

St. John Armenian Church Women’s Guild: Simply Over the Top

Contributor: Linda Jevahirian

Some say the St. John Women’s Guild is the heart and soul of our church - the nurturers; the preservers; the wardens of the walk-in. Quite literally – that fridge in the kitchen where the elements of water and salt combine to create the loving taste of all things Armenian. Fundraising, fellowship, community outreach and more are stuffed into a twelve-month sequence that never stops giving. At its core the Women’s Guild weaves our heritage together in a way that cannot be unwound. What they accomplish is just simply, *over the top*.

Fundraising

Delicious bake sales take place on Palm Sunday, at the church picnic on the Feast of Assumption of the Holy Mother of God, at ArmeniaFest, at the church bazaar, before the holidays, and during Christmas when homemade boxed cookies are sold every other year. One after the other - same scenario – same dedication - an endless supply of delicacies from their own kitchens, or from their *bake shop* in the church kitchen where they mix, roll, package and label from January to December.

Finally, come one, come everyone to the church bazaar – *the all-star sale of the year*. Armenians emerge from all four corners of the Detroit area to buy, eat and enjoy. Out of that walk-in comes the sou boreg, choreg, gata, khalka, nazoug, spinach and meat pies, and more. After months of labor the masterpiece is a sellout.

Fellowship

Following a new tradition that began in 2023 at St. Sarkis Armenian Church, the women of the four churches meet for a repast solely for mingling, meeting new friends and bridging the gap between communities. In 2024

the meeting was at St. John Armenian Church and on October 11, 2025 it will be at the Armenian Congregational Church.

New and existing members are welcomed and honored at a yearly membership dinner – a gracious feast on the house. Ninety people attended in 2025, and eight new members were installed. Members of 10, 20 and 25 years receive gifts, and members who have reached the age of 90 receive a special honor.

During the summer, members of the Guild get together for an educational and cultural outing followed by lunch. It's a day of leisure to socialize, learn something new, and *take a day off*. In 2025 members toured the Guardian Building in Detroit. In 2024 they toured the historic Edsel and Eleanor Ford house in Grosse Pointe.

Family

For those far away college students, the Guild prepares loving care packages for each one of them. In 2025 one hundred and five boxes were carefully packed with choreg, sweet treats, a cozy hat, a travel mug, a prayer book, and a \$10 Starbucks gift card. The thoughtful gesture reminds our students that their church community is always thinking of them.

The *Khunjook* held on the first day of Sunday School is an afternoon featuring food and exciting activities for kids of all ages. Bouncy houses, arts and crafts, cotton candy, popcorn and ice cream blend together in a festive afternoon focused on pure, old-fashioned family and fun.

Traditions

An Easter Tea is held after Sunday Badarak every year. The Guild prepares a welcoming table of Easter eggs dyed and donated by members, choreg, fruit, cheese and sweets. After the clergy perform a home blessing the

church hall explodes into a giant celebration of egg cracking and chocolate bunnies.

Saintly Women's Day takes place yearly. In 2025 the Guild honored St. Gayane, one of the first female Armenian martyrs. Gayane Grigorian, a refugee of the 2023 exodus from Artsakh, gave a special presentation drawing parallels between her forced migration and the ill-fated plight of St. Gayane. Guild members kindly took up a collection of needed items and gift cards to help Gayane and her family with their relocation to Grand Rapids.

Once a year the Guild gathers for a day of remembrance and prepares a Hokehankist Tea. Members meet after Badarak in the church hall to greet family and friends with tea, coffee and sweets.

On April 24 when the four churches come together for Armenian Martyrs' Day the Guild prepares a donation of choreg, cheese, paklava or grapes. Occasionally there is a special project, and in 2025 the Guild prepared a delicious Sunday brunch for the ACYOA Sports Weekend in Detroit.

Advent by Candlelight is hosted every other year in December. The church hall lights up with individually decorated candlelit tables after which participants enter the sanctuary for a musical program of love, hope, joy and faith. On rotating years, they host a Christmas party for members and guests.

Outreach

In 2025 the Social Concern Committee held a cereal drive at the membership dinner. They collected \$620.00 for milk, and 202 boxes of cereal for the Children's Hospital summer school breakfast program. The committee also makes fleece blankets that are donated to various organizations, such as Children's Hospital and Manoogian Manor.

For the past twenty plus years the Guild has assembled 150 holiday gift bags for Alternatives for Girls, a shelter in Detroit. Bags include personal hygiene items, small gifts, jewelry, makeup, socks, gloves and knit hats. The shelter gives the bags to neighborhood girls who are at risk, encouraging them to ask for support and guidance.

The knitting group meets once a month (fall, winter and spring) to make blankets, hats and scarves for Trinity Health Oakland. Father Aren Jebejian also takes these items to the new babies he blesses at hospitals.

Five times a year, the Guild takes freshly baked choreg on visits to Manoogian Manor – a treasured community. Clergy and the Komitas Choir celebrate the five holy feasts and offer holy communion to residents.

Recently, the Guild welcomed and helped furnish an apartment for Father Vazgen Antreasyan (clergy intern), Yeretzgin Tiruhi and their son Hovhannes. They also took up a collection and provided essential items for Hovhannes, such as a car seat, a stroller and a toddler's bed.

Armenia

Helping the needy in Armenia is never a forgotten cause. The Guild sponsors a child who is now thirteen years old, through the Children of Armenia Sponsorship Program (CASP). They also send supplies to Mer Doon, a home for girls that provides education, and job and vocational training. Support for the Vanadzor Old Age Home is offered indirectly through the Women's Guild Central Council.

The Organization

The St. John Armenian Church Women's Guild is a chapter of the Women's Guild Central Council of the Eastern Diocese. The local chapter includes an

executive board and three delegates elected by the members in November and installed in January. The board meets regularly during the year, and the delegates attend the yearly Central Council Meeting at the Diocesan Assembly. Committees are organized by members who support and carry out projects and activities. All women of the church are invited to join and become part of an organization that works and plays from the spirit of the heart.

Membership

To inquire about membership, please contact Donna Lafian lafiando@trinity-health.org or (248) 943-3150. Dues are \$25.00 per year and can be paid at <https://stjohnwomensguild.square.site/membership> or sent directly to the church. The link will also take you to the calendar of events and the monthly newsletter.