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Torchbearer

ST. JOHN ARMENIAN CHURCH NEWSLETTER

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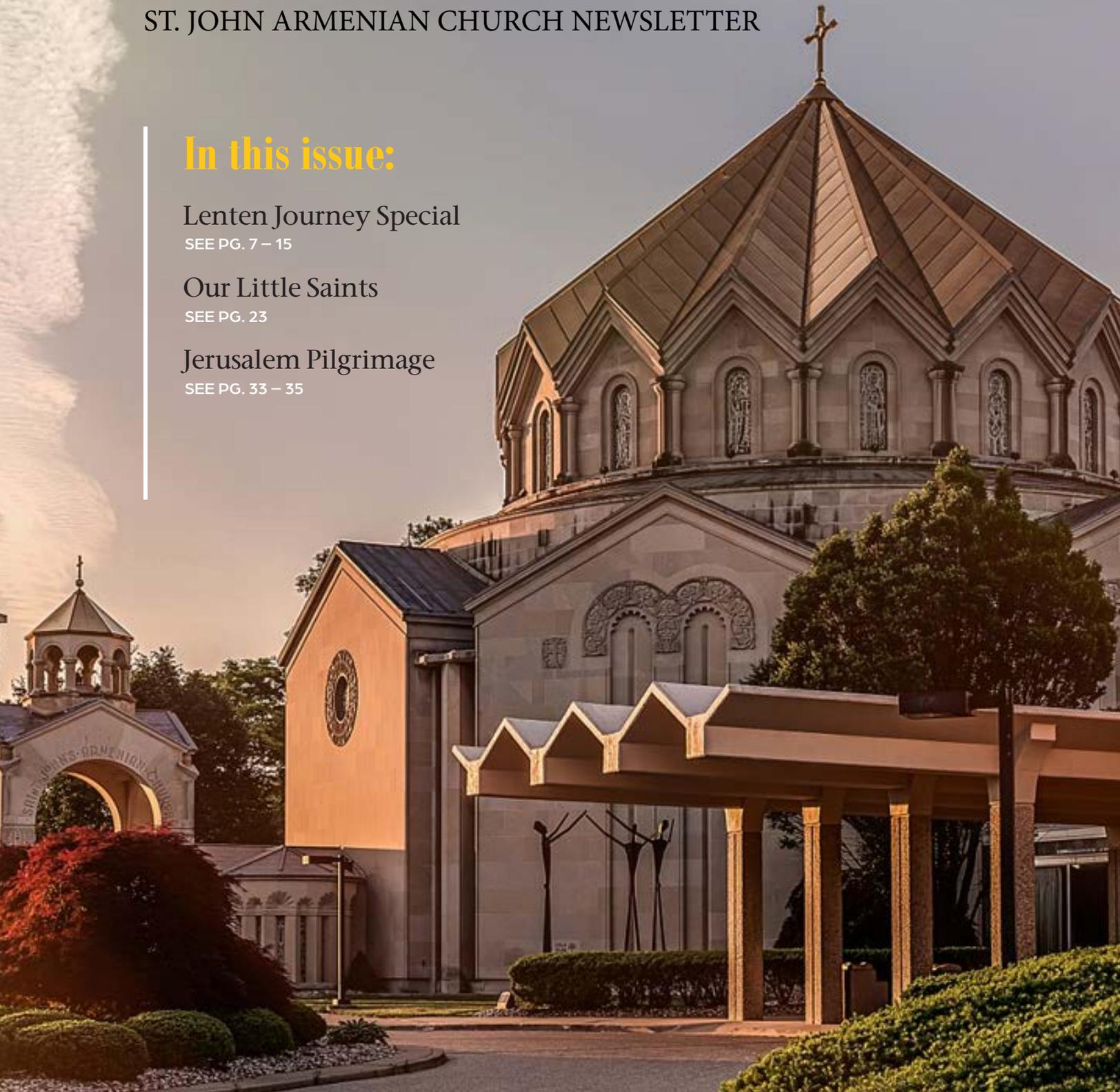


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Torchbearer

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Mission Statement

The mission of *Torchbearer* is to inform every Armenian about the Armenian Church and her spiritual mission. The *Torchbearer* is an extension of the mission of St. John Armenian Church. The *Torchbearer* will provide knowledge and information about the Armenian Apostolic and Orthodox Church, her history, theology, sacraments, services, hymns, mission, the understanding of the Bible and Holy Tradition.



Forgiving and Accepting Each Other

Dear friends, perhaps many times we ask ourselves the following question when we are faced with forgiving or accepting someone:

“Why do I have to forgive or accept someone?”



The answer is, to forgive and/or accept a person means to reinstate a bond of love and intimacy when there has been a disagreement. Sin breaks our bond with God and others.

When the relationship is broken with other people among us, we have a habit of objectifying and judging them, not noticing them as individuals, but only as entities of our anger and harm. This is a sinful action as Christians. In today’s world, most of us categorize other people in terms of their wrongdoing against society and us. Antipathy is an illness that can destroy us if we do not forgive or accept others; it will open the way to damage our bond with others.

Forgiveness and acceptance means observing the transgression or sin and reestablishing a connection of love. It does not mean to rationalize the wrong manner or accepting it as right, nor does it mean rationalizing one’s lifestyle, manner, or immoral personality.



Our Lord’s forgiveness of us and our misdeeds against Him are unrestricted and absolute. Our Creator never rejects us, or bears anger or hate against us. God’s intention is not to punish us; rather, by distancing ourselves from God, we punish ourselves and impute this punishment to Him. When we ask God for forgiveness, we welcome His love and acceptance, grace and kindness. We cannot ignore our nature; the world that we live in today has lots of parts and it is not easy to put all the pieces together.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we all notice that lack of forgiveness and biased attitudes are the most severe battle of today’s world. Hatred builds up faster today than in any other time in the history of the world. Most people are becoming more selfish with one another and cannot clearly see the other person for who they really are.

Finally, to have a genuine faithful spirit of forgiveness and acceptance means to be truly open to one another, despite the wrongs and sins. If we could do this, there is nothing that cannot be healed in this world.



Fr. Ardash

We need your participation in a readership survey for The Torchbearer!

Below is the link for a short readership survey! We would like your opinion on the newest incarnation of our quarterly parish newsletter. With your help, we can continue to improve this document that is so important in St. John’s outreach ministry. It will only take a few minutes! Thanks for your help!

FILL OUT SURVEY HERE: www.bit.ly/3poPtK4



Highlight of the February 26, 2023 Parish Assembly

Dear Fellow Parishioners,

I would like to thank everyone who was able to share their valuable time to participate in this year's Parish Assembly. As Stewards of the Church, you not only determine who will be elected to key decision-making positions within the Church, such as Parish Council members and Diocesan Delegates, you also set the tone and provide guidance for how these groups will incorporate your wishes into actions for the coming year.

Past decisions to proceed with major projects (like our Renovation and Support Organization) only came about through majority vote approvals of the Parish Assembly. Approving our future budgets and spending plans are also a vital part of our Parish Assembly process. The Parish Council is required to have an approved budget, like this session's approved 2023 Budget, in order to be empowered to administer the needs of the Church for the coming year. This process is more crucial than some may realize. Our Church, in addition to ensuring that the spiritual and religious needs of the congregation are nurtured, must also deal with the structural and physical needs of a 25,000 ft² facility with nearly 20 employees. Needs that are similar to those of a decent-sized company which must be properly and carefully managed to ensure it maximizes the benefit to all of our parishioners.

Either fortunately, or unfortunately, the Diocesan Bylaws require parishioners to be Stewards of the Church for the privilege of being a part of its highest level decision making body. Contrary to popular belief, it's the Parish Assembly – not the Parish Council!

