

# Saint Gregory The Illuminator Armenian Apostolic Church



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## 95th Diocesan Assembly 1997

The 95th Diocesan Assembly was hosted by the St. Gregory of Narek Church in Cleveland, Ohio, from May 1-4. Attending as delegate from Saint Gregory were Alice Bogdasarian and Decon Gegorge Devejian. During the four days, there were three business sessions and one panel-discussion session. There were over 130 delegates in attendance representing parishes throughout the Diocese. At the business sessions, many issues affecting the Diocese were discussed. As in the past years, there was enthusiastic discussion with many points of view being expressed. I continue to believe that we have a dedicated group of delegates who are working in the best interest of the Diocese.

This year, I am returning with a greater sense of frustration. There has been further deterioration in the financial situation at the Diocese. In 1996, the Diocese had a deficit of \$65,000. and borrowings from the Armenian Church Endowment Fund (ACEF), Restricted Funds, and Custodial Funds now exceed \$3,600,000. The 1997 budget also shows a deficit of \$54,000. There has also been no progress on the unity issue. There are parishes who are unable or unwilling to pay their dues. Compounding these problems, not enough time was devoted to discussing these and other important issues due to poor time management.

At the first session on Thursday, there were numerous reports given including the Clergy Conference, Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR), ACEF, Auditing Committee, and Proposals Committee.

The Primate addressed the Assembly and gave his annual "State of the Diocese" message. The Primate focused on mission and outreach. He also touched on three major milestones for the Armenian Church which will occur over the next four years. They are the 100th Anniversary of the Armenian Church in North America in 1998, the 200<sup>0</sup>th Anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ in 2000, and the 1700th Anniversary of the conversion of Armenia to Christianity in 2001. He also announced the "Primate's Plan" which designates a specific theme for the four up coming years, 1998-2001 each of which emphasizes one aspect of the overall mission of the Armenian Church. Central to the Primate's Plan are four goals, one for each year, which aim to strengthen our local parishes. The goals are Faith, Hope, Love, and Baptism.

Five panel discussion sessions were also held on Friday morning and afternoon. The five panels focused on the Department of Religious Education, Department of Youth Ministry, Christian Mission and Outreach, Armenian Language Lab and Resource Center, and Diocesan Finances and Administration. All delegates rotated through all five panels in one hour segments. At each panel, presentations were given by department heads and delegates were ask questions. It was an excellent opportunity to question department heads and make suggestions. The general consensus of delegates was that while the panel format was good, the panels were too short to accomplish much and left many delegates with feeling of frustration. Due to a lack of time, reports to be given on each panel to the General Assembly were cancelled adding to the frustration. On Saturday, there were reports from the Diocesan Council, Clergy Stipends Committee, Mission Parishes, New England Region, St. Nersess Seminary, Unity Committee, Treasurer's Report, and the 1997 and 1998 Budget Proposals.

As I have done the past ten years, I would like to highlight the topics that I feel are important.

The Unity Committee report was a focal point of the Assembly. The Committee reported that there were two meetings between the Prelacy Unity Committee and the Diocesan Unity Committee on November 22, 1996 and March 8, 1997. At these meetings, dates for three seminars were to be agreed upon to discuss the proposed by-laws for the united Diocese. Dates were agreed upon and then the Prelacy proposed to push out the dates. There was a disagreement among our Committee as to the reason for this. The Committee report feels that the Prelacy is stalling and used the excuse of Catholicos Aram's visit to the United States to delay the dates. The Committee's opinion is that the Prelacy will continue to find reasons to stall the process. The Committee proposed that we either stay with the agreed upon dates or move directly to special assemblies to approve the by-laws. However, a minority report was filed by one member of our Unity Committee which contradicted the Committee report. The minority feels that we should accept the Prelacy timetable for meetings and go forward. After a lengthy and heated discussion, it was voted to accept the minority report suggestion to accept the Prelacy timetable and that if there is no progress in the next year, we would address the unity issue at next year's Assembly.

There was much discussion during the Diocesan Council report. A main issue continues to be delinquent parish dues and the timeliness of payment of these dues. As of December 31, 1996, dues owed was \$182,842. There were discussions as to what could be done to solve this.

