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Torchbearer

ST. JOHN ARMENIAN CHURCH NEWSLETTER

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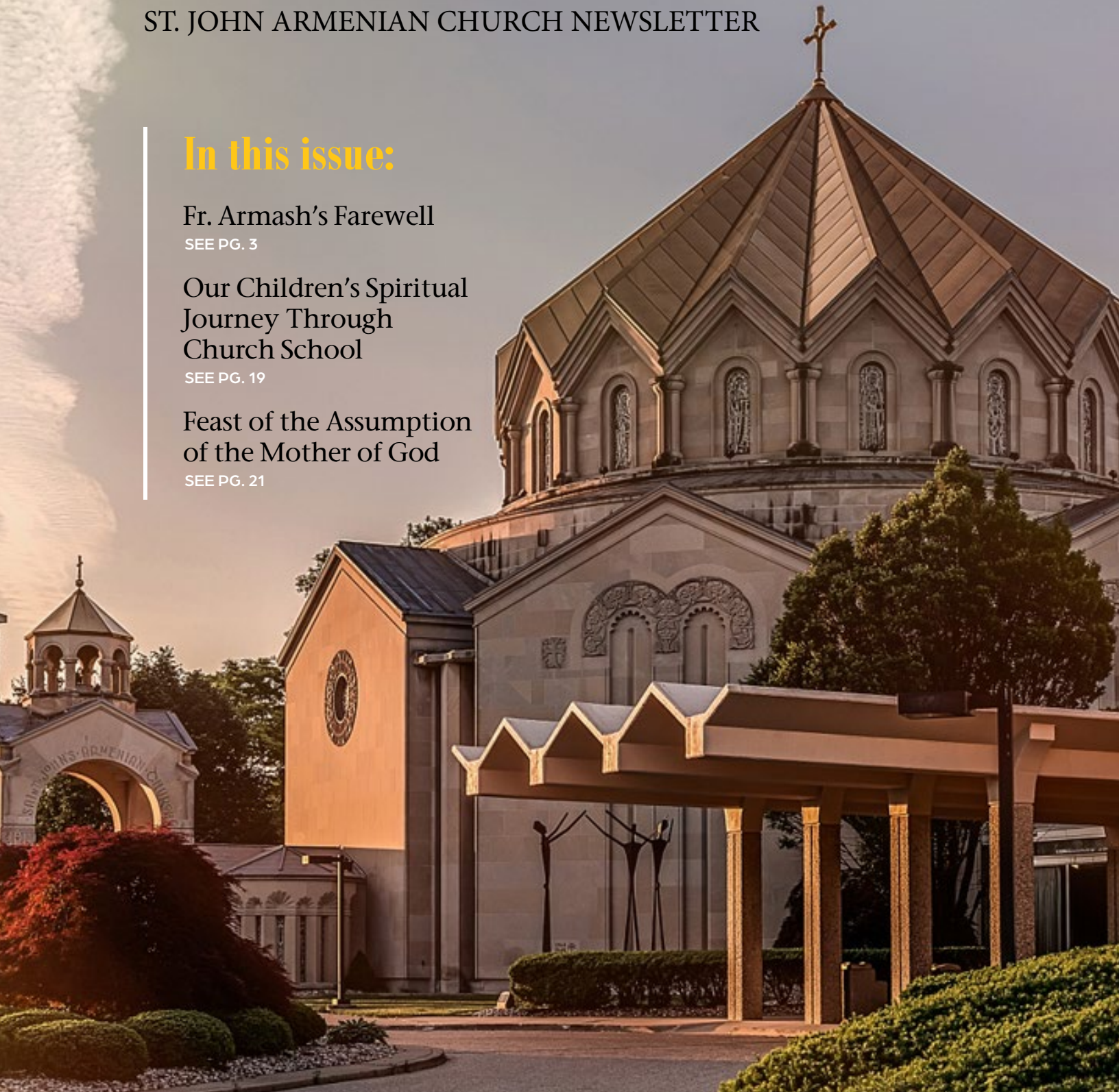


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Torchbearer

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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.