- Unfortunately – because being baptized in the Church or the mere act of a devoted desire to seek God within the walls of our Sanctuary should give people the ability to suggest ways to better our service to God and His people. It should, and it does!! Anybody can provide feedback to our clergy and Council members any day of the week.
- Fortunately – because there are no barriers to becoming a Steward and voting member of the Church. It's logical that someone given the ability to drive decisions that guide our future should be willing to at least make this minimum commitment. There are no burdensome monetary requirements that would inhibit someone from becoming a Steward.

If someone wishes, becoming a Steward can cost less than the price of the gasoline required to drive to Church. It merely requires making a donation from the heart, a gift between the parishioner and God. It doesn't even require an immediate donation. A Pledge Card commitment to donate will suffice – just fill out a card, put it in an envelope, and drop it off at the Church. Even if someone cares nothing about voting or actively guiding the Church's future, Stewardship is also an affirmation that people care about the fellowship and service the Church provides to all parishioners, and many others in need, through its various ministries. This also includes the facility resources required to do so – from the staff that support us and the use of our kitchen equipment (which is steadily being upgraded), right down to the very furniture we sit on in our meetings, fellowship teas and other events. The more people we have taking an active role through Stewardship, the better we can serve people both inside and outside the Church. If anyone reading this article has a good reason for not becoming a Steward, please call me at 248-303-9744 or talk to me in Church. We are very interested in understanding your point of view and any improvements we can make.

The main highlight of this past Parish Assembly was when our Stewards were invited to come to the microphones to say whatever moved them regarding the good works being done by our Affiliate Organizations, Parishioners and the Church in general. It was truly a feel good moment and an inspiration to see these great efforts continue. We need this to be a standing process for all future meetings!

Another highlight of the meeting was the first-ever implementation of electronic voting in an in-person Parish Assembly. We've done this successfully in our virtual Special Parish Assemblies, but this was our first initiative to wean ourselves off of the paper ballot process. We actually had a hybrid system this year that utilized both electronic and paper ballots. Electronic voting provided instantaneous and accurate election results and affirmed the need to move as close to 100% electronic voting as possible to improve efficiency and reduce overall meeting time. Rather than increase the length of this article, election results can be found below.

Lastly, we discussed ensuring that Town Hall meetings will be scheduled, in advance of Diocesan Assemblies, to ensure parishioners are aware of the agenda items and can provide comments. A Town Hall is already scheduled near the end of April, before the May 5th Diocesan Assembly. Also, as it relates to Town Halls and Parish Assembly meetings, there was a request to have comments from these gatherings to become agenda items for all subsequent Parish Council (PC) meetings. Rest assured that all major parishioner meetings have been immediately followed by a PC Agenda topic to recap the meeting results. This has been a standard practice for at least the last four years that I've been Chair and we will continue to follow this process in the future.

Thank you again for all of your support and participation for the betterment of our Church and our community.

Regards,

Michael Toomajian

Parish Council Chair

Annual Parish Assembly 2023 Election Results

Parish Council

Jim Berryman
Dn. George Boyagian
Peter Egigian
Sarkis Ghazarian
Kim Najarian
1st Alt. - George Derderian
2nd Alt. - Dr. Gary Zamanigian

Diocesan Delegates

Howard Atesian
Roseann Manoogian Attar
Dn. Rubik Mailian
Jacqueline Melkonian ElChemmas
Michael Kazarian
Edward Korkoian
Greg Mamassian
1st Alt. - Harry Kezelian III
2nd Alt. - John Yavruian

Nominating Committee

Melanie Boskovich
Yerchanig Joy Callan
Serena Egigian
Dn. Richard Norsigian
Judy Parks (Chair)
1st Alt. - Harry Kezelian III
2nd Alt. - Marina Terterian

Auditing Committee

Terry Parks
Alt. - Edward Bedikian

Special thanks to Laura Negosian Lucassian for filling the position of Chairperson of the Day and Linda Jevahirian for Secretary of the Day.

Keeping Us Safe!

By Patricia Fantazian, Cathy Sarkesian Zwinck
Contributors

Dear Parishoners,

Among the many priorities of the Parish Council, pastors and administration of the St. John Armenian Church (SJAC), one of the most important has always been the safety and security of everyone worshipping, working and visiting our large campus. It is unfortunate in these times today that places of worship continue to be areas of safety concern. Fortunately for St. John's, we currently have security teams consisting of dedicated parishioners, in addition to our paid security guards, who have consistently volunteered their time.

In 2013, the Parish Council decided to establish an emergency evacuation and safety plan at St. John Armenian Church. Cathy Sarkesian Zwinck began the process of researching and setting up a system to protect the St. John campus. Methods were established through education and training of Parish Council, clergy, teaching staff, building staff, ushers, students and parishioners. Safety routes and procedures were presented through church publications and in-person training sessions.

In October and November 2013, practice fire drills and tornado drills were conducted involving the entire community with the priest, deacons, ushers, teachers, and Parish Council members each fulfilling their leadership roles to enable the safe and efficient movement of people to appropriate locations. A system for efficient communication was also established through the purchase and use of walkie-talkie radios. This enabled everyone to communicate effectively about events and to avoid confusion and panic in real life emergencies.

These security measures remained in place and through the efforts of Parish Council, Patricia Fantazian and the current security committee, the process continues to be updated and implemented.

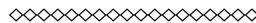
For more than five years now, we have done our best to make St. John less vulnerable than other gathering places. As you may already know, SJAC was awarded a security grant by the Michigan State Police Emergency Management and Homeland Security Division through the Department of Homeland Security Nonprofit Security Grant Program. The grant was written by Martin Toomajian with the assistance of our Parish Administrator, Paul Andonian. Under specifications of the grant, security upgrades were completed at SJAC in 2022. As part of the terms of the contract, our dedicated team, along with the SJAC affiliate organizations, received security training from a security expert, who interfaced with the Southfield Police Department, to provide the training. The grant also paid for additional security cameras, remote locking doors, and other building enhancements to increase our security. Also in 2022, SJAC was approved for a second security grant to further increase our protection. David Najarian has coordinated the schedules of the volunteer parishioners each week. Both Martin and David have been integral parts of our security equation over the last five years.

Please note that while there is no specific threat to our church or community, we appreciate your cooperation as we continue our efforts in keeping SJAC a safe place for all of us!

In view of recent events in schools, places of worship and public places in our state and elsewhere, the SJAC administration feels it is important that our community be aware of the plans and methods we have undertaken to secure our campus for all who visit us.

THE LENTEN JOURNEY
TO THE **GLORIOUS RESURRECTION**
OF **OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST!**

A LENTEN SPECIAL SECTION: PG. 7 – 21



By Dn. Dr. Aram Sarkisian
Contributor

The tradition of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church forges a journey through the period of Great Lent that is both individual and communal. It is personal in its constant call for introspection and spiritual transformation. Yet it is also communal in its very different invitation to worship, with a closed curtain and altered pattern of services, all of which emphasize the constant work of Christian repentance. Individually and communally, we follow a forty-day path towards Holy Week, and finally to Soorp Zadig, the Feast of Easter. This issue of the Torchbearer looks back at the opportunities made available to us at St. John Armenian Church in 2023, a time of emergence out of the global pandemic, culminating in celebrations of Holy Week and the Glorious Day of Resurrection which reminded us all of how far we have traversed. Join us as we retrace the steps of our community's journey this Lenten season!

Poon Paregentan 2023

Lisa Mardigian
Youth Coordinator

On Sunday, February 19th our parish hosted a *Poon Paregentan* celebration to kick off the Great Lenten season. Families enjoyed fun food booths of soups by our Men's Society; salads by Crispellis; Armenian foods by Christine Andonian, Basmagian Bakery, Anahit Toumajan and Anna Tokmajyan; sliders and desserts while listening and dancing to the Nigossian Band. The children loved cookie decorating too! Thank you to all those who contributed and volunteered their time to make this a successful event!



