

BANQUET—CLEVELAND, JUNE 28, 1992

Dear Faithful,

This gathering of ours today takes my mind back to the Apostolic times when Christians convened to pray together and afterwards had a meal of love. We Armenians, in the traditional Christian spirit, associate banquets such as this with friendship, family and Christian fellowship. The Armenian word for friend or comrade is *րնկեր*—consisting of the words *րնդ*, which means “together with” and *կեր*, which means “eating.” Indeed, the love of God, the love of Christ and of His Church and the love of our people bring us together to share each other’s company. It gives

me a great pleasure to be with you today and participate in this Christian fellowship. Your togetherness, faith and devotion to our Church are a source of spiritual strength for me.

As Primate within whose jurisdiction there are more than sixty parishes, I am confronted with all kinds of problems. But when I see a parish such as this that has braved all external and internal problems, and has maintained its vitality despite the fact that it has been without a pastor for so long, I give thanks to God for the miracles He works. All this time you held this fortress of faith with great success and today I have come to introduce to you a young man who will be your spiritual guide until

he is ready to be ordained a priest of the Armenian Church and resume the responsibilities of the pastoral office.

Deacon Norman Odabashian is one of the most diligent and learned young men in our church. He was born in America, but in his soul and spirit, he is as Armenian as they come. Norman grew up in the Armenian Church, serving the Holy Altar as an acolyte, clerk and stole-bearer. He went through the discipline of seminary life at St. Nesses Seminary, of which he is a graduate, and later at the seminaries of Holy Etchmiadzin and Jerusalem. He acquired pastoral experience in the Worcester parish and is now ready to serve the faithful in Cleveland.

A diligent spiritual guide in an active parish can work wonders. As it takes two hands to clap, the young Deacon will need your assistance to accomplish the tasks that please God. Both you and he must try to be helpful to each other. You must base your relationship with him and with each other on the foundation of faith, charity and love. In all situations it is important for a Christian to think before speaking. The words that come out of our mouths could be either constructive or destructive. We must all be aware that even one destructive expression or statement is one too many.

You must make every effort to be constructive in spirit, in deed and in word. Gather yourselves around Deacon

Norman to harvest the Lord's orchard. Despite your isolation from other large Armenian communities and despite your limited number, exert all your efforts to become an exemplary parish. You have a special role to play as the center of an extensive missionary territory where there are many Armenians, dispersed in various cities, towns and villages. Your church must be the focus of their faith. Grow stronger so that you will be able to reach them and bring them within the fold.

I pray that God always keeps you alert to His calling, and that you prosper spiritually to praise His name and continue to be a source of pride for our people. Thank you.

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