

Holy Cross Armenian Church - Toronto, Canada
Minutes of Special Parish Assembly held on
February 21, 1982 at 7:00 P.M.

On direction of the Primate and Diocesan Council, Father Paren Avedikian (to preside), Father Mampre Kouzouian (as Chairman) and Zarvin Kasparian (as Secretary) travelled to Toronto, Canada on February 21, 1982 to convene a Special Parish Assembly of the Holy Cross Church as per invitation and agenda previously sent to the parishioners over the signature of the pastor of the Church Father Houssig Nishanian, Mr. Armen Kurkjian having refused to sign as Chairman, Parish Council.

(Mr. Edward Chapian of the Diocese was unable to attend.)
The parishioners had received a second invitation and agenda for a Special Parish Assembly, on the same day and at the same time, called by the Holy Cross Parish Council over the signatures of Armen Kurkjian, Chairman, and Ghevont Sharmelikian, Secretary.

Upon arrival of the Diocesan Representatives, at the meeting hall, it was noted that the meeting was assembled with members wearing green lapel markers, this having been done by Holy Cross officials.

Mr. Armen Kurkjian announced that there were 62 members present (eventually the number grew to nearly 80), the meeting was convened and that only the local priest could preside at this meeting; and proceeded to challenge the Diocesan right to convene, preside over or conduct the meeting. He questioned the Primate's right to designate Fr. Paren to preside. Mr. Kurkjian asked for the Diocesan Representative's credentials, and in the absence therefore, the Parish Council Chairman (himself) would conduct the meeting.

Finally Armen Kurkjian stated that although the representatives of the Diocese have no right to convene, preside or chair at this meeting, however, as a Dzayrakooyin Vartabed, I order Father Paren to open this meeting with an invocation. Father Paren obliged.

Fr. Paren was not given the courtesy to explain our right to convene, preside over and conduct the meeting.

Mr. Armen Kurkjian stated he was the Chairman and we were to be taught a lesson in conducting meetings. Mr. Kurkjian's dictatorial behavior was challenged by Mr. Antranig Zakarian to no avail.

Comment: It was now quite apparent that we (The Diocesan Representatives) were in a hostile atmosphere completely controlled by Armen Kurkjian and Dr. Vartan Aynacian.

A member made reference to the fact that two invitations had been received for this assembly and asked for verification of the authenticity of Fr. Houssig Nishanian's signature. Armen Kurkjian was quick to say the signature was a photocopy and possibly false. Fr. Houssig was asked to

comment and he stated that he gave his permission to have his name affixed to the invitation.

Fr. Paren once again attempted to state the basis of our authority for the purpose of our being there and the conducting of the meeting.

A Mrs. Hanemyan questioned once again the procedure and authority to call a special parish assembly. At this point the meeting became somewhat unruly.

Father Paren stated that in the bylaws there might not be a specific provision for the Primate and the Diocesan Council to have the right to convene a meeting, simply because no one had envisioned that such situations would arise; moreover, if the Primate and Diocesan Council have the right to convene the highest body within the Diocese, the Diocesan Assembly, then they certainly can convene a parish assembly.

Father Mampre attempted to settle down the meeting by (a) citing the action of the 79th Diocesan Assembly in charging "the Primate and Diocesan Council to further investigate this matter (the actions of Holy Cross Church) and take whatever action they deem necessary." (b) quoting Article 65-C of the Diocesan By-Laws which states that the Diocesan Council has the power and duty "to give necessary instructions to Church and community organizations within the jurisdiction of the Diocese, in accordance with the provisions of the By-Laws." He further urged the assembly to hear us and we would hear them if the meeting was presided over and conducted by the Diocesan representatives.

Armen Kurkjian again challenged our right to be there and asked the assembly whose invitation the membership would honor - overwhelming voice was for the Parish Council; and therefore Kurkjian declared the Diocesan invitation invalid and stated that the Diocesan representatives had come with premeditated reasons.

Throughout all this time Dr. Vartan Aynajian had been very vociferous with an accusatory attitude.

At this point Fr. Mampre stated that in this type of an atmosphere a meaningful and beneficial meeting was not possible and in accordance with the Diocesan Council resolution of February 19, 1982 stating that -

"If the Holy Cross Parish Special Assembly does not afford the Diocesan representatives the opportunity to put into effect the Diocesan Council Agenda scheduled for February 21, 1982 by the same action the Holy Cross Parish be dissolved;"

and he declared the Holy Cross Parish dissolved and the meeting closed.

Amid a mob scene situation - shouting, pushing, fist waving, profanity and name calling by the assembly including approaching the dais -

under these threatening conditions, the Diocesan Representatives left the hall; and were followed out into the corridor of the hall by a number of parishioners.

Discussions (at times heated and argumentative) continued in the corridor on a "one-on-one" basis with the Diocesan Representatives attempting to reach these people with logical rationale.