The Lenten Rest Service Reflections: *The Seven “I Am” Statements Uttered by Our Lord Jesus Christ*

By Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian
Assistant Pastor

The theme chosen for the “Reflections” offered at the conclusion of the Wednesday Lenten Rest Services for 2023 was the seven “I Am” statements uttered by Jesus as found in the *Book of John*.

Jesus’ “I am” statements would have particular significance to the first-century Jewish listener. God had revealed Himself to Moses with a resounding “I AM” (Exodus 3:14). Jesus used the same words to describe Himself (Exodus 4:26; 6:20; 13:19). These phrases are worthy of reflection not only during the Lenten period, but throughout the entire year.

Below is a list of Our Lord’s seven “I am” statements, as well as where they can be found for your reflection in the *Book of John*.

“I am the bread of life.” (John 6:35, 41, 48, 51) As bread sustains physical life, so Christ offers and sustains spiritual life.

SPEAKER: REV. FR. ARMASH BAGDASARIAN

“I am the light of the world.” (John 8:12) To a world lost in darkness, Christ offers Himself as a guide.

SPEAKER: DN. RUBIK MAILIAN

“I am the door of the sheep.” (John 10:7,9) Jesus protects His followers as shepherds protect their flocks from predators.

SPEAKER: V. REV. FR. AREN JEBEJIAN

“I am the resurrection and the life.” (John 11:25) Death is not the final word for those in Christ.

SPEAKER: MICHAEL TOOMAJIAN

“I am the good shepherd.” (John 10:11, 14) Jesus is committed to caring and watching over those who are His.

SPEAKER: CORRENE AKARAKCIAN

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6) Jesus is the source of all truth and knowledge about God.

SPEAKER: CHRISTINE SANTORIAN

“I am the true vine.” (John 15:1, 5) By attaching ourselves to Christ, we enable His life to flow in and through us. Then we cannot help but bear fruit that will honor the Father.



ACYOA Prepares Wednesday Lenten Dinners

The ACYOA, under the direction of Youth Director, Lisa Mardigian and with the help of tireless volunteers and parents, provided delicious Lenten Dinners each week except the Wednesday of a sudden winter snow storm. They provided a meaningful opportunity for worshippers to gather and break bread after the moving Lenten Rest Services.





Left to right: Gia Andonyan, Leah Baharozian, Lula Yessian, Haiganosh Rasho, William McCausland, Sevag Ghazarian, Layla Kujawa, Areg Mailian and Rebecca Magee

Sharing the Warmth and Encouragement!

The high school students of the St. John Armenian Church School have been making blankets for a service project. On Sunday March 12, V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian blessed the blankets before they were delivered to Fleece & Thank You, a local non-profit organization that provides children facing hospital treatments with these colorful, comfortable fleece blankets and a video message of support. Thank you to our students for their service to our community!





Komitas Choir Gives Lenten Performance



The Komitas Choir presented a selection of songs in the tradition of Lent, both in Armenian and English, following the Lenten Fish Dinner, Wednesday, March 22 in the Church Sanctuary.

Rev. Fr. Diran and Yn. Rosalie Papazian

28th Annual Parish Retreat



Guest speaker, His Grace Bishop Vahan Hovhannessian, PhD

By Elise Papazian and Anne Marie Ameriguian, MD Contributors

Our beloved annual Lenten Parish Retreat was held in person, after two years of pandemic Zooms, at St. John Armenian Church on March 25, 2023. Guest speaker, His Grace Bishop Vahan Hovhannessian, PhD presented the topic: “Conversing with God Through Scripture: Inspiration, Revelation, and Canon”. Very Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian and Elise Papazian welcomed guests and introduced Bishop Vahan, touching upon his extensive literary and ecumenical contributions across the globe. The day included a continental breakfast, a lovely Lenten lunch, and ended with a short church service.

Bishop Vahan began by encouraging Armenian Christians to examine the scriptures. A prayerful practice must include reading the Bible, immersing yourself in the presence of God, and allowing dialogue with God. What necessitated the writing of scripture? Bishop Vahan related that at the time of creation there was no need for the Bible. Adam and Eve were in direct conversation with God, living peacefully in His presence. Following Adam and Eve’s sin, it was impossible for God to cohabitate with them, necessitating the creation of the Bible. God has not abandoned us. God converses with us in scripture by voluntarily divulging aspects of His being, will and love through revelation (*Haydnoutyoun*). Scripture describes God’s revelations to us via direct contacts, human intermediaries, dreams, audio contact, visions, and miraculous signs.

Inspiration (*Nershunchoum*) is the process of being mentally receptive to perceive Holy Spirit stimulated truth. There is synergy between God’s revelation and human inspiration to articulate the divine revelation in written form to current and future generations. Inconsistencies in scripture do not

detract from the purpose of the recordings to provide future generations awareness of God’s covenants with their forefathers. These covenants unfold God’s plan for our salvation through Christ, establishing the New Covenant.

Next, Bishop Vahan presented an overview of the *Book of Revelation* (Apocalypse). “Apocalypse” means to disclose something that is not accessible. Apocalyptic literature, a genre of symbolic writing, thrives whenever faith is persecuted. Through imagery, it reflects the local culture and traditions of the people, assuring the content is not accessible to outsiders. The *Book of Revelation* is a revelation from God: a partially prophetic vision about the end of the world. The inspired visual revelation John witnessed was an invitation for John to record and share it with the seven churches he supervised as Bishop of Asia Minor and later, to the entire world.

How does The *Book of Revelation* apply to the Armenian Church today and Armenian Christians? *Revelation* is not in our lectionary. We believe the message of Christ has been preached through the Gospels, the Book of Acts, and the Epistles. Revelation reassures that despite the coming of the world’s end, Christ will be victorious. It is a book of warning; be careful, Satan is doing his best to attack, deceive, and deter us from our faith. With the destruction of this world, we who remain faithful will ultimately be rescued by Christ, and will enjoy eternity with loved ones who superseded us, the saints, and Jesus Christ.

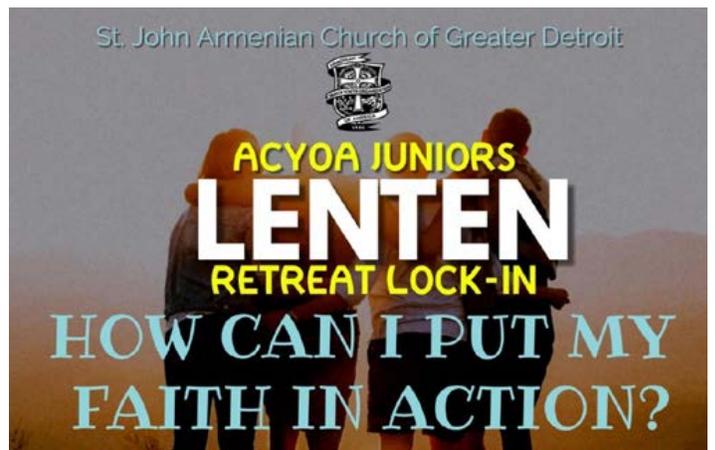


St. John’s beloved Rev. Fr. Diran and Yn. Rosalie Papazian, namesakes and inspiration of the annual Lenten Retreat.

ACYOA Juniors 2023 Lenten Retreat

Lisa Mardigian
Youth Coordinator

On Friday evening, March 25, our ACYOA Juniors began a Lenten retreat and lock-in. The theme of the retreat was “How can I put my faith in action?” Fourteen young adults enjoyed an evening which included a spiritually uplifting movie, a late evening Rest Service and affirmation circle led by our pastor, V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian and fellowship time. The participants departed Saturday morning after their breakfast and a morning service celebrated by our assistant pastor, Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian. Thank you to our pastors, chaperones and church staff for their help in making the retreat a safe, fun and enjoyable time for all!



