born in 1918 in Iran where, ever since the Persian ruler known as Shah Abbas the Great brought a whole Armenian township's population from Julfa in Armenia to "New Julfa" in Iran, there has been a considerable Armenian community in the region. One of eight children, he alone of the four sons of the Rev. Mesrobe Mirzaian followed in their father's footsteps to enter the ministry. In 1935 he left his birthplace Namakert behind him where he had attended the Hovnamian School and continued his education for a further two years at the Geyorg Kananian School in New Julfa. Like so many other young Armenians growing up in Iran he was then taken by his father to Calcutta in 1937, there to attend the famous "Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy" from which he graduated successfully. His studies here included English.

He now entered Bishop's College in Calcutta, an Anglican seminary, with a view to becoming a priest. Two years later the Armenian Church Committee of Calcutta sent him to Jerusalem to study there for three further years at the Armenian St James Seminary. Subsequently he returned to Iran, was married to the helpmate of his choice, Miss Knarik Haroutiounian, and was then ordained at the All Saviour Cathedral of New Julfa late in 1947. Early in 1948 he and his wife left for Calcutta to where he had been called to become one of the officiating priests of Calcutta's large Armenian community. He visited Holy Etchmiadzin, the Armenian vatican in the vicinity of the of the capital Yerevan, in 1955, the year of the election of the new Patriarch and Supreme Catholicos of All Armenians, His Holiness Vassgen I. On this visit the Church accorded him the distinction of wearing the pectoral cross. While still in Calcutta Father Mirzaian published "A Short Record of the Armenian Churches in India and the Far East."

In 1958, Father Mirzaian was transferred to a new area of Armenian activity, to Sydney, as Archpriest and Acting Prelate to Armenians in Australia and New Zealand. Father Ghazarian, who had been in Sydney from 1954 to 1958, had been appointed to become Bishop of the Far Eastern Province of the Armenian Apostolic Church, which is administered from Calcutta (as was the Anglican Church in this area in the early days of Australia), and Father Mirzaian was, in his turn, invited to come to Sydney from Calcutta to take over the onerous task of ministering to this phenomenally fast growing community here in Australia. The parsonage at 372 Miller Street, Cammeray, was acquired to which Father Mirzaian brought his dear wife Knarik and their son Armen and their daughter Arminee, and it was here that that their youngest child, Saco, was born. This parsonage has been for many years a refuge and rock of help to countless Armenians in need of advice, help, or temporary shelter. Father Mirzaian has worked tirelessly at assisting to facilitate the immigration of his compatriots and their families from the many areas of present day danger in the Middle East and Near North, and the community may in the not too distant future exceed four digits in number. Most have come to Sydney and Melbourne but a few also to other States and to country areas.

There was a time, lasting for many years, when Father Mirzaian used to fly to Melbourne regularly once a month to conduct a religious service there. Thanks greatly to his efforts a church was able to be acquired and consecrated there

some years ago, and later a resident Armenian priest was appointed. Soon moreover the Sydney Surry Hills church proved too small and a very much larger one in Chatswood was able to be purchased, there being many Armenians settled in the municipality of Willoughby. This church was consecrated in February, 1966. Here there is now also a very active Sunday school, and an Armenian youth organisation, and Father Mirzaian envisages a proper Armenian Kindergarten before very long. Above all, thanks to the kind co-operation of the Willoughby Public School he has also many Scripture classes for the Armenian pupils in the various grades of Willoughby High School and its Junior and Infant Schools. For many years, too, Father Mirzaian issued the Armenian Church Bulletin called "Looyce" with much of interest also to a large section of interested Christian friends in the host community.

Father Mirzaian is indefatigable in his efforts to smooth the way for the successful settlement here of his compatriots and makes frequent visits to Canberra to speak on behalf of those whose cases require special understanding because of the peculiar predicaments of Armenians in to-day's world. You will never find Armenian statistics in migrant lists, for they are invariably counted as emigrants from their respective chance countries of origin, however loyal Armenians they may be. To make himself more useful to his compatriots Father Mirzaian recently took steps to become a Justice of the Peace, and in 1970 was made the proud holder of this worthy office.

In 1965 His Holiness Vasgen I. invited Armenians from all over the world to visit Holy Etchmiadzin to witness his giving account of his first ten years' ministry as Supreme Patriarch. Father Mirzaian went as representative of this new diocese of Australia and New Zealand, and Mrs Mirzaian represented the Armenian Ladies' Guild. They took with them young Saco as the first Australian-born Armenian child to visit the ancient Armenian motherland.

In 1966, Father Mirzaian published his book on "Armenians in Australia and New Zealand," a much larger compilation than the present Guide Book, in order to increase general awareness on the subject of Armenians and their problems and achievements. In 1970 he issued a little duplicated booklet, a "Commentary on the Armenian Apostolic Church, its Sacraments, Vestments and Various Religious Symbols."

These have been years of worry and hard work and heartbreak, but Father Mirzaian has not allowed discouragement to gain the upper hand and has placed his firm faith in God's justice and compassion.