

REPORT ON THE 80TH ANNUAL DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY

Presented to St. Mary's Parish Assembly

Washington, D.C.

The 80th Annual Assembly of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America was hosted by the Holy Resurrection Armenian Apostolic Church of New Britain, Connecticut from May 6 to May 8, 1982.

The St. Mary's Parish of Washington, D.C. was represented at the convention by its parish Council President Dr. Edward Onanian, by its two diocesan delegates Vartkess M. Balian and Dr. Ohannes Sahakian and by Women's Guild members Mrs. Jean Sayian and Mrs. Shirley DuChessi.

At the opening session on Thursday afternoon at 2 P.M., the Assembly was presided over by his Eminence Abp. Torkom Manoogian, the Primate. Mr. Daniel Dorian and Judge Vincent Gueralian was respectively elected Assembly Chairman and Vice Chairman, Mrs. R. Reynolds and Fr. A. Ashjian were elected Eng. and Arm. language secretaries respectively.

During four general sessions on Friday and Saturday, two major issues were the primary concern of the delegates; they were: the Primate's election and the Church Unity Guidelines.

The election of the Primate took place on May 8th at 11:00a.m. The three candidates for election were the Very Rev. Father Mesrob Semerjian, the Very Rev. Father Varoujian Kabaradjian, and His Eminence Archbishop Torkom Manoogian. For the fifth time receiving 110 of the 142 votes cast, Archbishop Manoogian was re-elected on the first ballot.

On the Friday afternoon (May 7) session, when the three candidates were presented Father Semerjian read a brief statement to the assembly on behalf of Father Kabaradjian and himself. In it, he stated that the two candidates recognized their candidacies were a "mere formality, in order to be in keeping with the Diocesan by-laws." Father Semerjian then added, "The Primate has served well and there is no reason to replace him."

On the issue of the Unification of the Armenian Church of North America, the Diocesan Assembly, after a long and thoughtful discussion, voted to approve the Church Unity Guidelines by more than two-to-one margin.

From the beginning of the discussions, the majority of the delegates favored the unity of the church; however, there were differences on the process of achieving unity. The pursuing debate focused on three major issues. The first was whether or not cooperation by both the Diocese and the

Prelacy should begin prior to the acceptance of a uniform set of by-laws. The proposed measure called for the cooperation to begin in the Armenian and in the Sunday Schools upon the acceptance of the guidelines by both assemblies.

A second consideration was the Catholicoi's position on the unity process. Some delegates expressed concern that while decisions are made upon the Diocesan level, a "limbo situation" may arise if the agreements are not approved by the respective Catholicoi. Thirdly, the delegates were concerned whether or not some last minute changes made in the guidelines by the Diocesan Unity Committee would be accepted by the Prelacy. The essential addition required that the final approval of the by-laws by both Catholicoi be an integral part of the guidelines, with a date stipulation set at no later than December 31, 1983.

On Saturday morning, Judge John Najerian, a member of the Diocesan Unity Committee, presented the Unity Committee's report to the delegates. The report explained the process by which the guidelines had been agreed upon by the joint Unity Committee of the Diocese and the Prelacy. Earlier that morning, some corrections of the guidelines were presented to the Assembly by Edward Chapiian, a Unity Committee member. The guidelines after these changes would be the format by which unity between the Diocese and Prelacy would be achieved.

Judge Najerian explained that the guidelines "are not a governing instrument, but rather a format" to work with.

Further, Judge Najerian pointed out that the essential document in the negotiations was the by-laws which had yet to be drawn up: the guidelines called for the completion of these by-laws no later than November 1, 1982.

In view of a letter from His Holiness Vazken I, the Catholicos of all Armenians to His Holiness Khoren I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, dated November 23, 1981, several delegates questioned whether or not the Prelacy sincerely sought unity. In that letter, the Catholicos had expressed his disappointment of the Cilician Catholicos' new position and the latter's failure to honor the joint agreement of 1979.

Some delegates expressed a concern that in light of this letter, the Assembly should be more cautious in its approach toward unity. Although unity was desired, some delegates were cautious about early cooperation and suggested that we cooperate after the Catholicoi approved the by-laws.

Nonetheless, a majority of delegates felt secure in approving the guidelines because they viewed it as a non-binding decision. Most delegates shared the attitude that the key ingredient was the final set of by-laws and were willing to put the guidelines into effect, anxious not to slow down the process of unity.

Following the intense debate which clearly aired the two points of view, a roll call vote was taken. The Final vote count showed 92 delegates in favor of accepting the guidelines, 44 opposed with two abstentions and eight absentees.

Besides the above mentioned items, a few other issues were discussed.

Once again, the delegates expressed a major concern on how to attract qualified candidates to the clergy of the Armenian Church. The 79th Annual Assembly's request for the Primate to appoint a committee to prepare a report on Religious Vocations was restated and urged to be completed.

A budget of more than \$1 million was discussed and accepted for 1982.


Mrs. Simone announced that the mortgage of the cathedral was burned and that last year's raffle drive had exceeded expectations.

Partial elections took place for Budget, Nominating, Proposals and Auditing Committees. For the Board of Trustees, Mr. Dadour Dadourian was re-elected.

On Saturday several groups held meetings at the St. Francis Junior High School. These groups included the Diocesan Language Lab, the Armenian Church Youth Organization of America, and the Ladies Auxiliaries.

Saturday night at the banquet the Assembly paid tribute to twelve servants of God who were in the service of the Diocese of the Armenian Church for more than 30 years.

Besides representing the St. Mary's Parish to the General Assembly meetings, I participated in a few meetings with Col. Victor Arzoumanian, Mr. Frank Stoneson Avakian and Father Mampre Kouzouyan, representatives of our Diocese, to discuss the general concerns of our church.


Vartkess M. Balian
Diocesan Delegate