Everything Has Its Time

*Everything has its time,
for everything there is a season
and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born and a time to die;
a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill and a time to heal;
a time to break down and a time to build up;
a time to weep and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek and a time to lose;
a time to keep and a time to throw away;
a time to tear and a time to sew;
a time to keep silent and a time to speak;
a time to love and a time to hate;
a time for war and a time for peace.*

(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

There is a time for everything, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. This is the teaching of the *Bible*. Although it is very difficult for me to say goodbye to you all, I will obey the calling of our Lord, follow that call wherever He takes me and I will say, “Here I am Lord!”

After five and half years, I will be celebrating my last *Badarak* as assistant pastor of St. John Armenian Church, on Sunday, July 30th. Our Primate, the V. Rev. Fr. Mesrop Parsamyan, with the approval of the Diocesan Council, has appointed me pastor of the St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Armenian Church of Wynnewood, Philadelphia.

What a privilege it has been to share this journey of faith with you. I count it among my deepest joys. Even in sad times, what a blessing it has been to support each other in those moments. Our lives have been interwoven in the fabric of faithful service to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Thank you to all our parishioners.

If we could take a snapshot of our Church in January, 2018, the date when I began as an assistant pastor in St. John Armenian Church and hold it alongside today, we would see a church we recognize, but also a church that has been much transformed. The responses we have acted upon due to the pandemic, and all the measures we have initiated to meet this highly unusual situation — indeed, all that we have accomplished together — showed optimism and dedication, in which you generously shared. Three years ago, none of us could have predicted Zoom meetings, or the live streaming of worship, outreach programs and the continuous planning of new ideas in our Church. I am sure, just as we have done these things, so too, they will continue, for the worship and praise of our Living Lord. This is God’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

Our “Farewell Sunday” is July 30th. At our fellowship in the Main Hall, I will extend my love and thanks to you all for the last time. After that day, I will continue to hold you in my prayers and be the friend to you that we have been.

I want to extend my gratitude to our pastor V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian; the Parish Council and Parish Council Chair Kim Najarian; Diocesan Delegates; The Komitas Choir and Musical Director Dn. Rubik Mailian; our Deacons, sub-deacons and acolytes; Women’s Guild; Men’s Society; Music Guild; ACYOA Seniors and Juniors; Church School teachers and staff; Museum and Library Director Lucy Ardash and our entire staff. My special gratitude to our beloved parish administrator Paul Andonian, our youth coordinator Lisa Mardigian, and our former secretary Anna Tokmajian.

My dear beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, I say “Goodbye”, a word that originally meant “God be with you!” God will indeed be with us, with you all and with my new brothers and sisters in Christ at St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Armenian Church of Wynnewood, Philadelphia. He will be present every step of the way as we take this new step of our journeys. May we make space for the new growth God is planting in our lives and trust God’s abiding presence every step of our journey.

Love and blessings, now and always,

Fr. Armash Bagdasarian



Scenes from Fr. Armash's Farewell Sunday, July 30th



Parish Council Message: GIFT

It's summertime and the Parish Council continues working hard to serve our parish and in supporting the new Pastoral Plan that was presented at the Diocesan Assembly, *GIFT*, "Growing in Faith Together". This new plan includes five priorities: *Worship: Celebrating our faith together; Education: Knowing our faith together; Witness: Spreading our faith together; Service: Living our faith together; and Common Life: Sustaining our faith together.* We have been focused on how to better serve the needs of our parishioners and to grow our active community. Not only is there concentration on growing the number of stewards of our church; but we are also interested in increasing the participation of current stewards by integrating new ways to reach out to those interested. Your ideas on how to serve and strengthen our community are always welcome. It is not an easy task, but we can start with the five priorities of *GIFT* to reach those who may not currently be participating in one way or another.

