

April 22, 1996

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Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate
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630 Second Avenue
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Your Eminence,

I am writing in response to the recent changes that have taken place in the Ann Arbor mission parish and the resulting confusion and hurt it has caused for quite a few of us here.

As you may be aware, I requested and was granted leave from the parish council in May of last year to concentrate on theological studies through St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology, a home study program. I did this after consulting with Fr. Arakel. Although I have not attended parish council meetings since then, I did continue serving with Michael Ohanesian at the altar and shared responsibilities for preaching with him until September of 95 when he resigned. Most everyone I spoke with at that time expressed sorrow and disappointment in his decision and many tried to convince him to reconsider. More than a few of us were angered and frustrated as well, myself being among them. We felt that both the tone of his letter of resignation and the abruptness of the decision were inappropriate. I personally felt as though he was abandoning us and leaving a bulk of the burden for carrying on the services upon me. I also felt as though he was putting an ultimatum on you, that is "move ahead with my ordination or grant me my release to Canada." After reading his letter and speaking to him extensively, I was convinced that Michael was saying that if he did not see progress in his quest for ordination, he was not willing to serve in our diocese. Though I can understand Michael's frustration with what he perceives as indifference, a lack of communication and avoidance on the part of the Diocese, I still viewed his action as extreme and hurting the very people who were attempting to help him.

Well, the winter months followed and we continued to meet and pray. Attendance varied, but donations were strong. Though some members advocated for and encouraged people to write letters to you appealing for Michael's promotion, others were happy to see things continue as they were with Fr. Diran coming once a month and myself leading the other bimonthly service. Steve Mangigian, the parish council chairman, sent me a letter in November, shortly after Michael's resignation, stating that the parish council had discussed the situation and they decided it would be appropriate for me to be the Senior Deacon. This, he wrote, meant that I would take responsibility for making sure the Sunday services happen, lead services in Der Diran's absence and preach under his direction. He also said in the letter that he would write to you and ask your permission for all this. When I contacted Steve in early February to ask if he had written to you yet, he said that he had "forgotten all about it" and that he would go back and check his notes. I mention all this to point out that he revealed no proclivity of the council's efforts to bring back Michael as Deacon in Charge to me or to the parish assembly. Up until March 27, when the new

we did not feel

we did not need any pressure in dealing w/ him

it was not their place to make such a decision

chairman pro tem, John Ohanian, called to inform me of your decision neither I nor any other non parish council member I am aware of, was told publicly of the impending changes being considered.

I have expressed to the parish council my belief that advocating for and taking direct action as a group for changes of this degree was inappropriate without consulting first with the entire parish. I also told them that I feel it was wrong to promote this course without ever informing me since it had direct bearing on the responsibilities granted after Michael's resignation. It has been suggested to me by a council member that it was my responsibility to keep abreast of meeting minutes.

This situation has been very painful for me. My sense is that at least on the part of some parish council members, old and new, there was a willful effort to keep me and others in the dark. As a result, it has been very challenging for our family to attend services and for me to wear a shabig. I decided that we would attend and participate, but I am not presently able to serve at the altar beside Michael when he presides.

You are serving the Lord & his people & not an individual

I asked the outgoing chair, Steve Mangigian, and incoming chair, John Ohanian, if they would convene a special meeting with the council to discuss the situation since it would be one month until their next scheduled meeting. I also asked if I might have a chance to address the parish so that I could explain why I would not be serving in this capacity any longer and to encourage them to not let this situation divide our church and deter us from coming together to worship. They answered that we could not meet before the next scheduled meeting and that since Michael was now responsible for our services, they did not feel right in recommending to him my request to speak to the parish. I would have to take that up directly with him. Michael says that I cannot address the assembly during services because I am not an ordained Deacon and, therefore, you will not allow it.

Such a privilege is not appropriate at a parish meeting

Last week I invited most of the regular church attendees and parish council members to our home. None of the council members attended. The purpose was to keep those interested informed of my position, encourage everyone not to be bitter and to not be a poison that will divide our community. Although I made personal phone calls to everyone, a council member advised a mutual friend not to attend since this meeting was somehow clandestine and would only bring more difficulty.

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Based on conversations I have had with the parish council and with Michael, I don't expect a resolution. I have consulted with four of our priests and several other close friends. Two of the priests were familiar with the situation to some extent. Their council has been helpful.

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As I stated at the outset, my purpose in writing you is to express the confusion and hurt this situation has caused for my family and others. If you have any encouragement and/or guidance I would be very grateful. We know you are praying for us and we are appreciative.

Your servant in Christ,

John Kazanjian