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ARAM SARHADIAN 4032 JORDAN LAKE DRIVE MARIETTA, GEORGIA 30062

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

His Eminence,
Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Prelate
Diocese of the Armenian Church of America
630 Second Ave.
New York, NY 10016-4885

Dear Archbishop Barsamian:

I have not received any answers to several of my previous letters sent to your eminence's attention. Therefore, I have taken the initiative to send this letter by Registered Mail with Return Receipt Requested with the hope that it will be properly delivered to you.

In mid-1993, our Armenian Community in Atlanta was split in two through the activities of a newly formed Diocesan Council (The Armenian Church of Atlanta/Mission Parish Council) reportedly appointed by your eminence and consisting primarily of individuals bent on destroying our harmonious community life and the Armenian Independent Cultural Association (AICAA) of which I am the current president. This division is untimely and an unfortunate occurrence which can easily be rectified, if we, the Atlanta Armenian Community, did not have outside interference in our affairs and can have your blessing and support to function independently. Prior to the creation of the Armenian Church of Atlanta/Mission Parish Council, church services in Atlanta were sponsored by the AICAA through the Unified Armenian Church Council of Atlanta that had the cooperation of both the Diocese and Prelacy. The Unified Council, as its name implies, consisting of both Diocesan and Prelacy representatives, had been created to keep the Armenian Community of Atlanta united.

The Armenian Community of Atlanta, once an exemplary unified community, is now headed in the same direction as Ocala, Florida and other Armenian Communities due to the uncompromising position of Diocesan representatives who want to establish a monopolistic spiritual territory. This is an exclusionary practice and discriminates against the majority of the members of the Armenian Community of Atlanta (both Diocese and Prelacy) who wish to govern their own communal affairs based upon democratic principles through general elections.

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To defuse the situation, recently, a delegation of elected community leaders met with Father Haygazoun Najarian to explain the situation, motivations and aims of the Diocesan Council members. Our group asked Father Haygazoun to pass on to you and our spiritual leadership several solutions we had devised to extricate ourselves from this very nasty situation. At a later date, in a lengthy telephone conversation with Father Haygazoun, I was informed that our attempts to negotiate an amicable end to this situation were fruitless. Several reasons were given for the refusal to cooperate and coordinate, but none was motivated to bring all Armenian Community members together to strengthen ourselves and be able to support our troubled Nation and Church. Although the answer we received was negative, I informed Father Haygazoun that we will not give up our aim to bring the community together. I therefore ask that you forgive my stubborn persistence in this matter.

The situation in Atlanta is now pitiful. The community remains divided with approximately 50-60 faithful (including children and on Easter Sunday) attending church services organized by the Diocesan Council (approximately 10 being strong AICAA supporters who will not pass the chance to attend church) and 70-80 faithful attending services organized by the non-affiliated and democratically elected Unified Armenian Church Council of Atlanta which since its establishment has always operated under the sponsorship of the AICAA.

In the same telephone conversation with Father Haygazoun, I was informed that competition is good. Believe me your eminence, competition is mean, nasty, and brings out the worst in us. Competition is the cause of civil strife and wars among nations and all it does is kill our young. And we are losing our young who are fed up and chose to adopt other faiths or marry outside our Mother Church. To make my point, allow me your eminence to relay to you the following.

In December 1993, the AICAA published its dates of annual activities which included a picnic to be held on May 28-29, 1994, the Independence Day of the Armenian Nation, a traditional annual event celebrated by the Atlanta community. The list was published in our newsletter and was sent to all 260 names on our mailing list, including all members of the Diocesan Council. Recently, the Diocesan Council announced that it will have a picnic on May 15, just two weeks before the AICAA picnic and a Tennessee Aquarium Trip on May 22, one week before our Armenian Independence Day picnic. None of the members of the Diocesan Council can claim ignorance of the annual celebration of this significant event in our national history because almost all have served, at one time or another, on the AICAA board. What is one to make of this sort of activities? How would your eminence characterize such behavior? What is one to make of Diocesan Council members or their close associates making phone calls to prominent members of our community and calling them unmentionable names? Are these conduct becoming your eminence's representatives?

I once asked Father Haygazoun if he preferred to come to Atlanta and perform Divine Liturgy for 120-150 faithful or 40-50. His response was that you could all come and join us. How can one blindly follow and support an organization or group that does not welcome with open arms

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all Armenians and is the exclusive domain of several individuals who are not elected and do not represent the community. Dictatorships are not popular and corrode from within. The most perfect example is the former Soviet Union. Also, what happened to the Eastern Diocese Bylaws which call for the Parish Assembly to elect its representative Council? There has never been an Assembly or election (Diocesan) in Atlanta. In contrast, the Unified Armenian Church Council of Atlanta, which, as previously stated, consists of both members of the Diocese and Prelacy, is an elected body under the bylaws of the AICAA.

With the best intentions in mind and concern about the health of our community and National Church, I would again like to take the initiative and propose to your eminence the following practical program.

1. Ensure both councils are dissolved immediately.
2. All operating financial assets owned by both councils be consolidated and placed in one account.
3. Each Archbishop (yourself and your spiritual brother, Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian) shall appoint his personal council representative to serve for a period of two years.
4. A community assembly to hold elections shall be called by the AICAA in coordination with the appointed council members.
5. An additional 4 council members shall be elected (two from the Diocese and two from the Prelacy) by this assembly to serve for a period of two years in addition to the above.
6. All adult (over 18 years of age) Atlanta Armenian residents regardless of affiliation shall be entitled to one vote each.
7. The newly elected council consisting of six members shall elect a chairman, vice chairman, treasurer, secretary, a public relations member, and ways and means who shall conduct the spiritual affairs of the community in an impartial manner.
8. Religious services shall be conducted alternately based on a predetermined annual program; once officiated by the Diocese and once by the Prelacy.
9. Special events (such as Easter, Christmas, etc.) shall be officiated jointly.

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10. Other events, such as baptisms, weddings, etc., shall be officiated based upon the preference and discretion of individual community members.
11. During Divine Liturgy, the names of both our Vehapars and the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Jerusalem shall be mentioned in order of preference of the officiating priest.
12. All funds collected or plant assets obtained shall be administered by a locally elected board of trustees. All deeds and titles shall also remain in the name of the locally elected board of trustees and shall not be deeded or transferred to any other organization unless a fair market value is received through a sale.
13. This agreement shall stay in effect until the Diocese and Prelacy have negotiated and implemented a mutually satisfactory compact.

In this manner your eminence, the Atlanta Armenian Community can be brought together which will make us all proud of being Armenians. I believe the above proposal is very practical and acceptable to the absolute majority of Atlanta Armenians. Your eminence's suggestions for changes are welcome, and once we have reached an agreement, I will contact His Eminence, Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian in order to obtain his blessing. If we can make an agreement for the Atlanta Armenian Community, it may serve as the foundation to bring together the entire United States and others may later follow. Otherwise, having diminished our strength, we will continue to be the laughing stock of our enemies.

As a final note, I would like to place a standing invitation to any Diocesan Priest, your eminence may select, to come to Atlanta and perform Divine Liturgy under the sponsorship of the AICAA and Unified Armenian Church Council. Hoping to hear your positive response.

Sincerely,

Aram Sarhadian

April 21, 1994--11:06 am

ARAM SARHADIAN
4032 JORDAN LAKE DRIVE
MARIETTA, GA 30062

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right of the return address

CERTIFIED

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MAIL

His Eminence,
Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Prelate
Diocese of the Armenian Church of America
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