We love welcoming you as you enter the church for Sunday services to celebrate our faith together. Whether you attend church services, Catechism or Bible Study, attend the church picnic or Bazaar, participate in Women's Guild, Men's Society, Choir, or ACYOA, we encourage you to take part at any and all levels. It is always great to see old and new faces. Although most of us are very busy with our day-to-day lives, the church and community should be an important part to fulfill us as Armenians and live our faith together. We need YOU to be involved and help strengthen our church so that it will be here for our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

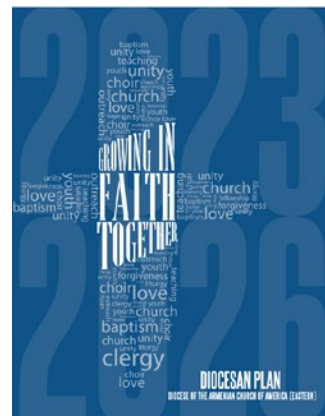
The youth of our parish are our future. There are many ways for them to take part in the church. Church School is a great way, as well as, Day Camp, *Hye* Camp, and ACYOA. The many activities that the youth experience teach them how to serve God and develop life skills. These kids have stepped up to chair church picnics, sponsor Palm Sunday and Christmas Eve Teas, and put on fantastic November Dances. Our ACYOA Seniors won their bid to host the 2025 Sports Weekend and will need our support as they work to plan an incredible event. It is exciting to see their enthusiasm. Parish Council's dedication to the youth of our community is strong. May God bless them and give us the strength to support and nurture them.

Sincerely,

Kim Najarian, Parish Council Chair



Installation of the 2023 Parish Council





The Kitchen: A Unique Perspective on Parish Life

By Yerchanig Joy Callan
Contributor

One of the most common references in one's personal life is the kitchen. Politicians try to connect to the public by evoking kitchen table economics. Families strive to gather around the kitchen table at least a few times a week for dinner, to share their goings on, in and out of the home. Many chefs extol the time spent in the family kitchen, learning the craft that propelled them into their careers from their much beloved family. It's all in the kitchen. You stood on a chair, with an apron or towel tied about you to have the flavor of love passed down.

When you open the lights to our St John kitchen, a brightness reflects off the stainless steel appliances and tiled walls. At first, there is pure quiet. As you walk about, the still machines are nothing more than highly exaggerated versions of what you have at home. Except, once they all go on, there is a harmonic hum that tells you good stuff is about to happen. Whether from our caterers or from our devoted volunteers, something makes you want to peek in there and remind yourself of the good stuff of our years in our vibrant community.

There is a machine much taller than our grandmothers called a Hobart. When the first Hobart was introduced to our volunteer ladies way back in the day, they felt somewhat threatened by the thought that a machine might produce a product as good as (or better than) their own hands and sore backs. How could a giant dough machine surpass their love? However, one by one, they became converts and happily discovered that 'the machine,' helped them produce more with less physical strain, leaving plenty of energy to add in more of their special love to all of their delicious delicacies.

There is a silent machine, not electric, no mother-board or digital read out, appropriately called 'The Dutchess'. It's a dough cutter that perfectly portions dough, saving so much time, so that our many volunteers can actually do more, with so much less physical wear and tear. This leads us right back to the camaraderie that all of the volunteers enjoy. (Legend has it that one day, the laughter and volume from the kitchen was so great, that we noticed the doors were being discretely closed as the laughter carried from the kitchen, through our big hall, the lobby and to the doors of the church where a funeral was taking place).

