

GUIDELINES FOR THE UNIFICATION OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA



I. PREAMBLE

There has always been, and is today, only one Armenian Church. Throughout the course of history, the Armenian People have maintained and cherished that sense of oneness.

Here in America for the past several decades, due to an internal conflict, there has been a division in the Armenian Apostolic Church

The time has arrived, in the highest interest of the Armenian nation, and in the spirit of Christian love and fellowship to move forward into a new era with the creation of a united Diocese in America. The Diocese will be established from the formal merger of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America and the Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America.

II. STRUCTURE

1. The Diocese will be a spiritual and administrative unit, and will be an indivisible part of the Armenian Church under the supreme spiritual jurisdiction of the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Armenians at Holy Etchmiadzin, as the Mother See of the Armenian Church, as was the case in the past. The election of the Diocesan Primate and any duly adopted amendments to the by-laws of the Diocese will be subject to the confirmation of the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians.

2. The Diocese will have a meaningful relationship with the Holy See of Cilicia, manifested in the following way:

a. The Seminary of the Holy See of Cilicia will remain a source of clergymen for the Diocese. All members of the Cilician Brotherhood and graduate Clergy of the Seminary will be accorded equal treatment within the Diocese without discrimination in the holding of any office or in the administration of official Diocesan bodies, in accordance with the canons and traditions of the Armenian Church.

b. To establish a trust fund within the Armenian Church Endowment Fund by donating to said Armenian Church Endowment Fund the net proceeds from the sale of the Prelacy building located in New York City, to be designated as the "Antelias Fund", the net annual income from said Fund to be transmitted to the Holy See of Cilicia.

c. Whenever the Catholicos of Cilicia is visiting the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, according to the accepted laws and order of the Armenian Church, proper protocol shall be accorded him, befitting his high rank and dignity.

d. Upon invitation, the Diocese may send observers to the National Assemblies of the Holy See of Cilicia.

e. Upon the initial election of the Primate of the Unified Diocese, it is recommended that he shall appoint his Vicar General from the opposite persuasion only for the initial term.

3. The Diocesan Assembly will be the representative body of the parishes of the Diocese and shall exercise supervision and control over all ecclesiastical and administrative bodies within the jurisdiction of the Diocese.

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITY PROGRAM

1. This memorandum of understanding subscribed to by the joint committee will be presented to the respective Diocesan assemblies.

2. Upon approval and adoption of this memorandum by the respective assemblies:

a. Cooperative programs will be initiated in the Religious and the Armenian Schools of our churches based upon plans approved by the respective Diocesan Councils.

b. The joint Unity Committee will begin drafting new By-Laws immediately following the respective 1982 Assemblies, endeavor to complete its work no later than November 1, 1982, and submit same to respective Diocesan Primates and Councils.

c. The joint Unity Committee will sponsor a joint consultative seminar to take place no later than October 15, 1982, consisting of Unity Committee members and a maximum of 30 clergy and lay participants from each side, limited to Parish Clergy and Council, (Board of Trustees) members; Diocesan and Prelacy Council members and delegates to Diocesan and Prelacy Assemblies, Subject to the agenda prepared and approved by the Joint Unity Committee.

d. Special Diocesan Assemblies will be convened not later than January 15, 1983. Each Assembly will meet separately but in the same city and at the same time, consider and approve the jointly prepared By-Laws.

e. After approval of the By-Laws by each Assembly, baptisms, weddings, and funerals can be conducted jointly.

f. After the By-Laws have been approved by the respective Assemblies, joint commemoration of Martyrs Day will be held on April 24, 1983, with the participation of all clergymen of both Diocese.

3. Following Catholicical ratification of the new By-Laws by Etchmiadzin and Cilicia, the term of the current Diocesan Delegates and elected officials will be terminated upon the new elections which will be held following procedures specified in the new By-Laws. A committee consisting of equal representation from each assembly will oversee and approve the election of delegates on the basis of the new By-Laws and membership based upon the respective 1979 assembly records and will convene a new assembly of the merged Diocese.

4. The first and successive assemblies will operate in accordance with the rules and provisions of the adopted By-Laws having as a priority order of business the election of a Diocesan Council and a Primate, as well as an official acknowledgement of the By-Laws.

5. In the event the respective Diocesan Assemblies have not on or before June 1, 1983 approved the proposed By-Laws, this document shall be terminated and shall not be binding on either party.

6. In the event that the Catholicoi have not consented and approved the new By-Laws by December 31, 1983, this document shall be terminated and shall not be binding on either party.