

REPORT ON DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY, 1993

The 1993 Diocesan Assembly took place on April 29-May 2, 1993. Host church was St. Gregory the Illuminator in Chicago, IL, and George Nahabedian was the Chairman of the church's arrangements committee.

After the Invocation by the Primate, the presence of a quorum was confirmed. Dr. Garo Garibian (Holy Trinity Armenian Church, Cheltenham, PA) was elected chairman of the Assembly, with George Marifian as Vice-chairman (Holy Shoghagat Armenian Church, Belleville, IL). A special message from His Holiness Catholicos Vasken I was read. The Agenda as printed in the Annual Report of the Diocese was affirmed.

A novelty was the introduction of computers to confirm the identity of delegates when entering the conference room, and when voting. The computer read "bar codes" attached to the identification cards of the delegates. This worked rather well. However, the computer system was not sophisticated enough to be able to scan the ballots and total up the results.

Reports from the New England Region, Clergy Conference and Unity Committee were received. The Unity Committee reported some progress:

1. Joint seminars between Diocese and Prelacy have been held on needs of Armenian Language schools.
2. Out of 99 Articles in the By-Laws, 14 remain in contention, but progress on these is slight.
3. Judge Gurahian remarked that agreement on common By-Laws is crucial to unity.

This subject was discussed at greater length on April 30. The results are summed up in a resolution that was accepted: **The Unity Committee shall continue negotiations until March 15, 1994. If at that time, the Unity Committee believes that further negotiation will not be productive, it shall report to the Diocesan Council and recommend that the issue of discontinuing negotiations be placed on the Agenda of the 1994 Diocesan Assembly.** The resolution was approved unanimously. Richard Saradian of the Prelacy, who was present as an observer, noted on the last day of the Assembly, that the 78th Annual Observance of the Genocide was highlighted by the cooperative participation of the Diocesan Primate and the Prelacy's Prelate, and expressed the opinion that Unity is a necessity. He indicated his personal frustration with people who use the lack of unity as an excuse for doing nothing.

The observer from the Western Diocese, Mr. Muserlian, reported that they have new churches in Cupertino and Newport Beach, California. In addition, five new mission churches have been established.

Friday, April 30.

The session reconvened at 9:30 AM.

The report of the Clergy Conference was read by Dn. Norman Odabashian. It was received by the Assembly.

Question was raised on the necessity for so many clerics assigned to the Diocesan Headquarters when there is a severe shortage of priests in the Parishes. The Primate responded that many of the clerical members of the Diocesan Staff are retirees, do not work full time, and do not wish to be assigned to parish work since they have retired from pastoral duties.

Reports were received from the Department of Religious Education, the Armenian Language Lab, the Youth Ministry, ACYOA, ACEF, the Zorab Information Center, and the Development Department. ACEF reported that the endowment had grown from about \$1.5 million in 1980 to about \$30 million in 1992, representing about 600 donors. The Department of Development is setting up a fundraising campaign with a goal of \$4.5 million, half of which will be set aside for repair of the cathedral and headquarters building.

Election Reports:

Periodic reports were received on the elections. Rose Mekenian was elected as a lay member of the Diocesan Council on the first ballot. Asbed Zakarian, Ed Brewster and George Papalian were elected on subsequent ballots. All offices were filled, but the names were announced too rapidly for recording.

Panel Discussions:

A new activity was introduced through the formation of six panels assigned to discuss and report on the functions and operation of: 1. Christian Education; 2. Armenian Language, Culture and Identity; 3. Youth and the Church; 4. Christian Outreach; 5. Stewardship. Panel discussions were conducted from about 11 AM, to 12:30, and again from 1:30 to 2:30. Panel Leaders were George Mekenian, George Mangigian, Michael Yapchian, Lionel Galstaun and George Papalian respectively.

Reports on the panel discussions were read by the Panel Leaders. These will be incorporated in the Minutes of the Assembly. In the Christian Outreach sessions which I chaired, one conclusion of general interest was that there is a natural synergism between the Womens' Guilds and the newly established Social Service Department of the Diocesan Staff.

New Business:

A motion was introduced by Dean Shahinian of St. Mary's Church, Washington, DC, requesting the Diocese to report on a resolution adopted by the Interdiocesan Conference of Eastern, Western and Canadian Dioceses to instruct the Staff of the Diocese to prepare a book of Armenian Church teachings on a number of moral issues which are assuming major dimensions in the U. S. The Primate stated that this is a major problem which impacts in a complicated way on many issues. He continued that it is being worked on, but he wants it to be carefully researched to prevent future confusion. The motion was withdrawn.

