

## TESTIMONIAL HONORING FR. HAIGAZOUN MELKONIAN

Dear Parishioners,

An unusual ceremony brought us together today in the holy sanctuary of your parish. The degree of Dzayrakooyñ Vartabed was conferred on you pastor.

Vartabedootyoon is an ecclesiastical academic degree in the Armenian Church conferred on celibate priests who have devoted many years to theological studies and are ready to teach. The degree of Dzayrakooyñ Vartabed is the equivalent of Doctor of Divinity. In ancient and medieval times these were highly coveted titles sought by zealously studious priests.

In our days as well, the ancient and medieval titles still retain their value and meaning. If we could momentarily dismiss the pageantry of the religious ceremony we were part of today and concentrate on the meaning behind the ritual, Fr. Haigazoun received full credentials in ten areas to teach and preach the doctrines of the Armenian Church. The conferral of the title of Dzayrakooyñ Vartabed makes him the recipient of the highest academic degree that the Armenian Church gives to a cleric as well as the right to speak with authority.

Fr. Haigazoun who has been your pastor for the past seven years deserves this honor. For he was one of a handful of American-born youth who delved himself into Armenian church life and ventured to go into the rigors of monastic habit. He went to Holy Etchmiadzin and later to Jerusalem with a well-prepared background. He had already gone through the discipline of a college education and acquired some experience as a High School teacher. His American educational background helped him to master at a faster rate and more deeply all the learning that he would need as a Vartabed of the Armenian Church. After his ordination and acceptance into the St. James Brotherhood of Jerusalem, he taught at the Seminary, proving that he was a teacher.

His many years of service in parishes in the United States, including your own, bear testimony to his abilities as a pastor and as a teacher. Fr. Haigazoun has been particularly meticulous about areas such as iconography, hagiography, homiletics and canon law. Sacred pictures he has commissioned in churches point to his knowledge in Armenian iconography. His recent translation and adaptation of a work of Armenian Saints, published by the Dept. of Religious Education, indicates his concern for our youth and his