PALM SUNDAY



Procession into the Cultural Hall for the annual ACYOA Day Tea



Procession with the palms



Blessing of the palms by His Eminence, Archbishop Paren Avedikian



Opening of the Gates service.



Vesting demonstration for the Church School before the procession.



Carole Hovsepian, Paulette Apkarian, Marilyn Dadian, Michelle Samarian Ducato, Nicole O'Donovan, Jacqueline El Chemmas, Linda Tiffany



The Annual Women's Guild Palm Sunday Bake Sale always provides all the delicacies to make your Easter complete!



HOLY TUESDAY

The Ten Wise and Foolish Maidens



“The parable of the Wise and Foolish Maidens (Matthew 25:1-13) is the focus of Holy Tuesday. Ten maidens waited for their bridegroom (in the custom of that time and place, the bridegroom would fetch the bride from her parents’ home to bring her to his own). Five of the women foolishly took their lamps with no extra oil and when the bridegroom was delayed, could not go out and meet him. The wise maidens went prepared and joined him in the marriage feast. Similarly, we must pray and wait, in a state of perpetual preparation to receive Christ.”



This year the young ladies participating were Elizabeth Apkarian, Katherine Apkarian, Ariana Ashkarian, Laura Ashkarian, Anya Bell, Sona Bell, Sosi Callan, Kira Hagopian, Madeline Mardigian and Chloe Sahakian.

The quoted citations provided in this special section on Great and Holy Week (Avak Shapat) and Easter are taken from the website of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church.

www.armenianchurch.us/the-lord/easter-and-holy-week

HOLY WEDNESDAY



On Holy Wednesday worldwide in the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church we remember how “a fallen woman anoints Christ with costly oil and kisses his feet. The apostles chastise her for wasting oil that could have been sold to help the poor, but Christ defends her action, perceiving her deed as one of devotion, and knowing that this anointing anticipates His upcoming death and burial.”

At St. John, this day is marked by the Prayers for Healing Service, where prayers are offered and water is blessed and distributed in hopes of healing us spiritually and personally.



HOLY THURSDAY



Washing of the Feet

“Another episode at the Last Supper is recalled during the evening service on Holy Thursday. “The Washing of the Feet” ceremony commemorates how Christ washed the feet of His apostles, setting an example of humility and love.”

This year, Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian washed the feet of current and former members of the Parish Council and Diocesan Delegates: Howard Atesian*, James Berryman, Dn. George Boyagian, George Derderian, Harry Kezelian III, Edward Korkoian, Dn. Rubik Mailian, Greg Mamassian, Dr. Edward Sarkisian, Robert Simonian*, Kazar Terterian, Michael Toomajian. (*pictured)

Betrayal and Passion of Our Lord

The Thursday commemorations conclude with “the service called *Khavaroom* (Darkness). Before He was arrested, Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane and endured in solitude the agony of His impending death. Six sets of laments are chanted, each followed by a Gospel reading depicting Christ’s betrayal, imprisonment, torture, trial, sentence, and crucifixion. Twelve lit candles, 11 white and 1 black (representing Judas), are extinguished in pairs.”

Joining our pastors for the Great and Holy Week services were Deacons Rubik Mailian, George Boyagian, Onnig Boyajian, Sdn. Harry Kezelian III and visiting St. John for Easter were Deacons Dr. Aram Sarkisian and Mihran Toumajan.

GREAT AND HOLY FRIDAY



“Holy Friday is the most solemn and sad day of the Christian calendar. The Crucifixion Service, usually held at midday, recalls the suffering, execution, and death of our Lord, memorialized amid readings from the Psalms. In the evening, a white tomb is placed in the chancel of the church

for the Entombment or Burial Service. The tomb is adorned with flowers and during the service is taken in procession around the church. As the faithful leave the church they approach the tomb, kiss the Gospel book, and take a flower in remembrance.”



GREAT AND HOLY SATURDAY



At St. John, a Church School Mid-day Service is celebrated where our young people and their families receive Holy Communion and then greet the Easter Bunny while enjoying refreshments.

“On Holy Saturday, also known as the Easter Vigil, the mystery of salvation in the Resurrection of Christ is celebrated. The church is dark, its lights are dim. Then the great verses from Isaiah 60 are read: “Arise, shine; for your light

has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you”- at which point the lights are suddenly turned on. The dramatic, joyful candle-lighting ceremony is called *Jrakalouytz*.”

Following *Jrakalouytz*, our families adjourn to the Cultural Hall for a sumptuous dinner to begin the joyous celebration of the Resurrection.



EASTER SUNDAY



“Finally, Easter Sunday celebrates the joy of the Resurrection and the promise of salvation for all humanity. Armenian Christians around the world exchange the Easter greeting:

ՔՐԻՍՏՈՍ ՅԱՐԵԱԲԻ Ի ՄԵՆՆԵԼՈՑ: ՕՐՀՆԵԱԼ Է ՅԱՐՈՒԹԻԻՆՆ ԶՐԻՍՏՈՍԻ
Christ is risen from the dead! Blessed is the resurrection of Christ!”

Following our services at St. John, we process into the Cultural Hall where we celebrate the House Blessing Service followed by the much-anticipated annual Women’s Guild Easter Tea! We cheerfully and loudly greet each other with the good news in several languages and the children receive their chocolate crosses from our pastors.

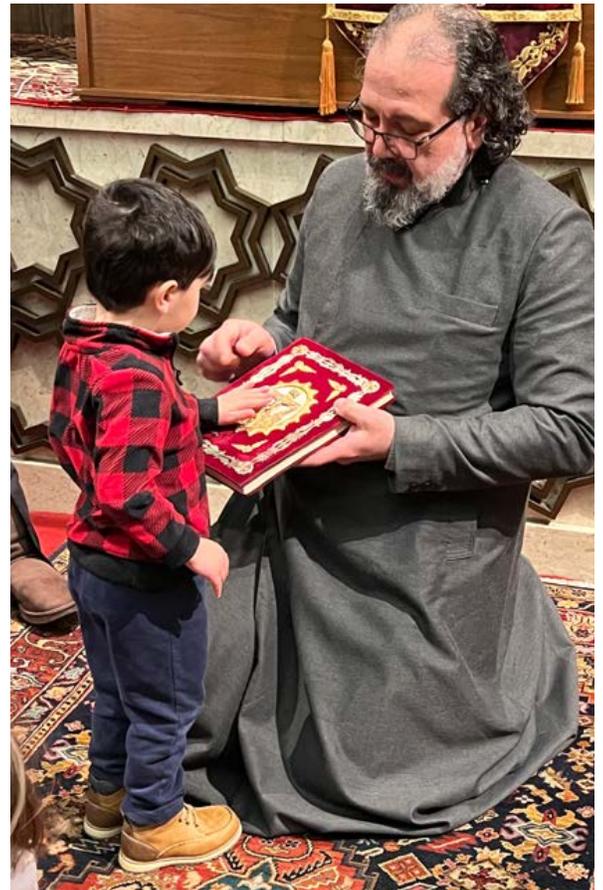
The Great Lenten Journey to the Glorious Resurrection is complete!

St John's Youth Basketball Program

By Lisa Mardigian
Youth Coordinator

During the months of October to March, St. John's sponsors a basketball program for the youth of our community from the ages of 5-18 years which is a source for the OYAA basketball league. Coach Rich Apkarian runs our biddy basketball skills practice for over forty kids each Thursday evening. Thank you to Chelsea Acho and John Hagopian for their commitment to our Biddy C team (7-8 years.) Coach Dikran Callan and Coach Lisa Mardigian led our Biddy B teams (age 9-10 years); Coach Kevork Mardoyan ran the Biddy As (11-12 years); Coach Armen Arslanian and Coach Royce Acho led our Junior Boys (13-15 years); Coach Aram Cholakian and Coach Peter Crane coached our intermediate boys (16-18 years); and lastly, Coach Maral Thomas coached our Junior girls team (13-18 years). St. John's pastors and parish council thanks all our volunteers for their time and commitment to our youth basketball program.