The Assembly recessed at 5:00 PM.

Saturday May 1.

A proposal was introduced to provide spiritual aid to Armenia. Rev. Fr. Vertanes Kalayjain of St. Mary's, Washington DC called for financial support outside the Diocesan Budget. He suggested a goal of \$40,000 for 1993 and \$150,000 for 1994. The proposal was debated vigorously and an amendment proposed by Judge Gurahian. Under this amendment, the Diocesan Assembly would endorse the principle behind the proposal, but would leave implementation to the parishes. The amendment was carried unanimously.

1993 and 1994 Budgets:

An increase in the support of St. Vartan Camp (line 33 in the proposed 1993 Budget) from \$1380 to \$4,000 was proposed, with the increase being taken equally from lines 12 (Dept. of Religious Education) and 14 (Youth Ministry). The DRE and DYM agreed to have their budgets reduced. The motion was passed unanimously.

Between \$1.3 and \$1.4 million during 1993 is needed for rehabilitation of the cathedral complex. Critical needs are repairs to stop leaks from the roof and plaza, installation of access ramps for disabled persons, and a check to determine if asbestos problems might be present.

Considerable discussion, led by delegates from Detroit, ensued on parish assessments. The final decision was to "freeze" assessments at the 1992 levels for 1993 and 1994. Use of "Restricted Funds" will remain unchanged. All other expenditures are to be reduced to make up the difference between the levels proposed in the budgets and the reduction in revenue caused by freezing assessments.

A request by Lionel Galstaun for separate accounting for capital items was accepted by Haig Dadourian who was presenting the Financial Report.

The amended budget was passed.

Proposals:

1. An amendment to By-Law No. 7 was up for passage the second time. It was passed and now becomes the new By-Law No. 7.

2. An amendment to By-Law No. 27 was up for passage the second time. It was passed and becomes the new By-Law No. 27.

3. A new proposal by St. James Armenian Church of Watertown calls for assessment relief of 1% of the budget for Youth, for those parishes that employ a Youth Director. The Diocesan Council opposes this proposal. The proposal was defeated.

4. A new proposal by St. James Armenian Church of Watertown calls for a budgeted fund of \$50,000 be established to provide for Regionalization of the Diocese. The proposal was defeated.

5. A proposal by St. James Armenian Church of Watertown calling for the implementation of a Panel Discussion format for Diocesan Assemblies, and that the discussions should include: Department of Religious Education; Armenian Language Lab and Armenian Schools; Department of Youth Ministry; Christian Outreach; Finances and Budget; and Diocesan Administration. The proposal included a schedule for the panels and other activities of the Assembly. In the discussion, it was brought out that such a format can be proposed for the next assembly, but it cannot be proposed as a mandate for all future assemblies. As a format for 1994, the proposal was accepted.

6. A new proposal by St. Mary Armenian Church of Washington, D.C. which calls for:

- a. A survey to assess the needs of Armenian women
- b. The Primate to take action to ordain women as Deacons, Stolebearers and Acolytes
- c. Women to be encouraged to seek representation in the Diocesan Council

The Proposals Committee made no recommendation.

Discussion brought out the following:

The Primate has already given permission for girls to be appointed Acolytes. No ordination for Acolytes is necessary. The question of ordination of women to the Diaconate must be decided by Etchmiadzin. Opposition developed in the assembly to mandating action by the Primate.

Amendments to delete articles (b) and (c) above were approved, leaving only article (a) of the original proposal. The whole proposal was defeated.

7. A new proposal from Very Rev. Fr. Mesrob Semerjian to adopt a plan he submitted for establishing a provisional working relationship between Diocese and Prelacy.

It was recommended that the proposal be submitted through the Clergy Conference since Father Semerjian has no pastorate and is not on the Diocesan Council. No action was taken.

8. A new proposal by Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church of Greater Boston, which calls for amending By-Law 51 to limit terms of Diocesan Delegates to two consecutive terms, and to require passage of four years before being eligible to be a delegate again.

The proposal was not submitted within the two-month deadline before the Diocesan Assembly and was therefore not discussed.

Courtesies Committee Report:

The report of the Courtesies Committee was received.

Future Assemblies:

The 1994 Diocesan Assembly will be held at St. Kevork Armenian Church in Houston, TX.

The 1995 Diocesan Assembly will be held at Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church, Chelmsford, MA

In view of the fact that St. Peter Armenian Church of Watervliet, N. Y. will be celebrating their 100th Anniversary in 1999, they asked for the Assembly to consider their bid for this date.

Adjournment:

There being no further business, the 1993 Diocesan Assembly was adjourned at 5:30 PM.