Armen Kurkjian, Vartan Aynajian and others, apparently concerned over the dissolution of the Parish, emerged from the hall and asked that the Diocesan Representatives reenter the hall and conduct the meeting with our agenda. In good faith the Diocesan Representatives reentered the hall.

Armen Kurkjian immediately stated that the Parish Council declared this meeting contrary to the Diocesan By-Laws and therefore withdrew from conducting the meeting.

Father Mampre declared the meeting legal, introduced the Diocesan Representatives by name and position, and invited Father Paren to convene the meeting with a prayer, which was done.

Father Mampre once again declared our presence as representatives of the Primate and Diocesan Council legal. He stated that our authority comes from the Diocesan Assembly which is the supreme legislative body of our Diocese and the Diocesan By-Laws. He reviewed the 79th Diocesan Assembly decision relative to Holy Cross Church and Article 65-C of the Diocesan By-Laws (as previously quoted).

Father Mampre pointed out that since the Primate and the Diocesan Council can convene a Diocesan Assembly they certainly have the right to call any parish, which is subservient to the Diocesan Assembly, to a meeting.

Father Mampre then asked Fr. Houssig Nishanian to read the minutes of December 20, 1981 Holy Cross Church Special Parish Assembly. Father Houssig did so amid a host of unnecessary remarks.

Father Mampre moved to the next item on the agenda "Proposal of Diocesan Council" outlining three specific conditions that the Diocesan Council expects and proposes that the Parish Assembly order:

1. The Parish council to faithfully abide by the Diocesan By-Laws.
2. The Parish Council execute the directive of the Primate and Diocesan Council.
3. The Parish Council pay in full the Diocesan Assessment as approved by the Diocesan Assembly.

Mr. Ghevont Shahmelikian took the floor and asked that the Diocesan Representatives tell the assembly what they know about Canadian laws pertaining to charitable organizations.

Mr. Armen Kurkjian asked for "point of order" and proceeded to refute point #1 above stating that the Diocese wants the Parish to work against the Canadian Government Laws. Then he proceeded to refute the remaining two above items. Father Mampre informed him that he asked for "point of order" and stepped out of line by making a speech and this would not be tolerated.

Ghevont Shahmelikian once again challenged the Diocesan Representatives to tell what they know about the Canadian Law. Father Mampre said he intended to do that before he was interrupted by Armen Kurkjian.

Father Paren pointed out that above and beyond the monetary obligation to the Diocese, the Holy Cross parish has moral obligations to the Diocese, neither of which the parish is willing to abide by.

Father Mampre made reference to Edward Chapien's (attorney for the Diocese) letter of February 2, 1981 to Canadian Department of National Revenue - Taxation Section explaining the organization of the Diocese, how it operates, the services it renders and how assessments are levied.

Response again from Ghevont Shahmelikian was "we ask you to tell us about the law - you read us letters."

Father Mampre then read Revenue Canada - Taxation letter of April 1, 1981, to Edward Chapien in which it is stated:

"We note your contention that these 'Diocesan dues' are payment for 'services rendered' and would advise that, if this is the case, such would be an acceptable practise for an organization registered pursuant to the relevant provisions of the Canadian Income Tax Act. However, there seems to be some doubt as to whether or not 'services' are being purchased in this situation, as evidenced by a letter sent to us by the Canadian charity dated August 21, 1980. If in fact 'services' are being rendered to the Holy Cross Armenian Church by the Diocese, it will be necessary for the Canadian church to verify this contention, and to maintain sufficient records to substantiate that such 'services' have been purchased, and purchased at a reasonable cost."

Dr. Vartan Aynajian, in a most belligerent manner, quoting the recommendation relative to Holy Cross Church from the minutes of the 79th Diocesan Assembly pointed out that Edward Chapien, our attorney, was on record as opposing the motion. He continued that this in itself was testimony that the Diocese wanted the Church to act contrary to Canadian Laws. (A number of comments and accusations were made by him very vehemently.)

Mr. Hovhannes Kouyoumjian stated that intent is not to challenge the Diocesan Council but Diocese must realize that Canada is not the United States. Perhaps a wrong was done by going to the Revenue-Taxation Department, but it is done, so now we have to deal with it.

Father Mampre emphasized that the Primate and the Diocesan Council have never implied or attempted to influence any disobedience to civil law anywhere in Canada or the United States.

Comments: A number of derogatory and insulting remarks and statements were made in blaming the Primate and Diocesan Council for all their troubles. Attitude toward Diocese is one of disregard and disobedience. It was apparent that majority of those present were influenced by Kurkjian-Aynajian et al.

Armen Kurkjian continued to refer to their not receiving a list of services and values thereof from the Diocese; and he confronted Father Mampre to give a "yes or no" answer to a conversation at a meeting on January 7, 1982 at the Prince Hotel, Toronto in His Eminence's room - present at the meeting were the Primate, Fr. Mampre Kouzouian, Fr. Houssig Nishanian, Armen Kurkjian and Ghevont Shahmelikian - regarding a statement made by him (Kurkjian) "Submit a bill for \$17,080 and we will pay." (The bill to itemize services and values thereof.)