Faith, Hope, Love, Baptism...then what?

St John's Littlest Parishioners!

By Jennifer Morris
Contributor

On the third Saturday of each month, our youngest parishioners gather with their families for a one-hour program called Little Saints. But, do you know how this ministry developed six years ago? Well, let me tell you! Fr. Aren recalls, "One day, after submitting the number of baptisms in our parish to the Diocese, it occurred to me that we were leaving a very important thing to chance: that a parent would register and drop off their child to Church School four years after celebrating their baptism. There was a missing link in the care of our beloved, youngest members of the Church, and that needed to change." From these initial thoughts, our pastor, the V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian, gathered a group of parent volunteers, Sara Sarkisian Bell, Jennifer Morris, Knar Cal-

lan Pifer, and Linda Yarjanian, and called us to action along with the support of our assistant pastor, Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian and youth coordinator, Lisa Mardigian. During our initial meetings we worked together to brainstorm and think through the details and needs of this new program to foster an environment where our young families felt comfortable in the sanctuary with all of the sights, sounds, and smells of our holy place of worship.

Little Saints is now a one-hour, monthly program that contains four segments: open play; thematic art project; clergy-led lesson with a church connection; and sights and sounds of the sanctuary. Currently about a dozen families attend each month, and Little Saints is now a thriving reality that fosters a community of Christian fellowship.

LITTLE SAINTS
CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE



My daughter, Grace, began coming to Little Saints before she could even walk or talk, and has since graduated on to Sunday School. While we no longer attend the Saturday morning gatherings, it was important to me that the framework and foundation of the lessons we created continued on for others to benefit from year to year. So, as a longtime diocesan employee and former teacher, I created a *Little Saints Guidebook* with twenty-four monthly lesson plans based on the liturgical calendar that could be repeated every two years, along with twelve additional lessons that were used on Zoom during the pandemic to keep our families connected from home. I knew that this program we created could also benefit other parish communities, so we shared it with all of the clergy and youth workers of the Eastern Diocese, and several parishes have since developed their own Little Saints ministry.

What began as a grassroots effort to bridge the gap between Baptism and Sunday School, has flourished into a ministry that brings children and their parents together each month under the dome of the Church. Together, they are learning about their faith and growing closer to God. We invite you to join us!



For more information, or to be added to our mailing list please email sjlittlesaints@gmail.com.



Mary Ohanyan was presented by her parents, Artur Ohanyan and Rima Aghekyan along with proud big brother Michael for her Fortieth Day blessing On February 5, 2023



The Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord to the Temple is always 40 days after Armenian Christmas. This year on February 12, unbaptized infants were presented to our parish and His Eminence, Archbishop Paren Avedikian and Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian blessed them.

Blessings from above...

By V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian
Pastor

In each coming issue we will focus on a different “Blessing from above....”

On a daily basis, we are abundantly blessed by God in various ways. Sometimes we don’t see these blessings and sometimes we do. Do we understand or realize the blessing we have in front of us each time we look down on our tables and see food? In any case, whether we realize these blessings or not, God does not turn away from us.

There are times in our lives when we go out and actively seek God’s blessings. A wedding, a baptism or even a home blessing might be one of these occasions. We may think that these occasions are limited, however when we delve deeply into our wonderful church’s history and traditions, the blessing services are nearly unlimited.

Amongst the many services of blessing is the Feast of the Presentation or *Diaruntarach*. On this feast day, we remember when Joseph and Mary took the Christ child to the Temple, as was Jewish custom, forty days after a child’s birth. This beautiful tradition continues today when parents take their newborn children to church in order to present and dedicate their child to God. It is based upon the gospel passage in Luke 2:25-32. We are reminded that Simeon the Elder was promised by God, through the Holy Spirit, that he would not see death until he had seen and laid his eyes upon the Messiah. When Simeon the Elder saw Christ in the temple he was quoted as saying,

“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for the glory to thy people Israel.” (Luke 2:29-32).

The Armenian Church commemorates this feast forty days after Christ’s birth. If Christ is born on January 6th, then this particular feast day falls on February 14th. That’s right. February 14th is not Valentine’s Day in the Armenian Church, but rather the Feast of the Presentation. Amongst the many feasts in the Armenian Church, this particular one is what’s known as a “non-moveable” feast. In other words, no matter what year or the day that the 14th falls on, it is always the exact day of the 14th.

We encourage all couples with newborn children to bring and dedicate their children to God. It is not an exact science though. In this country we encourage parents to bring their children (especially around February 14th) to church on the closest Sunday. Otherwise, if February 14th is a few months away, the church encourages parents to bring their child around forty days after their birth. Sometimes this is thirty-five days, sometimes it’s forty-two days and sometimes it’s fifty or sixty days after their birth. In any case, parents should call the church office and make arrangements with their pastor prior to coming to church.

This and many more traditions and customs bring God into our lives as we recognize His blessings from above. For more information, click following link: www.bit.ly/3oEPj5



George Saboonjian and Dan Cristiano display the tasty trays during 'pick-up' after church in time for the big game!

Mezza Trays for Celebrating Super Bowl LVII

By George Saboonjian
Contributor, St John's Men's Society

Basterma, brick cheese, spinach pies, *eetch*, *hummus*, *sarma*, pita bread, pickled turnips and garnishes, along with award winning Armenian wines and Armenian beer – all part of the “must-have” game time fare offered by the St. John Men’s Society for Super Bowl LVII fans Sunday, February 12.

Dan Cristiano, Harry Dulger, Kazar Terterian, Tony Janigian and Paul Yousoufian contributed their time and talent assembling and distributing the beautiful trays.

Members of our church community are encouraged to serve our church as well as participate in the outreach programs sponsored by Men’s Society.

“Come and join fellow Christians.”



“Come shop with me!”

The St. John Parish Bookstore is open and waiting for you!

The best selection of Armenian books and CDs plus many gift items:

- Jewelry
- Armenian crosses
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- Table runners
- Tablecloths
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- Shawls
- Scarves from Armenia
- And much more!

Open Sundays after Divine Liturgy and Monday through Friday during regular Church Office hours

248.569.3405



The Komitas Choir: Why Do They Sing?

By Linda Jevahirian and Gary Melikian
Contributors

The Komitas Choir serves the parish in multiple ways besides singing.

- Their summer *Arts of Armenia* program offers a unique cultural exchange between Armenian educators and the next generation of Armenian - American youth and helps them understand and appreciate the visual and performing arts of Armenia.
- They periodically visit residents of Manoogian Manor for song, prayer and fellowship.
- Along with the clergy, they celebrate the Divine Liturgy at the mission church in Windsor.
- They sing in the April 24th commemoration service along with members from the three Armenian churches.
- They serve food at the Annual Bazaar.
- They host artists from the community for parish enrichment.
- They gather each year for a summer picnic and a Christmas dinner which brings together choir alumni, family and friends.

But why do they sing? The Bible references singing or song many times.

*“Let the words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts and make you wise.
Use his words to teach and counsel each other.
Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts.”*
(Col. 3:16)

There are thirty-six references in Psalms, including Psalm 13:6:

I will sing the LORD’s praise, for he has been good to me...

Clinical research shows that while singing the brain releases endorphins and the hormone oxytocin to reduce anxiety and stress and enhance feelings of trust and bonding. Singing also lowers weight. One hour of singing is equal to fifteen minutes of jogging. If you sing while you are standing, you will lose more calories.

Singing is a mindful activity. When you are singing you are fully focused on it. This allows you to turn off your stream of consciousness and be completely in the moment, eliminating negative and distracting thoughts and instead focusing on the sound, the action, the breathing, the feeling and the pleasure of song.

