

January 22, 1976

The Reverend Kevork Arakelian
Pastor, St. Gregory The Illuminator Church
12 Corbett Avenue
Binghamton, New York 13903

Dear Father Kevork:

We received the newspaper article you sent us and read it with interest.

We wish to compliment you on the interview and feel that it will enlighten the Binghamton community about the Armenian Church and its people.

We are sure that the St. Gregory parishioners feel proud of their Pastor for the interest and public relations that has been created by the article, not only in the American community but the Armenian as well.

Once again, congratulations on a job well done.

Prayerfully,

Archbishop Torkom Manoogian
Primate

ic response boosting Armenian church

These first-generation Americans are now in their 30 and 40s and have children who have joined the parish.

Most of the children, who know little of the Armenian languages still stay with the old-style Armenian mass, which is said in Classical Armenian.

Armenia was formerly a small country in Eastern Europe and is now part of the Soviet Union. It is northwest of Turkey.

The parish has held together very well, Father Arakelian said, despite not having a pastor for 40 years. Parishioners had a priest in 1930, but had to let him go because they couldn't afford to pay him.

Father Arakelian arrived in March, 1972, as a deacon and was ordained the following year to the priesthood.

"The community kept together very strongly for 40 years, he said. Almost all the



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families are from the Triple Cities, although there is one family from Owego.

The Armenian church was officially made the state church of Armenia in 301 A.D. by King Durtad, who was converted by St. Gregory.

"This was the first nation as a people to declare Christianity as the state religion," Father George said.

The first contact Armenia had with Christianity, though, was when Thaddeus (also called Jude) and Bartholomew

came to the area. They were two of the original apostles, which makes the Armenian Church a direct apostolic church, as opposed to those which were formed later, such as the Russian Orthodox Church, Father Arakelian said.

The Armenian Orthodox Church does not fall into any of the three major categories of Western religions — Catholic, Protestant and Jewish. "When you look under the Britannica we're classified under 'Other,'" Father Arakelian said. But they are being considered more and more as a fourth division, he said.

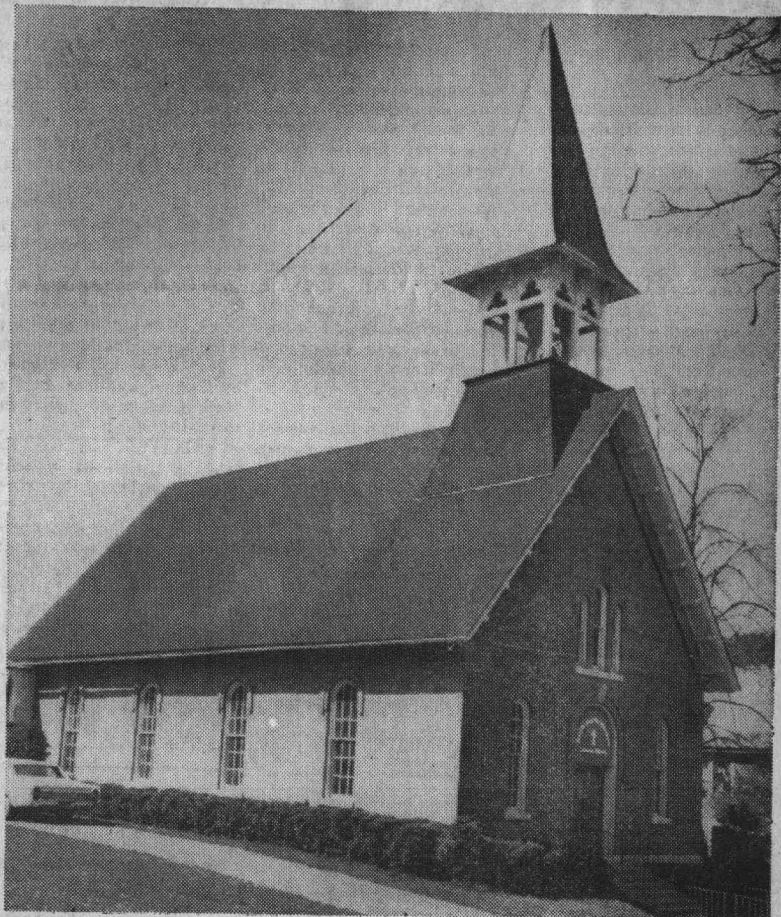
The Armenian Orthodox Church is a part of the Oriental or Lesser Orthodox Church, the pastor said, though it is completely autonomous from its sister churches, the Coptic, Ethiopian, Indian-Malabar, and Assyrian.

The Mother See is located in Etchmiadzin in Armenia where the Patriarch-Catholicos of all Armenians, Vasken I, resides.

The Patriarch-Catholicos is a rough equivalent to the Roman Catholic Pope. St. Gregory was the first head of the Armenian Church, and there have been 130 since then.

St. Gregory did more than organize the Armenian Church. "Not only did he enlighten the people in Armenia, but he also went to Georgia right next door and helped them," Father Arakelian said.

The basic tenets of the faith are contained in the Nicene Creed, according to the pas-



—PHOTO BY LEO F. FAHEY

St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Orthodox Church

tor. This includes the belief in three persons in one God, the virgin birth, and the belief in "one Catholic and Apostolic Church."

The church also believes in the perfection of the Deity. If this were not so, said Father Arakelian, "then there's no salvation; we might as well forget it. I'm wasting my time in the church then."

The church also believes in seven sacraments: baptism, penance, holy eucharist, confirmation, matrimony, holy

orders and extreme unction, though the latter is now used only in the case of a dying priest.

Holy Eucharist, or Communion, is taken in both bread and wine. The priests make their own Communion wafers, which are called nushkar, out of flour and water, and dip them in wine before distributing them to the congregation.

Three of the sacraments, baptism, holy communion, and confirmation, are given to

an infant at the same time, usually when the child is between seven and 40 days old.

Baptism is by immersion, and confirmation is performed by blessing nine parts of the body with holy oil.

The three sacraments are given at one time because "in this way the person becomes a full member of the Church," Father Arakelian said.

It is a small congregation, but it is an active one,