

Palos Hts

ADDRESS TO 49TH CHOIR ASSOC. ASSEMBLY
OCT. 20-22, 1994—STS. JOACHIM & ANNE CHURCH,
PALOS HEIGHTS, IL

Reverend Clergy, Honored Guests, and Delegates of the
Choir Association Assembly:

I would like to welcome all of you to this 49th Annual
Assembly of the Association of Armenian Church Choirs
of America. Let me congratulate the people of the Sts.
Joachim and Anne Church of Palos Heights, Illinois, and
especially their pastor, Fr. Tavit Boyajian, the choirmaster,
deacons, choir members and altar servers, for the splendid
job they have done in organizing this Choir Association
Assembly.

I should also express my gratitude to the local Assembly committee and its chairman, —————, the Choir Association Central Council, and all of you who devote your energies and talents to the service of God each Sunday.

Last year, I began my remarks by calling 1994 a banner year for the Choir Association—and the same description applies for 1995. Through its publications, regional and local workshops, and other educational programs, the Choir Association continues to fulfill its mission of bringing the Armenian Divine Liturgy to vibrant life. Since the coming year will lead up to your milestone 50th assembly—along with other important observances in

our Diocese—this seems like a good time to offer some pastoral reflections on how the Choir Association can take an already powerful ministry, and energize it even further.

Appropriately, we are gathered during the month of October—traditionally observed as “Armenian Cultural Month” in our Diocese, and a time when local Armenian communities sponsor a variety of programs and activities. The centerpiece of Cultural Month, which we observed last week, is the Feast of the Holy Translators, which commemorates the scholars who first translated the Holy Bible into the Armenian language.

Having the Scriptures available in the native tongue of Armenia seems to have brought out all the creativity in

our ancestors. Inspired by the word of God, the Armenian people went on to develop a distinctive and beautiful culture. The two individuals who first envisioned the Armenian Bible—St. Sahag Partev and St. Mesrob Mashdotz—are called “the enlighteners of the mind,” for the vital role they played in this flowering of the Armenian arts and letters.

Creating the Armenian alphabet and translating the Bible into our native language were acts of incredible foresight. But they served a single, basic purpose: bringing the word of God to the Armenian people. Over the succeeding centuries, Armenians would find many creative ways to transmit the word of God: through poetry,

architecture and music, among others things. Taken together, this Christian culture helped our people to hear God's call, and more importantly, it has led us to implement God's word in our daily lives.

In the case of the Armenian Bible, St. Sahag, St. Mesrob, and the Holy Translators read the signs of the times, and identified the one thing most needed by the people, so that the Armenian Christian heritage could be handed down to future generations. We should keep that example in mind, as we meet the challenges of our own age. The Church as a whole, and each of her children, needs to be aware of the signs of the times: of where we were, where we stand presently, and where we would like to be in the future.

There are many indications—from the creation of a new Republic of Armenia, to the election of a new Catholicos this past spring—that the Armenian people have begun a new chapter in our national and spiritual life. As a result, the entire Church is called to evaluate itself, so that we may be prepared for the prospects which the future holds.

Needless to say, that mission of evaluation will be driven by the same sense of purpose which guided the Holy Translators: to make sure that the word of God is heard by the Armenians—especially, the new generation of Armenians. That mission of outreach to our children will be our focus throughout 1996, as our entire Diocese observes “The Year of the Youth.”

I hope "The Year of the Youth" will be an opportunity for all of us—not just one organization, but our entire community—to look at the prospects and challenges facing the youth of the Armenian Church today. Nevertheless, I firmly believe that the Choir Association has a special role to play. The call to educate, to inspire, to deepen the understanding of our younger generation, has been a function of this organization from its beginnings. And after half-a-century of operation, the Choir Association has achieved many powerful successes in attracting young people into the church's fold.

But more can be—and needs to be—done. The current teaching and outreach functions of the Choir Association

should be considered the seeds, out of which a stronger and more wide-reaching mission may grow. The natural appeal of music to the young is a potent attractive force, which can reach beyond the boundaries of our parishes, to bring in youth who, left to themselves, might have little to do with the Church. In this mission of evangelizing to our younger generation, we have a greater opportunity today than ever before in recent history. Across this country—indeed, around the world—there is a tremendous revival of interest in spiritual matters, especially among the young.

I have seen this development here in America, and in my travels to Armenia. And I saw it on an enormous scale a few weeks ago, when Pope John Paul the Second visited

New York City. The wholesome love of God, church and family, which was on display by so many Christian youth, was a refreshing change from the usual expressions of our culture. In place of the usual stereo-types of alienated, complaining and rebellious youth, millions of people saw young Christians who were filled with enthusiasm for the Godly life, and for a strong teaching on moral values.

I believe these and other expressions of the power of the Christian spirit are the signs of our own time. They suggest to me that the present moment offers a unique opportunity to evangelize the young people of our community. As I said, the Choir Association is already a leader in this, and you should be commended for your

many creative efforts. Your wonderful workshops are not only effective educational programs, but they also build fellowship and enthusiasm among choir members from different parishes.

We can thank the Choir Association Central Council, under the chairmanship of Mary Selvinazian, as well as Maestro Meikhanedjian, for making these activities such a success. Most of all, I am happy to say that a number of youth programs along these same lines are already being organized by the Central Council. I am certain this contribution will be an important and memorable part of "The Year of the Youth."

Let me close with this thought. Our heritage of faith and devotion to God is a treasure: a gift that God has given our people, and that He renews with each passing generation. The richness and power of this gift is especially evident in the sharagans and liturgy of our Church—as all of you realize. Sadly, the world often tries to distract us from recognizing this gift, and young people are especially vulnerable to these distractions.

But as Christians, we are commanded to focus our attention on the truth. In the upcoming “Year of the Youth,” the members of the Choir Association should commit themselves to the task of helping our children discover the true value of the gift God has given us.

In doing so, I pray that we may all re-discover our true identities, as the children of a holy people, and as the sons and daughters of God.

Thank you.

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