THE KITCHEN
 CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE



In addition, there are refrigeration units the size of bedrooms. There is a machine, the dough sheeter, that can roll dough for *katah* almost paper thin. There is a tilt fry pan that can make fifty pounds of pilaf in about twenty minutes. There are sinks everywhere, coffee urns, water stations, an ice machine and of course a wall of ovens and stoves. It's quiet now but when all that machinery goes into action at the command of our caterers or our dedicated volunteers, things like *Sou Beoreg*, *Cheoreg*, *Katah*, *Sarma*, *Simit*, *Nazoug*, *Meat Beoreg* and *Kufta* happen. Following the sacrament of marriage, receptions fill our hall and meals come out to punctuate the happiness of the gathering. We follow solemn funeral services with a *Hokejash*, a dinner for the soul and for the comfort of the family surrounded by loved ones. There are baptisms, engagements, and wedding rehearsals, followed by meals in smaller rooms. From the kitchen, we serve outreach to people we will never meet, as in the many meals provide for Motor City Mittens Mission project. During the time of COVID, meals were delivered to those unable to venture out. It wasn't just a meal. It was *Sirov Jash*, the meal of love, given from hand to hand with heartfelt love. And no matter what the occasion, someone invariably finds a reason to just come in the kitchen for only a minute. Maybe cultivating a memory of participating in a Lenten Fish Dinner or a Church School dinner, or that feeling of looking into our happy past, as we were learning the heritage of our food from the loved one that nourished you in so many ways.

The kitchen has been the center of so much of our community life. Yes, we gather there to prepare food. But in reality, the food is merely the vehicle that gathers us together. It brings us to the table to sit side-by-side, face-to-face and from that early nourishing love, connecting us from our past to our future. We learn from church tradition that after "breaking bread" in church during *Badarak*, we adjourn to break bread again in fellowship as a community. When we teach our children and grandchildren what our mothers and grandmothers taught us, we are the link from the past to the future.

Once the hoods go on and the make-up air comes in and the talents are shared, hands begin to prepare as an extension of the heart. Our fellowship extends far past the soft dough in our hands to reporting on grandchildren, nieces, nephews, cousins near and far and friends not forgotten. With great love, and loud enough to drown out the harmonizing hum of the working machines, we evoke the wonderful members of our families and our community that walked here before us. We recall the GOATS of *okhla*, bread shapes, fillo dough and seasoned meats. What they passed down was not a mere (secret) recipe. They passed on the devotion of Christian fellowship and love for our community. We always say, '...it's all about the *jash!*' It's really the getting to the *jash*, bringing us together, that is "The Kitchen".



The Women's Guild: *Growing in Faith Together*

By **Linda Jevahirian**
Contributor

During the Friday afternoon, May 5, 2023, session, members of the Women's Guild Assembly participated in a presentation by Salpi Katanjian, a member of the host church, St. Sarkis Armenian Orthodox Church. Referencing three verses from scripture we broke up into small groups and shared our reflections on love, inner beauty, provision and faithfulness.

Love is shown through action. Words can be meaningful, but action proves those words are true! What are ways that you can love others through your actions? What are some of the uniquely God-given talents and abilities that YOU can use to show others your love? Conversely, what actions from others make you feel the most loved?

We are the only nation that translates the name of the bible as *Astvadsashuntch* – meaning the 'breath of God.' We grow our faith through the word/breath of God. Faith is a supernatural gift from God. Faith is not the result of work and therefore, no one may boast about it. We find divine life in the breath of God as it was in Eden; the presence of God is heaven on earth.

Salpi encouraged us to discover how God is at the center of our life and how our lives are transformed through are relationship with God. Do we study the bible? Pray in communion with God? Have a personal relationship with God? Attend religious lectures? Meditate on God's words?

The St. John Delegation to the 2023 Diocesan Assembly

MAY 4TH, DALLAS, TX

Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian, V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian, Rev. Fr. Garabed Kochakian

Yvonne Korkoian, Jacqueline ElChemmas, Roseann Manoogian Attar, Jennifer Morris

Linda Jevahirian, Sara Andonian, Denise Boyagian, Greg Mamassian, Edward Korkoian, Harry Kezelian III, Dn. Rubik Mailian, John Yavruian Dn. George Boyagian

St. John Armenian Church Men's Society Spiritual Retreat

A Day of Prayer and Reflection

By Kazar Terterian

Contributor, Chair of SJAC Men's Society

The St. John Armenian Church Men's Society recently organized a captivating and spiritually enriching retreat on Saturday, June 24th, that left attendees with a renewed sense of faith and community. With a remarkable turnout of 28 participants, this year's retreat marked a significant milestone as women were also invited to share in the experience.