“Music expresses that which words cannot.” The journey into the hymns of the Badarak (the Divine Liturgy) and the many services of the church is a treasure trove. Getting to know the church through her hymns is like opening an envelope of our entire religious history.

People often ask if it is hard to learn the hymns because they themselves do not speak Armenian. Singing the hymns is not about speaking Armenian. It is about worshipping in the mother tongue of the Armenian church, Kurapar - an ancient language through which we express our religion and faith. Come to one of our rehearsals and see. If you can read words phonetically and hum a tune you can do this!

CHOIR

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE



Gomidas Liturgy

“Throwback Sunday” takes place once a year in the fall. This is reminder of our past when the Badarak was sung to candlelight and without accompaniment. The choir sings the Gomidas version of the liturgy as an alternative to the Yegmalian Liturgy which is sung on regular Sundays.

The Komitas Choir Celebrates their New Choir Room!

The choir has a brand-new room on the main level where they can practice and prepare for services. Eliminating the stairs and the need to set the room up each week is so convenient! The choir expresses extreme gratitude to the renovation team through a \$7,000 contribution to the parish.

A Selection of Songs in the Tradition of Lent

The choir presented a nightcap of Armenian and American music in the church sanctuary following the Lenten Dinner on March 22, 2023. The songs were in keeping with the Lenten theme and the Seven Last Words of Christ.

The choir assembled in the middle aisle of the sanctuary led by Deacon Rubik Mailian and accompanied by Arshaluys Gharibian on the piano and on the organ. A few of the songs were sung in Armenian. Vaughn Masropian narrated some of the lyrics. A solo was also sung by Annette Mamassian. The songs were breathtakingly beautiful.

December Concert

The choir will host the Bellissima Handbell Choir in a Christmas Concert on December 3, 2023, at 4:00 pm.

Join the Choir

Members of the Komitas Choir remain honored and blessed to serve the St. John community under Director of Sacred Music and Pastoral Assistant, Deacon Rubik Mailian. Singing praises provides spiritual, social, and physical well-being. The choir invites all parish and community members to join them and share in that growth and wellness, because that is why they sing!



If you can identify the individuals in the photo as well as the year, please inform any choir member.



Organist Arshaluys Gharibian and choir director Dn. Rubik Mailian next to the organ at the St. John Armenian Church sanctuary.

The Sounds of Worship and Music: Meet Arshaluys Gharibian

By Alice Argnian and Ardis Gregory
Contributors

When we attend *Badarak* on Sunday mornings at St. John Armenian Church, the deeply moving organ music fills our ears. The Komitas Choir, directed by Deacon Rubik Mailian, is accompanied by the organ as we sing, pray, and meditate to this beautiful liturgical music.

The person playing the organ is Arshaluys Gharibian who joined us in February, 2021. She was born in Yerevan, Armenia, where her family encouraged her to study music including the piano and violin. Her education and training are extensive. She obtained two Bachelor's Degrees in Music from Romanos Melikyan State College, Yerevan and from Wayne State University, Detroit; a Master's Degree from Yerevan Komitas State Conservatory; and Teaching Certification from Eastern Michigan University. She also took lessons at University of Michigan with Ms. Marilyn Mason, world-renowned organist.

Arshaluys came to the United States in 2002, having previously resided and worked in Beirut, Lebanon, where she taught Music Theory at the Music College. She lives in Farmington Hills with her husband, and her two daughters, and is currently employed as music director and teacher of general music at Our Lady of Good Council Catholic School in Plymouth, Michigan. In her spare time, she likes to jog and enjoys listening to good music of renowned orchestras and performers. Arshaluys is fluent in English, Russian, and Armenian, which enhances her musical background and experience as our organist. As she executes the responsibilities as organist, she feels it is a fulfilling experience to perform Armenian sacred music. "I am so grateful to work with Deacon Rubik and with the Komitas choir", says Arshaluys.

The Komitas Choir, Deacon Rubik, and our organist lead our worshipers, both Armenian and non-Armenian alike, through our sacred liturgical music which brings us closer to the Lord. We are blessed to have these dedicated people bring us together every Sunday through worship and music.

Women’s Guild Celebrates Sainly Women’s Day 2023

By Carol Cholmakjian
Contributor

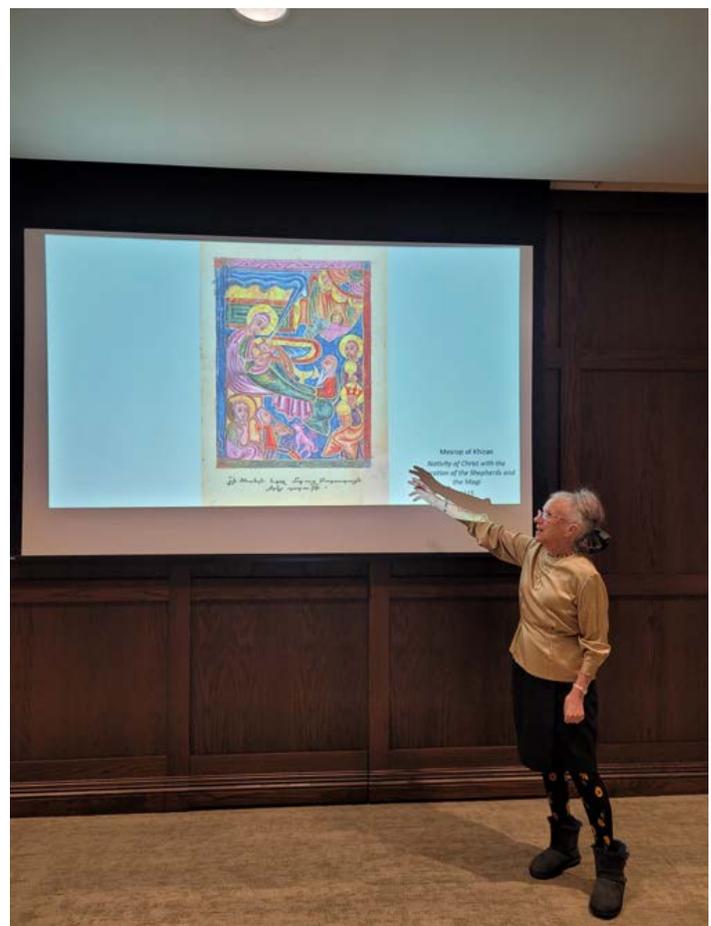
Every year in March, Women’s Guild honors saintly women. And even a snowstorm of up to 10” couldn’t deter a dedicated group of thirty-one members and guests from attending a lecture by art historian Wendy Evans on “Sainly Women in Art.”

Co-chaired by Carol Cholmakjian and Yerchanig Joy Callan, the program began with a short church service led by pastor V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian who discussed our relationship with art and the divine. We then gathered in the Vartan Room for a delicious Lenten buffet luncheon of grilled vegetable or hummus and *tabouli* roll-up sandwiches, *vospov kufteh*, green salad, popcorn, and cut-up fruit, made by Joy with help from Marianne and David Dardarian. Afterwards, additional guests joined us for the lecture.

Ms. Evans has advanced degrees from Oxford University in England and Wayne State University in Detroit. She has taught Art History and is a long-standing volunteer at the Detroit Institute of Arts. Wendy tailored her lecture to our interests, beginning by comparing St. John’s altarpiece by Zubei Kachadoorian to an Italian statue from 1225. None of us had noticed the bird in baby Jesus’ palm until Wendy’s slide showed us an extreme close up.

She referenced Saints Hripsime and Gayane, and ended the program with a piece she said was the most beautiful of all: an illustrated manuscript from 1615 by the Armenian artist Mesrop of Khizan, currently in the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. Wendy gave us insights into fifteen pieces of art from around the world and encouraged us to “treat a piece of art like a prince; let it talk to you first.”

