



DIOCESE OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH OF AMERICA
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Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate

January 4, 1993

Ms. Joan Vos MacDonald
The Reporter Dispatch
4 Gannett Drive,
White Plains, NY 10604

Dear Ms. MacDonald:

Being a new comer to the Westchester County area and a reader of the Reporter Dispatch, I read with great interest your article on the Religion page on the January 2, 1993 issue of the The Reporter Dispatch which you have titled " HOLIDAY STILL TO COME FOR ONE CHURCH", however I find that your reporting to be erroneous.

The Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church of Yonkers is not the only Church in Westchester County which observes Christmas on a date other than the 25th of December. Yes, it is correct that the calendrical variance of thirteen days between the Gregorian and Julian Calendars explains the reason why the Carpatho parish in Yonkers will celebrate the 7th of January, however this is merely an accidental factor and a tradition that this one church adheres to, thus causing the later celebration.

There is another Eastern Church in Westchester County as well, in the town of Harrison, that observes a date for Christmas other than the 25th of December. This is the Armenian Church of Saint James located on the Lincoln Avenue. The Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church which belongs to the lesser Orthodox family of Churches, as also known as the Oriental Orthodox Churches, celebrates the Feast of the Birth of Christ as well as His Baptism (The Epiphany) on January 5th and 6th. These two dates in accordance with the Gregorian Calendar, are the ones which all Christianity observed in the early centuries before the Church of Rome divided the feasts of the Birth and Baptism, celebrating them as separate feasts in the Christian West. The simple explanation of this change was to discourage the early Christians of Rome from continuing the pagan practices affiliated with the winter solstice and the festival they called *Saturnalia*. The Roman Bishops deliberately chose the December 25th date in order to overtake these practices that competed with the Church.

The Church of Armenia as well as the other Oriental Orthodox Churches, i.e. the Coptic [of Egypt], Syrian and Ethiopian did not find it necessary to introduce such a change and therefore never deviated from this original date. Of course during these early years there was only the Julian Calendar in use and consequently The Nativity of Christ and His Baptism was celebrated on the 18th and 19th of January. With the change by Pope Gregory of the west to his "Gregorian style" - subtracting 13 days - this now translated to the 5th and 6th of January for these ancient churches.

The parish of Saint James in Harrison, will observe Armenian Christmas this coming week and will hold services on Christmas Day, January 6th at 10:00am. At the conclusion of the Eucharistic Liturgy, the Great Blessing of Water will take place commemorating the Baptism of Our Lord in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. This practice will be observed globally by the Armenian Church in Armenia and the diaspora.

Thus, I would wish that you make a correction to your reporting of "Holiday Still To Come" noting that the Armenian Community of Westchester County like the Carpatho-Russians have this unique celebration in the month of January.

Thank you,

Jr. Garabed Kochakian

The Reverend Father Garabed Kochakian
Chancellor of the Diocese of the Armenian
Church of America - New York City

GK/as