The focal point of the retreat was the profound prayers of Saint Nerses (the Graceful) Shnorhali presented by Dn. Yervant Kutchukian, the esteemed Spiritual Director of St. Nerses Armenian Seminary. With his deep understanding of the spiritual teachings of St. Nerses, Dn. Kutchukian led the attendees on a profound journey of introspection and connection with their faith.

The serene ambiance of the retreat venue provided the perfect backdrop for contemplation and reflection. Attendees were encouraged to delve into the prayers, exploring their meanings and significance in their personal lives. The retreat fostered an atmosphere of openness and shared spiritual growth, allowing participants to connect with one another on a deeper level.

The success of this retreat would not have been possible without the support and participation of each and every attendee. The presence of women this year added a new dimension to the retreat, enriching the conversations and deepening the sense of community.

A special note of appreciation goes to Dn. Yervant Kutchukian for his illuminating and thought-provoking presentation. His profound knowledge and spiritual guidance truly inspired all in attendance, fostering a greater understanding of St. Nerses Shnorhali's teachings.



Rev. Dn. Yervant Kutchukian, guest homilist speaks about The Sign of the Prophet Jonah, Sunday, June 25th

"Each of us will be like Jonah in the belly of the whale before we leave this earth. ...We will fall into darkness... but we can go on to do good and change our lives and the lives of others... Each of us is a light in this world....."

RETREAT
CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE



Furthermore, the Men’s Society would like to acknowledge the contributions of all those who assisted in organizing and executing this remarkable event. Specifically, Very Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian, Ara Belian, Greg and Edith Baise, Dan Cristiano and Dr. Greg Movesesian. Their dedication and hard work ensured that every detail was meticulously taken care of, allowing the retreat to unfold seamlessly.

In conclusion, the St. John Armenian Church Men’s Society Spiritual Retreat was an incredible day of prayer, reflection, and fellowship. It served as a reminder of the power of communal devotion and the importance of spiritual growth. With gratitude and appreciation, the Men’s Society looks forward to future events that continue to strengthen the bonds of faith and unity within our parish and the Detroit Armenian community.



Continuing the Fuller Center Tradition

Once again, July found a team of volunteers under the direction of Jacqueline ElChemmas working with the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia. Along with exploring all the rich sites, sounds and culture of Armenia, visiting with religious dignitaries and home building they were present at the blessing of two homes that previous volunteers worked on last year.

One home was sponsored by our own St. John's Women's Guild for the Karapetyan family who live in Getap village of the Vayots Dzor region. The second house, donated by our parishioners Edward and Catherine Sarkesian Zwinck, was built for the Smbatyan Family, who also live in Getap Village

In addition to Jackie, the team was comprised of Mark and Elaine Mardirosian, Barbara Rupas, Susan Cholakian, Sandy DerGazarian, Greg and Annette Mamassian, Leah Mamassian and Anna Mamassian, Karen and Michael Kazarian, Alexan, Marissa and Sofia Kazarian and Faouzi ElChemmas.



Dinner with Archbishop Paren Avedikian, former pastor of St. John parish



The volunteers along with Archbishop Paren Avdikian visited with His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians



A lesson in roasting kebab



MORE PHOTOS
ON PAGE 20

The Life of a Church School Superintendent Mrs. Alberta Ohanasian-Godoshian

By **Ardemis Gregory and Alice Argnian**
Contributors

NOTE: Several weeks ago, The Torchbearer staff visited Mrs. Alberta Ohanasian-Godoshian, St. John Armenian Church School Superintendent, at her home to learn more about Church School so we could share information with The Torchbearer readers. When entering her home-office, we saw piles of books, a Bible, lots of published articles and writing materials spread on table tops and a desk which she said were her “Sunday school teaching materials and lesson plans”. We talked, and we learned.