In the end, during questions and comments from the audience, one former teacher said, “After your presentation, I know that I will never look at another piece of art the same way!”



Art historian Wendy Evans giving insight to a 17th century Armenian gospel illumination by Mesrop of Khizan



St. John Armenian Church Altarpiece



Naghash Ensemble with Music Guild members. Back row: Aramais Nikoghosyan, Tigran Hovhannisyan, Harutyun Chkolyan, John Hodian, Tatevik Movsesyan, Hasmik Baghdasaryan, Arpine Ter-Petrosyan Front row: Vaughn Mesropian, narrator, Martin Shoushanian MG, Greg Mamassian, Annette Mamassian MG, V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian, Dn. Rubik Mailian MG, Violet Cholakian MG, Diane Ekizian MG, John Yavruian MG

The Sound of Ancient Armenia *Reinvented For The 21st Century*

By Violet Cholakian
Contributor

“Endeavor to pray and stay awake. Open the eyes of your soul and see what is to come.”

These are the profound words of the medieval Armenian poet and priest Mkrtych Naghash in his poem, “Passing is the Glory of This World”. A unique trait of Mkrtych Naghash, forced into exile, is the use of language in his meditative poems which address worldly issues of the elite and underprivileged, wealth and power, sin, death, judgement - the consequences in the spiritual realm.

The text describes the grim plight of people forced to live in exile. Armenian-American composer, creator, director John Hodian was inspired by the text to which he combined his music with the earthly spirituality of Armenian folk song, new classical music, contemporary, and the energy of jazz and rock. “The words leapt off the page and into my soul. I knew I had found my text,” Hodian said. For inspiration, he started exploring ancient monasteries and sacred places in Armenia. It was in a temple in Garni that he heard the mesmerizing voice of soprano Hasmik Baghdasaryan. He had a singer and a text, which led him to the creation of The Naghash Ensemble. The Ensemble features three of Armenia’s finest musicians and three highly regarded female vocalists, with Hodian on the piano.

At times the text was difficult to understand because it is written in medieval classical Armenian. Even with a brief

narration before each selection, it was Hodian’s music and the performers, which translated the text with their voices and instruments.

In the opening selection, “Mediation on Greed,” the amazing voices of sopranos Hasmik Baghdasaryan, Tatevik Movsesyan and alto Arpine Ter-Petrosyan, performing in solo or trio, was perfection. The *a capella*, contrapuntal voices soared in flawless harmony.

In the poem, “If in This World by Sin You Wander,” the musicians journeyed you through the struggles of man between good and evil with sudden rhythmic changes and masterful instrumentation - the haunting, soulful *duduk* performed by Harutyun Chkolyan, the articulation on the *oud* by Aramais Nikoghosyan, the powerful rhythms of the *dhol/dumbeg* by Tigran Hovhannisyan and John Hodian’s passion on piano.

Despite the weather on Friday, March 10, the Cultural Hall was overflowing with concert goers and seating was added to accommodate everyone. “This was an unforgettable evening!” “I felt Hodian’s interpretation of Armenian music with the text, the beautiful blending of voices, and talents of the instrumentalists – Bravo!” These ovations were heard throughout the evening at a lavish afterglow reception at which the Naghash performers were greeted. The concert was sponsored by the St. John Music Guild whose mission is to present a wide variety of genre/repertoire, performed by high-caliber musicians, and this concert by The Naghash Ensemble exceeded that. Thank you to the community who continues to support our endeavors.



Garry Javizian, Dr. Gary Zamanigian, Assembly State Director John Jamian, Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian, Senator Gary Peters, Richard Norsigian, Phillip Mooradian. Present but not pictured: Assembly State Chair Corinne Khederian, Dr. Gary Assarian

The People of Artsakh Held Captive

St. John Parishioners Meet with Senator Gary Peters (D-MI)

By Dr. Gary Zamanigian
Contributor

On January 18, 2023, several St. John parishioners were among a group of Greater Detroit Armenians invited to meet with Senator Gary Peters (D-MI) to discuss the humanitarian crisis in Artsakh as a result of Azerbaijan's blockade of the Lachin corridor, which began December 12, 2022. Senator Peters, in his opening remarks, clearly stated that he was present to gather information from Michigan's robust Armenian community and return to Washington, D.C. to make every effort to help the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Next, Armenian Assembly State of Michigan Director, John Jamian, eloquently expressed the concerns of all Armenians with an emphasis on the United States providing immediate humanitarian assistance to the Armenians affected by Azerbaijan's state sponsored policy of terror.

Everyone present was then given an opportunity to comment. Some of the main talking points were the removal of the blockade to allow free flow of movement and transport, as well as the unfettered supply of gas and electricity to the residents of Artsakh, along with holding Azerbaijan accountable for obstructing a civilian population's access to food and essential goods and ensure that Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act be fully enforced thus preventing any United States military assistance to Azerbaijan.

Prior to the meeting's conclusion, Senator Peters said that the information he obtained was extremely useful and he pledged to do everything possible to be of assistance to the people of Artsakh.

The series of articles "The Armenian Genocide Continues" which appeared in the *Torchbearer* a few years ago were eerily and unfortunately prophetic for the Armenian people. Azerbaijan's objective is to remove all Armenians and any trace of Armenian Culture from Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) by making life so miserable and living conditions so unbearable that the people leave the geographic area they and their forefathers called home for centuries.

Especially during this critical time all Armenians should become "Rapid Responders", for no fee whatsoever, with one of the two Advocacy Groups in Washington, D.C. that work with Members of Congress on key legislative issues to support Armenia and Artsakh. Simply Google the organization of your choice and register; your responses do count with our Senators and Representatives.

The ongoing and worsening suffering and deprivation the people of Artsakh are enduring is one more nail in the strategic coffin prepared by Armenia's enemies; the possibility of another genocide cannot be dismissed. The overt warnings and threats looming overhead make it obvious where this dark wind is blowing. We must, without exception, keep in mind that complacency and indifference further enable the enemy.

A Personal Plea From Our Youth!

By Natalia Seta Afacanyan
Contributor

In today's world, where everyone has become so disconnected from reality, my friends Axsel Ozdamar, Jesse Agop Afacanyan, and I, Natalia Seta Afacanyan, wanted to come together in bringing awareness and our community together. My friends and I are 12 years old, and members of St. John Armenian Church in Southfield, MI.

We love our church in so many ways because we are given chances and are heard rather than being dismissed. As young adults, our voices matter. Our pastors have helped bring our community together and have given us opportunities to help others.

Currently our families support the Motor City Mittens Mission (MCOMM) charity that helps give to those who are in need. Every week more than 100 meals are prepared and personally delivered to the homeless.

There is so much we want to do to help bring awareness about those who are in need. Unfortunately in reality not everyone is lucky to have everything in life and we hope to help humble our youth and help them to be appreciative.

Anytime our community can come together so that we can help put a smile on someone's face, give hope for a better day, look forward to uplifting someone, and help them pos-

sibly get back on their feet again. That one guaranteed meal is one thing less that one person has to worry about.

We were completely heartbroken when recently in downtown Detroit we saw all those helpless people sleeping outside on the ground, no beds, no blankets, wet, cold, and even hungry. Even more sad, with nowhere to go or someone to turn to. It was then we knew that we had to step up and do something.

There is so much we can do for all these people. The key thing is not to judge them for whatever reason that it was that played a role for where they are today, but to give them hope and lend a helping hand. We wanted to reassure them that they are not alone.

With my best friend Axsel Ozdamar and cousin Jesse Agop Afacanyan we hope to help bring awareness to one of the best missions that our families love to support: Motor City Mittens Mission.

As all of us know: "No one ever leaves an Armenian kitchen hungry!"

Together we are strong,

If you would like to contribute to this wonderful charity please make donations to: *St. John Armenian Church Men's Society MCOMM*.

Thank you.



