

February 7, 1993

The Most Reverend Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate
Diocese of the Armenian Church
630 Second Avenue
New York, New York, 10016-4885

Dear Surpazan Hayr:

I wanted to write to thank you for the time that you spent with us in Racine. It certainly was refreshing to see an Archbishop who is interested in the opinions of the young people in the parishes. We appreciate your time, your consideration, and the fact that you approach these issues with an open mind.

I am impressed with the fact that you are planning to assemble a group of people to further discuss these and other relevant issues. Let me take a few moments to summarize some of the points I feel most strongly about for use in those discussions.

The single most important issue in my mind is the ability of the church to communicate God's message to the parishioners. This is and should be a separate issue from maintaining the Armenian traditions and language. Although you understand that the strength of our people comes directly from centuries of faithful service to the Lord, I'm afraid that this message has not been adequately communicated to the masses.

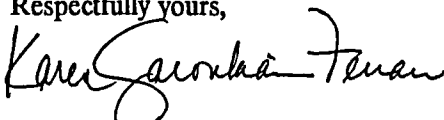
I cannot tell you how many times I have had discussions with adult Armenians regarding this issue. I ask the question, "Which is more important...being Armenian or being Christian?" and many of the people that I talk to either cannot decide, or choose "Armenian" over "Christian." In my mind if one cannot easily and without reservation answer this question "Christian," then we have a serious problem. As a former Sunday School teacher, I also posed this question to my junior high school class. What resulted was a heated debate over which was more important.

I know that you see the two as intertwined, but you must agree that they are in fact separate and may be mutually exclusive i.e. one may be a "good Armenian" without being a Christian, and vice versa. The way we can solve this problem is by directing the clergy to emphasize the Lord's word over Armenian tradition, and by conducting church services in a language that the parish understands.

You talked about allowing each parish priest to decide which language best fits its parish, and in principle I agree with this. However, I think it makes sense to further encourage the clergy to use the language of the parish to communicate God's message. We must be careful to make our decision about language for the right reasons i.e. what language best allows us to spread the Word, as opposed to which language we must "preserve."

I know that you have in the diocese a number of diverse people and each of them has opinions regarding these and other matters. However, let all of us remember that God's son, Jesus Christ, was not an Armenian.

Respectfully yours,



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