

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Unified Armenian Church Council of Atlanta

The Unified Armenian Church Council of Atlanta has been in existence since November of 1988, inviting clergy from both the Diocese and Prelacy jurisdictions.

On Nov. 21st 1993 Father Nerses Manoogian of the Prelacy was invited by the Council to celebrate the Divine Liturgy for the Armenian faithful of the Atlanta area. Close to one hundred people were in attendance at the Liturgy which was held at St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church.

After the Liturgy a Thanksgiving dinner was served in the church hall to a group of nearly sixty people, after which elections were held for a new unified council. The following individuals were elected: Haroot Aghasarkisian, Bedros Dido, Ara Dostourian, Maro Gheblikian, Sona Maghdoussian and John Pomakian.

In November of 1988 a memorable event took place, not only for the Armenian Community of Atlanta, but also for all Armenians in the United States and Canada. The hitherto separate Armenian Church Councils of Atlanta decided to unify their efforts in working towards the eventual establishment of an Armenian parish in the Atlanta area. This was an unprecedented move, since no other Armenian community in the United States or Canada had taken such a radical, yet constructive, step. Letters of support and encouragement were received from many groups and individuals, including the Coalition For Church Unity.

The Unified Council, at one point, decided to take an even more radical step by requesting official recognition from the bishops of both the Diocese and Prelacy jurisdictions. The Council well understood the unprecedented nature of this request, since there obviously would be canonical complications (a church council under two bishops). Nevertheless, the Unified Armenian Church Council of Atlanta hoped that the two bishops could work out some arrangement, especially since it would be a

matter of time (hopefully) before the two jurisdictions indeed became one. Accordingly, a petition signed by over fifty individuals was sent to each bishop. The Prelacy answered positively, officially recognizing the Unified Council. On the other hand, the Diocese, after repeated requests, communicated that its bishop would address the issue soon, since he was planning a visit to Atlanta. Unfortunately, neither the bishop's visit nor his answer was realized.

In all fairness, it should be said that the Prelacy found it easier to give a positive answer, since it had never considered Atlanta as its field of missionary endeavor. On the other hand, from the early 1970's Atlanta's Armenian community had seen regular and consistent visits from Diocese bishops and priests, with the intent of establishing a parish in the city. Therefore, the Diocese always felt that Atlanta was its own preserve, and the Prelacy tacitly acquiesced to that arrangement. Nevertheless, the Unified Church Council, supported by the vast majority of the community, believes that jurisdictional issues should be put aside, and that both the Diocese and the Prelacy should take a magnanimous approach and work out a compromise in accordance with the interests of the Armenian faithful of Atlanta.

It is indeed unfortunate that recently a few individuals of the community have taken it upon themselves to go against the wishes of the majority and have formed a separate church council under the jurisdiction of the Diocese. Their action has not only caused much consternation and dismay in the Armenian community of the city, but also has jeopardized years of painstaking work and struggle to unify our people in Atlanta, as well as become an example to the Armenian communities in the United States and Canada.

Ara Dostourian

ARA DOSTOURIAN  
WEST GA. COLLEGE  
CARROLLTON, GA 30118



The Armenian Church Monthly  
Armenian Herald  
630 Second Ave.  
New York NY 10016