

By BARBARA MERGUERIAN

THE ACYOA ADRIFT

One of the real pleasures of being editor of the Mirror-Spectator during the past two years has been to witness the dedication and enthusiasm of a large group of people working for the Armenian Church Youth Organization of America. The young people who are members of the ACYOA, their parents, advisors and friends, all have been working together to give the organization a new dynamism. New chapters have been springing up, older chapters have been reactivated, activities have multiplied and the program has grown in quality. All this could not have been accomplished without the strong support, both moral and financial, of the Diocese of the Armenian Church in New York.

None of this means that the ACYOA has come anywhere near reaching its true potential. It should be much larger in size, it should have more programs to meet the varied need of our Armenian American youth, it should be active in many more areas of the church and community life. But the important thing is that it has been an organization on the move, working to realize its goals.

But in the last few weeks, the situation has totally changed. The confident enthusiasm has turned into a sad resignation, the wheels of progress seem to have gotten stuck in the mud, and the bubble has burst. We don't hear any more about plans for the future; in fact following the Sports Weekend and Assembly in Milwaukee over Labor day weekend, nothing has happened.

The immediate cause of the problem is the vacancy in the position of Youth Director at the Diocese. After two years of dedicated and capable service, George Tashjian left the position in September to return to his teaching position. This should have posed no problem — after all, Mr. Tashjian made it very clear when he accepted the position that it was for a two year period only. The problem stems from the fact that no one paid much attention to the procedure to be followed in choosing his successor and, as a result, the Central Council of the ACYOA and the Diocese of the Armenian Church seem to have been laboring under different assumptions about the process. As a result, no replacement has been found as a youth director, a deadlock has been reached, and as a result of the general misunderstanding, Mr. Tashjian, who had agreed to stay on for an interim period as advisor, is now out of the picture completely. Since the Youth Director serves as a link between the ACYOA Central Council and the Diocese, his absence leaves a wide gulf that no one has been able to cross.

It doesn't sound like a very serious problem. It surely should not be difficult to find a new Youth Director. The position is well-paid, it is challenging and also carries some of the personal satisfaction of serving a worthy cause. With so many of our Armenian Americans receiving a good professional education, there should be many qualified candidates ready to serve. But those who are familiar with the situation assert that nothing can be done until the existing climate of mutual distrust is removed.

There do not seem to be any major differences of policy or goals involved in the present dispute. No one denies the importance of a strong youth movement; no one can believe in the future of the Armenian church in America without a training ground for the youth like the ACYOA. To be sure, the organization has its critics (which Armenian organization doesn't?) There are those who believe the organization should be more religious and spiritually oriented, others believe it should be more ethnic and nationalistic, still others who emphasize the social aspects of the organization and its importance as a meeting ground for our young people. In fact, the organization has programs to meet all these needs: the spiritual, the nationalistic, and the social. All of these programs can be, and should be expanded.

But unless something is done to meet the immediate problem, it is idle speculation to even think about future expansion. The fact of the matter is that, in the past two years, under the leadership of George Tashjian and the strong support of the Diocese, the ACYOA has gained a strong momentum. The danger in the present situation is that the momentum may be lost and the organization may receive a severe setback.

It's probably true generally that, as Armenians, we take our youth for granted. We expect them to follow in our footsteps, but we don't give much thought to how this is to be accomplished. In some sense, we have an old-world attitude — we expect our young people to naturally look up to us and respect us as their elders. But we are forgetting that, American education emphasizes the teaching of youth to think for themselves, to find new and innovative solutions to old problems, to find different and better ways of doing things. We have to give the youth scope for their imagination, their energies, their dreams and aspirations. The ACYOA was established to provide this forum for youth, within the framework of the traditional Armenian Church.

The danger in the present situation is not the presence or absence of a Youth Director, but in the lack of communication and trust between the parties involved. A little more understanding and willingness to listen to each other will certainly bear fruitful results. The danger is that, in the face of so many problems facing the church today, chief among them balancing budgets and covering mortgages, the youth problem will be set aside for lack of time. This could have a serious adverse effect on the youth of the church. Nothing that the church may do is more important than preparing its youth for the future, because, without the youth, there will be no future. It's as simple as that.

Massachusetts State Police Detective Lt. ALFRED P. BOYAJIAN has received the Leo J. Doyle Memorial Award at a banquet in honor of those foremost in state arson investigations. He has consistently set the pace for arson and arson-murder investigations in the state. In 1977, he made three arrests for arson-murder and his probes of six similar cases led to other arrests. His outstanding work has also earned him a citation from the Fire Marshall of the state.