Armen Kurkjian referring to their letter of January 20, 1982 to the Primate and draft of letter to Revenue Canada stated that since permission was denied to send the drafted letter, let the Diocese deal with the Canadian Government as per the Diocesan statement that they will handle these matters, not the Parishes. The burden of proof is on the Diocese.

Mr. Yeghia Torosian expressed conciliatory feelings and stated that there should be giving in on both sides to settle these matters - especially in dollar matters.

Father Mampre emphasized that obedience is the essence of the matters and not the dollar values. He cited where: "There have been instances in our Diocese where Parishes have been financially unable to pay assessments and have requested the Diocesan Council to make adjustments and they have been made. If Holy Cross Parish was in a similar situation we would have considered a similar adjustment."

Jirayr Hanemyan, Armen Kurkjian, Vartan Aynajian and others on several occasions indicated that they distrust the Diocesan Council, they ask:

- for documents from the Canadian Government stating it's all right to do as the Diocese asks.
- to show us your contentions in the By-Laws.

They stated:

"How can we trust you when you do not want to help us, you are allergic to us."

Armen Kurkjian stated:

- Diocesan Council was going to meet in Toronto in January and they cancelled for unknown reasons.
- The Regional Meeting in Niagara Falls was cancelled.

They were looking forward to these meetings but they never happened and this all leads to distrust.

Father Paren stated that when a parish speaks to its parent, in this case the Primate and the Diocesan Council, through a lawyer, then there is distrust on the part of the parish council. When the parish has to have a list of services, and reasonable costs thereof, it is humiliating to the church hierarchy and, therefore, it is an intolerable condition.

Father Mampre explained to the Assembly that during the last three years we have been discussing these issues with the Parish Council to no avail. These same issues have been raised over and over with ample explanation by the Primate and Diocesan Council. It seems to me, said Father Mampre, that there is no use in continuing these same conversations over and over again.

Armen Kurkjian and Vartan Aynajian alluded to the fact that other Canadian Armenian Churches either are or are going to be in trouble with the Canadian Government.

Father Paren declared the Holy Cross Parish and the Parish Council dissolved.

As the Diocesan Representatives prepared to leave, many uncomplimentary remarks were made to them, particularly by Vartan Aynajian and Armen Kurkjian and many others.

Armen Kurkjian vehemently admonished the Primate and Diocesan Council in attempting to appoint any individuals as interim parish council. Further, he vociferously advised that any official communication relative to the dissolution had better be signed by each member of the Diocesan Council.

The Diocesan Council representatives and Fr. Houssig Nishanian left amidst a boisterous and threatening scene again being pressured into "one-on-one" difficult situation through the corridor.

Observations:

1. There are people of good will in the community who do not want to be disobedient to Diocesan authority or see that their Parish is dissolved.

There were some sensible and caring individuals who wanted the Church to continue to provide services to its people.

2. The immediate past and present Parish Council and leadership of this community is in the hands of individuals who for selfish motivations deliberately misinform and misguide the faithful.

Recommendations:

1. A circular letter be sent immediately to all the people of the former Holy Cross Parish informing them of the action taken by the Diocese and the immediate plans of the Diocese for these people.
2. All elected bodies of former Holy Cross Church remain dissolved as per Diocesan Council decision of February 19, 1982 - Second Session meeting.
- 3a. The Holy Cross Church remain dissolved as per Diocesan Council decision of February 19, 1982 - Second Session meeting.
- 3b. The following individuals of the Holy Cross Church of Toronto should be suspended for 10 (ten) years from the privileges of being elected to office in the Armenian Churches under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.

This tentative list of names is subject to changes, additions or deletions:

1. Armen Kurkjian
2. Dr. A Vartan Aynaciyani
3. Ghevont Shahmelikian
4. Jirayr Hanemyan
5. Levon Comlekciyan
6. John Fenerjian

4. To immediately charge the Pastor of the former Holy Cross Church, Father Houssig Nishanian, to look for a suitable Church to continue liturgical services to the Scarborough area Armenians.
5. To assign the following individuals to temporarily assist Fr. Houssig Nishanian in his ministry to the community.

The following names are tentative and are subject to changes, additions or deletions:

1. Bedros Mushian
2. Antranig Zakarian
3. Khachig Kouyoumjian
4. Tavit Varjabedian

6. The Diocese to immediately allocate and pay stipend and allowance to Father Houssig Nishanian.
7. Immediately inform the parishes of our Diocese and our Diocesan Delegates of the decisions and the actions taken by the Primate and the Diocesan Council regarding the former Holy Cross Parish of Toronto.

8. Immediately inform the suspended members of the former Holy Cross Church of Toronto of their future status within the Armenian Church under the jurisdiction of our Diocese.
9. The Diocese consider immediately retaining a qualified Canadian attorney.

Zarvin Kasparian
Secretary

Father Paren Avedikian
Presiding Officer

Fr. Mampré A. Kouzouian
Chairman