St. John’s Armenian Church School was founded in the 1930s and Church School class was held in the original site located on Oakman Boulevard in Detroit, Michigan. For approximately 70 of these years, Mrs. Alberta Ohanasian-Godoshian has been student, teacher, and superintendent (principal) of Church School. She has served under a number of clergy leaders over the years: Rev. Fr. Arnak Kasparian, V. Rev. Fr. Diran Papazian, V. Rev. Fr. Yeghishe Vartabed Gizirian, Very Rev. Fr. Paren Dz. Vartabed Avedikian, V. Rev. Fr. Baret Dz. Vartabed Yeretzian, Rev. Fr. Garabed Kochakian, and V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian with Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian. All of this accomplished between the years of 1952 and 2023.

Mrs. Ohanasian-Godoshian was born in Detroit, Michigan to Mr. and Mrs. Mike and Rose Ohanasian. She met and married her late husband Masis and together had two lovely daughters, Mrs. Katherine Haase and Ms. Christina Sarafian. Mrs. Ohanasian-Godoshian is a graduate of Detroit Business University and also advanced her studies through night classes with the goal of being a medical professional. She was appointed principal of the St. John’s Church school and worked closely with Dn. Levon Zenian. At its inception, the school had a few students and teachers.

Presently, St. John’s Armenian Church School has 110 enrolled students and 19 teachers. Students range from pre-school age to high school. Children of all ages learn about the faith of the Armenian Church, participate in worship and *Badarak*, learn the hymns or *sharagans*, receive Holy Communion regularly, give and receive the “Kiss of Peace”, and participate in seasonal programs including special projects involving Church School outreach programs. It also provides the opportunity to meet and bond with other Ar-



menian children and foster long lasting friendships. Lesson plans are prepared to meet curriculum requirements as outlined through the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church and classes are held each Sunday morning in newly refurbished classes located in the Cultural Hall.

Mrs. Godoshian has seen many changes and challenges over the years with the coming of the digital age which has impacted educational strategies and student participation. She stresses the importance of parental involvement both directly and through their church attendance, which is vital to the success and viability of an effective church school with the goal of increasing attendance. The best part about her job? “Kids! I adore the kids and remind myself that without students, there would be no school.” She is passionate about attracting NEW STUDENTS and retaining regular attendees which could potentially impact the sustainability of our Church.

Sunday mornings, you will find Mrs. Godoshian either walking through classrooms, or in church when students participate in *Badarak* during the school semester. And, whether school is in session or “out” during summer vacation, you will find her in church on Sunday mornings, just in case “Her Kids” happen to be there and can see that she “walks the talk”.

GREAT JOB, ALBERTA AND THANK YOU FOR SEVENTY YEARS OF SERVICE!



Men's Society Makes *Nushkhar*!

By Dan Cristiano
Contributor

On Monday, April 3, 2023, the Men's Society led by V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian and Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian made over 500 *Nushkhar*s for Easter Sunday. Traditionally, each family receives one and places it in their flour container to bless the flour and keep it dry. Whenever the *Nushkhar* is removed from the flour it must be buried in your garden. Each *Nushkhar* has an imprint of a religious symbol. They are made with special wooden stamping tools.

The *Nushkhar*s were made by the following Men's Society members and guests pictured here: Natalie and Steve Hagopian, Fr. Aren, Dn. Onnig Boyajian, Kazar Terterian, Fr. Armash, Dr. Gregory Movsesian, George Sabounjian, Carol Cholmakjian, Steve Derderian, and Dn. George Boyagian. Serop Babayan and Peter Toukhanian are not shown. Dan Cristiano supervised and took the picture.

The Men's Society Sweetens Mother's Day with an Ice Cream Social

By George Saboonjian
Contributor

Demonstrating the mission of community, the Men's Society sponsored a free-will offering Ice Cream Social on Mother's Day, May 14, 2023, following the Divine Liturgy. Over 120 cups of ice cream with multiple toppings were served generating \$1,094, which will benefit families of deceased or wounded soldiers from the 202 Artsakh War. With additional funding provided by the Men's Society treasury, nine families will receive \$150 when members of the Brotherhood of Holy Etchmiadzin visit and offer home blessings in Armenia. V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian will personally be present at the distribution to the families.

