

## Archbishop Khajag Barsamian

**Remarks: Dedication of Renovated Church—November 17, 1996  
St. Leon Church, Fair Lawn, New Jersey**

750 words

It is a great pleasure for me to be in Fair Lawn today, for an occasion which embodies the hard work, dedication and optimism of this community.

Your dream of renovating the St. Leon Church was a worthy goal, and you can all be proud for having accomplished it in such a noble way. The renovations to the structure and especially to the sanctuary are truly beautiful, and your efforts are a reflection of your dedication to God and the holy heritage of our people. My congratulations go to Fr. Vahan, the parish council and renovation committee, and all the parishioners on this joyous occasion.

I know from Fr. Vahan that your work on this church is only the physical manifestation of a greater sense of renewal—a renewal of the spirit—which is also at work in this parish. This idea of renewal is a very important one in the Christian religion, and I would like to spend a few moments reflecting on it here.

The word “renewal” means literally, “to make new again”—but it needs to be distinguished from simple novelty, which refers to something that seems new only because it is different. Novelty—or chasing every fashion that comes along—does not renew us; it only makes us tired and confused. True renewal means going back to the eternal truths, the everlasting things, the familiar outlines of living, and making them new again: re-discovering their greatness, and applying them in our own lives.

At the same time, renewal is more than simply a cosmetic fix—like putting a fresh coat of paint on an old house. Renewal affects our entire being—inside and outside, visible and invisible. It firms up the old structure, corrects the faulty features, even demolishes some parts, so that stronger, better, healthier things can be built in their place.

What are the prospects—and the opportunities—for such renewal in our Church? How can we achieve it? One way, certainly, is to have an influx of new and younger blood into parish life. This is a constant concern in our community—as important today as ever before. Many of you know about the various programs and youth activities which our Diocese sponsors each year to reach out to our younger generation. The mobility of American society makes such outreach essential today—because as our children seek education and opportunity, they no longer remain in their home communities. So the

Armenian Church has to spread its nets wide, to draw our young people into parish and community life.

Above all, we each need to look for opportunities for renewal in our everyday lives. The renewal that the Gospels speak about is not only directed at institutions like the church, but at the heart and mind of every individual. The greatest the obstacle to such renewal is not some external force, but something within ourselves: apathy—the enemy of life, which breaks down traditions and institutions, and kills faith. This is what the Bible means when it speaks about individuals who "hardened their hearts to God."

The opposite, of course—the doorway to renewal—is an open heart. In the simplest sense, this means keeping a positive attitude. After all, if you view the world through a sense of darkness or negative-ness, true renewal is unlikely to ever come to you. But in the highest sense—the sense taught to us through Christianity—the open heart is an invitation to Christ, to enter the doorway of our souls, and guide us to a deeper faith in God, and a greater involvement in His Church.

That is the sense of renewal we need to seek today. That is the sense of individual renewal which, when it is multiplied over each and every Armenian Christian soul, will bring genuine renewal to us as a people and Church. In this way, we will be able to accept whatever challenges may confront us. As you have found, in accepting the challenge to renovate your church, God is here to renew our strength—for He is the true source of whatever strength we have.

May the God of our fathers always keep the people of this parish under His protective watch; and may He bestow His blessings upon you, whenever you gather in this building to worship in His Name. Thank you.

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