Note from the editor: The *Torchbearer* is pleased to share this letter because we are proud of the young people of our community who continue to be an inspiration to all of us to support the work of a very worthy program, the Motor City Mitten Mission.



St. John Pilgrims Celebrate Christmas in Jerusalem

Donna Lafian
Contributor

Sixteen pilgrims from St. John Armenian Church, led by V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian, made an unforgettable pilgrimage January 15 -23, 2023 to Jerusalem, to celebrate Armenian Christmas in the Holy Land. The Armenian Church uses the Julian calendar in the Holy Land, which is why Christmas is celebrated there at this time.

As a pilgrim in the Holy Land, we had the opportunity to live and walk in the steps of Jesus and witness firsthand many of the sacred Biblical sites, the birthplace of Christianity, and where our Lord Jesus Christ was born, baptized, performed miracles, was crucified, and resurrected.

This is a summary of our trip, as each day brought new adventures and experiences.

Day 2: We visited the Mount of Olives for the best views of the Old City; Church of the Pater Noster, the site where Jesus taught his disciples *The Lord's Prayer*, which has plaques inscribed in 130 languages including Armenian. We visited the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran Caves where there are ancient manuscripts that were discovered between 1947 and 1956 in eleven caves near Qumran by a wandering shepherd. We drove a few miles up the road to the Dead Sea, which is the earth's lowest point, and the world's deepest salt lake. Because it is so salty you can actually float on the water and the mud contains minerals that are known to have healing powers.

PILGRIMAGE
CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE



A private audience with the Patriarchs: Naera Haghnazarian; Ann Marie Egigian; Erika Palaian; Garooneh Haghnazarian; Levon Abrahamian - Tour Guide; Mary Boyadjian; His Beatitude, Archbishop Nourhan Manougian, Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem; His Beatitude, Archbishop Sahak Mashalian, Patriarch of Constantinople; V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian; Elise Papazian; Terry Parks; Elaine Mardirosian; Mark Mardirosian; Donna Lafian; Sharon Maraian; Serena Egigian; Judy Parks; Terry Palaian

Day 3 and 4: On Armenian Christmas Eve, we went to the Armenian Patriarchate to watch the Patriarch leave for the procession from the Armenian quarter to Bethlehem. The Palestinian police on horseback led the Patriarch's procession until it reached Bethlehem. We were blessed to be part of this procession. The chimes of the Church of the Nativity echoed through Bethlehem as we walked toward the church. We climbed up to the rooftop by the bell tower and had a beautiful panoramic view of Bethlehem. We visited the Chapel of the Shepherd's Field where the angels' announcement of Jesus' birth to the shepherds took place. We ran into an east coast Armenian group on a pilgrimage and Fr. Aren and His Grace, Bishop Vahan Hovhanessian sang a beautiful hymn from the morning service. Their melodious voices echoed through the church with the impressive acoustics. At 1 am, we attended morning service at the Church of the Nativity where Archbishop Nourhan Manougian gave his Christmas message and then we descended into the grotto where Jesus was born.

Day 4: We had the privilege of a private audience with His Beatitude, Archbishop Nourhan Manougian, the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem and the Patriarch of Constantinople, His Beatitude Archbishop Sahak Mashalian. They spoke about the presence of Armenians in Jerusalem and responded to questions that we had about Jerusalem.

Day 5: We took a beautiful two-hour ride North and visited the Church of the Beatitudes where Jesus is believed to have delivered His *Sermon on the Mount*. We went on a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee, where Christians believe Jesus walked on water and fed the masses with loaves of bread and fish. We drove up Mount Tabor on a long narrow winding road to the Church of the Transfiguration where the

transfiguration of Jesus took place. We visited the Basilica of the Annunciation where the Angel Gabriel visited Mary and delivered the invitation for her to bear God's Son. We drove to Cana to The Sanctuary of Our Lord's First Miracle, where Jesus performed his first miracle by turning water into wine at a wedding feast.

Day 6: We visited the newly renovated Mardigian Museum, which showcases Armenian culture and explains our centuries-long connection to the Holy City as well as a memorial to the Armenian Genocide. We attended services at St. James Cathedral. The cathedral has five chapels within it and the head of Saint James the Great and the body of Saint James the Lesser are buried here. Interesting fact, the oil lamps and candles are the only source of light, because there is no electricity in that church. We also visited the Church of the Holy Archangels where Jesus was taken and imprisoned.

Day 7: We visited the Tomb of the Blessed Virgin Mary near the Garden of Gethsemane where the mother of Jesus was buried, and then on to the Church of the Agony of Jesus where Jesus suffered His passion before He was betrayed. We drove to the Jordan River where we watched the Patriarch perform the Blessing of the Waters Service. This represents the baptism of Our Lord Jesus Christ, declaring Him the Savior. We explored the Old City of Jerusalem, which is divided into four quarters, Armenian, Muslim, Christian and Jewish. We walked on the narrow cobblestone streets jam packed with people. Within the walls is a maze of shopping in the bazaar (Old City Market) where you can purchase all kinds of local souvenirs and fresh spices, and we enjoyed hot freshly baked bread with *za'atar* and baked *knafeh*.



At the Jordan River where the Patriarch performed the Blessing of the Waters Service

PILGRIMAGE
CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

At 3 am, we participated in the *Badarak* at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the location of the Tomb of Christ, during which Fr. Aren was the celebrant. Three major Christian communities serve as the custodians of the church, the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholics and the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church. All three celebrate liturgy there daily at specified times. The Armenian *Badarak* is held daily at 3 am and if one *Badarak* service is missed the Armenians lose their rights. The Holy Sepulchre is one of the most holy sites

in all of Christianity. Jesus was crucified, buried, and resurrected there. As our journey came to an end, we pilgrims enjoyed a last supper together when we reminisced about our week of traveling in Jesus' footsteps. We also surprised Fr. Aren with a birthday cake to celebrate his birthday!!

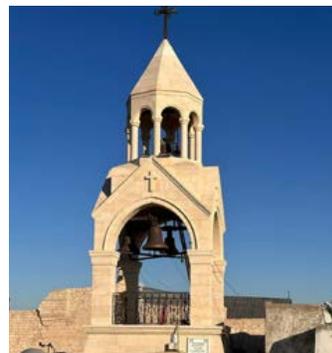
All Armenians, if able, should go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It is spiritually uplifting and strengthens your faith and connection with God.



Fr. Aren at the Holy Sepulchre



Grotto of the Nativity



Church of Nativity Bell Tower



Pater Noster Hayr Mer



Sea Of Galilee



Shopping Spices Old City



Old City Shopping Jaffa Gate



St James Cathedral

Links • Links • Links

We hope that you enjoyed exploring the links that were provided in the last issue of *The Torchbearer*. Our hope is that you will find interesting and thought provoking information in them. Below, you will find information on some of the sites that will be provided and spend some time investigating them on your own. If you have a site that you would like to share, please send the link to us for consideration. sjatorchbearer@gmail.com



In 2023 Armenians everywhere will commemorate the 850th anniversary of the passing of St. Nersess of Shnorhali. Please refer to this link for the Pontifical Encyclical from His Holiness Karekin II, the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, on this occasion. The encyclical is available for download in both English and Armenian
www.bit.ly/3nfoYNx



The Feast of Pentecost / *Hokehkalousd*; two names, but the same Feast for the Armenian Orthodox Church
www.bit.ly/41Gxwiq



Who was St. James of Nisbis?
www.bit.ly/3LBhCjT



A unique look back at the Battle of Avarayr – a video from the Diocese Archives Vault
www.bit.ly/3Nk4ikY



For our Russian readers: An informative look at our diocesan Cathedral in New York City
www.bit.ly/3oOIuE6



For a limited time, Johns Hopkins University Press is providing free access to the digital editions of its journals, including the *Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies*. Read it online on Project Muse.
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Editor's Notes

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