

Blessing Graduates and Celebrating America 250

By Dr. Gary Zamanigian

A spirit of joy and gratitude filled the sanctuary of St. John Armenian Church on Sunday, June 14th as parishioners gathered for a special blessing of this year's high school and college graduates and a special prayer for the 250th anniversary of the independence of America.

The blessing of graduates commenced during the Divine Liturgy as alumni were invited forward to receive their benison, to celebrate the hard work, dedication, perseverance and faith that carried each one to achieving this significant milestone. Fr. Aren reminded the graduates that God's guidance does not end with their educational achievement, it is the beginning of new opportunities to continue to serve, lead, and grow, to shape their steps into the years ahead. His message centered on purpose, calling and the courage to follow God's direction in every season of life.

Following the church service, a formal slide presentation, prepared by Lisa Mardigian, featured all the student's names parishioners submitted to the church, the institution from which they graduated and their plans for the future – the graduates recognized were:

High School Graduates

Graduate	High School	Future School
Nicholas Baylerian	Brighton High School	Michigan State University
Sophia Bergeron	South Lyon East High School	University of Michigan
Sofi Dakessian	AGBU Manoogian High School	Michigan State University
Hiyk Ghazarian	AGBU Manoogian High School	University of Michigan
Niklas Gustafson	Berkley High School	Michigan State University
Lili Hovhannisyan	AGBU Manoogian High School	University of Detroit Mercy
Aylana Jamardova	AGBU Manoogian High School	Oakland University
Alex Kazarian	Northville High School	Michigan State University

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Marissa Kazarian	Northville High School	Michigan State University
Lauren Kachikian	Marian High School	Syracuse University
Haiganoush Rasho	AGBU Manoogian High School	Education in Pediatrics
Gabrielle Suarez	Seaholm High School	Michigan State University
Ethan Tiffany	Seaholm High School	Michigan State University
Kayleigh Yessayan	AGBU Manoogian High School	University of Michigan
Lulu Yessian	Groves High School	San Diego State University

College Graduates

Graduate	College	Future Plans
Isabelle Akarakcian	Michigan State University	Career in Advertising
Sophia Kazarian	Michigan State University	Teaching grades 3-6
Armen Oknayan	University of Michigan	Career in Business
Nadine Shoushanian	Michigan State University	MSU-COM Medical School
Franziska Winkler	Michigan State University	Civil Engineer at WSP
Artyom Vardanyan	University of Michigan	Create a Company
Jacqueline Zoryan	University of Michigan	U of M - Master's Degree

Sunday, June 14th was also the day designated to offer a special prayer at the conclusion of the Badarak to celebrate and respectfully acknowledge the United States of America's 250th Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The prayer, authored by the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church, was more than a ceremonial gesture, it was a profound expression of gratitude to the nation that became a refuge, a home, and a new beginning for generations of immigrants arriving on its shores seeking safety, dignity and the chance to rebuild their lives.

For Armenian Americans, whose collective memory carries the weight of genocide, civil war, revolution and ethnic violence, this anniversary is not only a civic milestone, it is a spiritual moment that binds together the themes of survival, faith and renewal. The prayer spoke to the heart of the Armenian Christian experience in America. It

honored the nation that welcomed Armenians fleeing catastrophe, while affirming the enduring faith that sustained them through the darkest chapter of their history—unequivocally their nadir. It was especially meaningful to our families whose journeys to America were shaped by trauma and displacement: The Armenian Genocide survivors rebuilt families and churches and their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren now fill Armenian churches across the United States; the Persian, Lebanese, Syrian and Iraqi Armenians fled their native land because of sectarian violence, civil wars or revolution to reconstruct their lives in America and with them they brought new cultural energy; and Baku and Sumgait Armenians sought refuge after being the target of anti-Armenian pogroms, to seek peace, security and stability.

The service expressed three intertwined themes:

- 1) It acknowledged the blessings of freedom, safety and opportunity that the nation has offered Armenians for more than a century and asked God to continue guiding the country's leaders and citizens toward justice, compassion and peace.
- 2) It recognized that America became a sanctuary where Armenian faith, culture and identity could flourish
- 3) It asked for God's protection over our church, for unity among the faithful and for spiritual vitality to continue to thrive for generations to come.

By offering this special prayer to celebrate the 250th Anniversary of the Independence of the United States of America in every parish under one cross, one faith and one shared gratitude, the Diocese affirmed that the Armenian Church has been the spiritual anchor of the diaspora, that faith and civic gratitude can coexist harmoniously, that the Armenian story in America is a sacred one and that the church remains the guardian of memory and the guide to hope for Armenian Americans.