Special thanks to Men's Society spouses Patricia Magee, and Charlotte Akarakian and daughter Isabelle for assisting in making a fun and successful event. The generous donations will assist in the healing process of our brothers and sisters.





Ten-year members.



Time for dinner!



Members enjoying the evening.



Newest Honorary Member, Alberta Godoshian.

Annual Women's Guild Membership Dinner 2023

It was with great anticipation that over 100 St. John's Women's Guild members gathered to attend the annual Membership Dinner June 7th, 2023. In honor of the Guild's 85th Anniversary, a large, expansive group photo was taken of all those who attended.

Paulette Apkarian, Yerchanig Joy Callan, Belinda Kabodian and their committee presented a lovely buffet dinner, table settings and program.

It is the Women's Guild tradition to welcome new members and honor those who have been members for 10, 25, and 40 years. They also honor those who become honorary members.

This year they also had the pleasure of recognizing those who have been members for 50 years or more. It was gratifying to see so many of these lovely ladies in attendance and also photographed for the anniversary. It is also wonderful to note the many generations of families recorded in the photo!

Fifty-year plus members!

Gladys Artinian (1958)
Angela Banerian (1952)
Julie Couyoumjian (1962)
Marguerite Dakhlian (1957)
Margaret Derderian (1973)
Jane Hovsepian (1956)
Anita Kachadurian (1963)
Mary Keoleian (1963)
Virginia Mekjian (1956)
Alice Safilian (1970)
Nina Sarkisian (1952)
Mary Seremjian (1958)
Rose Shahinian (1956)
Anne Tashjian (1951)
Alice Terzian (1967)
Isabelle Vahratian (1973)

New Members:

Lora Kazanjian, Vanna Kazarian,
Marie Semarjian

Ten Year Members:

Yerchanig Joy Callan, Lilit Grig
ryan, Adrian Keoleian, Deborah
Ann Stamp, Katherine Channell,
Sandra Jack, Janice Megerian,
Seta Yeranorian

Twenty-five Year Member:

Carol Aprahamian
Forty-Year Member Suzanne
Nazoyan
New Honorary Member: Albert
Godoshian



2023 Women’s Guild Executive Board Installed Sunday, June 4

Sara Andonian, *Chairperson*

Linda Karibian, *Vice Chairperson*

Donna Lafian, *Corresponding Secretary*

Yerchanig Joy Callan, *Recording Secretary*

Jacqueline ElChemmas, *Treasurer*

Paulette Apkarian, *Assistant Treasurer/Membership*

Nyree Giragosian, *Newsletter*

Sue Carman Vian, *Advisor*

Joyce Yeghissian, *Advisor*

Women’s Guild Provides Blankets and Caps of Love

By Linda Assarian
Contributor

On June 6, members of the Women’s Guild knitting group delivered thirty-nine blankets and fourteen caps for newborns to St. Joseph Hospital, Oakland. Barbara Stephen, Volunteer Coordinator was a pleasure to meet, and said the blankets will be much appreciated by new moms who are in need. We’ll be talking more with her about additional projects and programs at St. Joe’s that could use Women’s Guild’s help and tap the talents of our members and friends beyond knitting and crocheting. It was a wonderful, fulfilling day punctuated by additional fellowship over lunch at the Moose Preserve.



Women’s Guild members Arlene Howrani, Linda Assarian, Linda Lutz and Carol Ohaniesian along with Barbara Stephens (center), delivering the work of many hands.



Women’s Guild’s University of Michigan Matthaei Botanical Gardens Outing

By Sara Andonian
Contributor

On June 22, sixteen Guild members accompanied by our pastor, V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian, visited the University of Michigan Matthaei Botanical Gardens in Ann Arbor. Our tour started with an introduction from the K-12 educational coordinator at the Gardens, Liz Glynn, who is the daughter-in-law of WG member Mary Keoleian. We learned that the conservatory design was the architect Alden Dow’s dream and was a work of faith and commitment to nature. There is a pond in the front of the conservatory that is likened to a baptismal font. We toured the conservatory where we saw

plants and trees indigenous to the world. Of particular interest to our bakers and cooks were the sausage tree and the vanilla tree. Time was also spent marveling at how bananas grow! A favorite for Fr. Aren was the frankincense tree. And everyone loved the cacti that soared to the rafters as well as the ones closer to ground. Going outside, we toured the bonsai garden, the knot herb garden, the Great Lakes garden, and the children’s garden.

