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LAWRENCE BANQUET - APRIL 7, 1991

It gives me great pleasure to spend this lovely afternoon with you to mark the 75th anniversary of the Women's Guild of the Holy Cross Parish. As in many old parishes such as this, the Women's Guilds predate the construction of the churches; they originally served as the moving force behind the parish to build or acquire a church. As a result of the activities of your Women's Guild in particular, your fathers and mothers proudly erected the Holy Cross Armenian Church as the symbol of their faith in Christ. You are at present carrying out the work they began; they built the physical structure of the church and you are now endeavoring to enhance the spirituality in that physical structure. They were moved by the need to have a house of prayer where they could be in the presence of God; they raised you under the protection of this sanctuary so that you also may spend your lives knowing the fear of God.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the consecration of the first Armenian church on the western continent.

The Lawrence Armenian community existed at that time and contributed the grand total of \$74.70 to the building fund of the new church in Worcester. In those days that was a large sum for a tiny community of Armenians who had just arrived from the old country. The Lawrence community ultimately emerged as a separate parish at the end of the 19th century, when the Armenian Church of America was still in a developmental state.

It took several decades to consolidate the resources of the community to found this church and cultural hall exactly sixty years ago. The complex was built during the worst days of the Great Depression. As in other parishes,

women here as well played a very important role in the life of the church. Without them, none of the functions would have been possible and the community life would have folded from day one. Women were and are still the spirit behind most of the activities. Through the years they have done the lion's share of the work, and particularly the kind of work that serves as a glue holding the community together.

Today, as we mark the anniversary of the Women's Guild of the Holy Cross Church, we must remember the toils our fathers and mothers went through to build our parishes. It was not an easy task for them to overcome the syndrome of 1000 years of oppression and the psychological effects of massacres and a genocide and adept themselves to the ways of this country. The men and the women of the first and second generations worked very hard to transfer the roots of Armenian culture to this new world. They succeeded, since you are here today continuing their work.

Anniversaries are like the Roman God Janus who is depicted with two faces, one looking backward and the other forward. A retrospective view is necessary to assess the accomplishments so far, but we must also plan what we should do over the next 75 years. First there is, above all, the mission of the Church to save souls, in which we all must take part. Without that mission everything would be meaningless, including our Armenian traditions and heritage. After all, our Armenian identity is based on the teachings of our Lord.

The Women's Guild of a parish such as this has a number of other tasks to tackle that are auxiliary to the main purpose of the church. There is the task of raising funds for the church to ensure its physical continuity. So far you have done this well, and must continue the same way in the future. Then there is the task of promoting the Christian moral values. In the past women have been the upholders and transmitters of such values. You must continue in the same

tradition particularly today, as the fabric of our family life is not what it was in the past.

Then there is the task of fostering the Armenian spirit and transmitting our traditions to the young generations. You are the protectors, teachers, guardians and the source of our tradition. As mothers and grandmothers, you will be the ones from whom the young children will first learn about their religious and ethnic identity.

As time goes on and our ties with western Armenia, the country of origin of most of our families, become weaker and weaker, your roll as the molders of the minds of young Armenians will become greater.

Your job is going to be more difficult than that of your mothers and grandmothers, but I am certain that the Holy Spirit Who guided your parents will also guide you and that you will succeed in your mission. You have a young, educated and energetic pastor who is here to assist you. May God bless you all and may He be your guide and guardian.