The Diocese has now borrowed over \$3,600,00 from the ACEF and restricted funds which is up from \$3,100,00 last year. This borrowing was supposed to be to finance the Cathedral renovation. It was noted that there were also borrowings to finance current and prior deficits. There continues to be no realistic plan to pay this money back. Considering that the Diocese is projecting a deficit of \$54,000 in 1997, the total borrowing will only go up by the end of this year. Very little time was spent discussing these issues and many delegates were upset about the lack of time allocated for this.

It was announced that the new pew books are being finalized and will be ready by the fall.

The Clergy Conference addressed the need to reach out to the growing number of non-Armenian members of our Church and the fact that there are more interfaith marriages.

The Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR) continues to do well. FAR is now concentrating on permanent job creation, development, and creating new business. FAR has opened a second Armenian office in Gumri. It was noted that donations from Armenians continues to decrease and in 1996 only 10% of its funds came from Armenians. The balance comes from government grants. Administrative costs continue to be low, approximately 2% of total services rendered.

The Armenian Church Endowment Fund (ACEF) now has over \$35,000,000 in assets. Donations in 1996 were \$1,832,724 and the ACEF returned 6.5% for all funds deposited with them.

There has been no progress on the status of the New England region. A proposal for continuance and restructuring of the region is currently being evaluated by the Primate.

St. Nersess Seminary currently has 12 full-time students of which 11 are committed to the Eastern Diocese. The Seminary is in the process of getting accredited.

A representative of the Western Diocese reported that they have 25 parishes of which 16 are regular parishes and 9 are mission parishes. There are 350,000 to 450,000 Armenians living in California.

The Proposals Committee presented two amendments to the by-laws; however, neither passed. Seven proposals were considered and four passed. The first was that the 1% Youth Ministry assessment be rescinded. This proposal was submitted by Holy Trinity, Cambridge, Ma. The second was to make the special Youth Ministry assessment part of the regular Parish assessment. The third was to include years of service of our priests in the annual Parish directory. The fourth was to dissolve the New England region and organizational structure.

A separate proposal under new business was passed to distribute annually to all Parishes a report on restricted funds that are administered by the Diocese.

The Mission Parish Program is doing well. There are currently 19 mission Parishes and 4 mission communities. The Atlanta mission Parish is in the process of buying a Church and the St. Petersburg mission Parish is currently building a Church. There is also a new mission Parish on Cape Cod. There is talk that the mission Parish program will become a department of the Diocese.

It was suggested that each Parish send their priest to a mission Parish for one week each year to help in their development. It was also suggested that each Parish adopt a mission Parish to help.

The Women's Guild Central Council reported that over 2,000 children are being cared for by the C.A.S.P. program. This includes 4 orphanages with 250 children. Over 500 children have graduated from the program and no longer receive aid. Over 30,000 children have requested aid from C.A.S.P. and have received none. Last year, there were 875 sponsors. Their administrative costs are less than 6%.

The school bag program continues to be successful. In 1993, 2,000 bags were sent and in 1996, 1,000 bags were sent at a cost of \$15.00 per bag. There are no administrative costs for this program. All bags were sent to Stepanavan and it has been documented that all bags have been received by the children.

In the finance panel, it was noted that the letter call campaign will be done in house this year. Last year, the campaign generated \$160,000; however, the cost for the campaign was \$90,000. The new administrator, Ed Balassanian, will be doing more in the areas of public relations and fund-raising this year. The Diocese has a budget of \$3,500,000 of which 22% comes from Parish assessments, 30% from ACEF and restricted funds, and 48% from development, bookstore, and rentals.

The Department of Youth Ministry informed us that their young professionals' trip to Armenia is sold out. They are also sponsoring youth advisor training sessions in different areas of the Diocese. There is also a newsletter called Hye-mail geared for college students which is being sent out by E-Mail. They are also working on a website for the Internet.

There is a strong ACYOA Juniors group at many Parishes; however, the ACYOA senior group is weak at most Parishes. There are currently only six active dues paying chapters totalling 100 members. The ACYOA General Assembly and Sports Weekend has been run by an ad-hoc committee the last two years due to a lack of active chapters.

In conclusion, there continues to be challenges which face the Diocese in many areas, including financial stability, attaining unity, improving its image, and providing services to the Parishes. While frustrated, I am optimistic that we will accept these challenges and work diligently to be successful.

This is the tenth year I have been a delegate and, once again it was a pleasure for me to represent our Parish.

Respectfully submitted,



Alice T. Bogdasarian

June 25, 1997