Once our tour was over, we enjoyed lunch and fellowship at a local restaurant, Paesano’s.

Many, many thanks to Marilyn Sarkesian and Sue Carman-Vian for planning this year’s outing.

ACYOA General Assembly and Sports Weekend

By Lisa Mardigian
Contributor

Forty-three ACYOA members along with V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian and Youth Director Lisa Mardigian, participated in the 2023 General Assembly and Sports Weekend in May in Dallas, Texas. Chairman Armen Arslanian along with Melanie Boskovich, Andrew Boskovich, Danielle Sarafian, Sevana Mailian, and Talia Oknayan participated in the General Assembly as delegates and observers. Our chapter won the bid to host the 2025 General Assembly and Sports weekend! Thank you to all those who helped put together our video presentation and to our Parish Council for their support.

Congratulations to our sports teams for their participation and sportsmanship! Congratulations to our girls basketball team and to our co-ed Detroit Orange Volleyball Team for winning the championship and to our Men's Detroit Orange Basketball team for winning the runner up!



Detroit Orange Championship Volleyball Team with Primate, Very Rev. Fr. Mesrop Parsamyan.



The Detroit Orange in the huddle with Fr. Aren for some pre-game inspiration!



Detroit ACYOA sports teams with Primate, V. Rev. Fr. Mesrop Parsamyan.

Blessings *from Above*

By V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian
Contributor

On May 7, Mason Sahakian was accompanied to the chancel by his parents, Lindsay and Aram Sahakian, his sister Chloe, and his grand uncle, Dr. Gary Zamanigian for his “first haircut”.

Amongst the many hidden treasures of the Armenian Church, is the “Service for a Youth’s First Haircut”. The Armenian Church has many traditions that have come out of practice for one reason or another.

This very brief service includes a hymn, Old Testament and New Testament reading, a brief prayer as well as the ceremonial “snipping”. The New Testament reading is from the Holy Gospel of Matthew (10: 29-32) wherein we are reminded that God knows each of us so intimately, that he even knows how many hairs are on our individual heads.

The purpose is to mark the sign of transition from one phase of a child’s life to another. In the case of the haircutting, this is a physical sign of a child’s dedication to God.

In order to have a child’s “first haircut”, arrangements can be made with the priest through the office. Since this is NOT a Sacrament of the church, it can be done in the sanctuary (traditionally after Divine Liturgy) or at any time, and can also be done in the child’s home by arrangement.

That same day, Natalie Marina Tahayokian was presented by her parents for her 40th Day Dedication.

The parents of these children are commended for respecting and participating in these ancient traditions of the Armenian Church.





The elementary students recite the *Hayr Mer* in church as a concluding activity of their Church School Year.



Even beach balls are teaching tools during the Youth Sunday sermons.



The Kindergarteners are sailing their boats through a storm, just as Jesus and the disciples did.



The Kindergarteners display the Bible Book covers they designed like the ones they see each Sunday in church.

Our Children's Spiritual Journey Through Church School

By Alice Argnian and Ardemis Gregory
Contributors

Our little ones start Church School when they are four years old. Many of them have experienced The Little Saints Program, which makes them familiar with the church surroundings, the clergy and their new found friends. Sunday mornings are spent learning about what God made and who Jesus is. In their classrooms they have discussions about the messages in *The Bible*.

There are many individuals who help these preschoolers, kindergarteners, and first graders with their Christian faith. Church School teachers Sara Andonian, Dawn Aginian, Lerna Lacinian, and Ani Lucassian help the children with lessons

from *The Bible* and related stories and crafts. Maral Thomas, Anoush Mardigian, Melanie Sarafian and parent helpers assist the children with their Church School activities.

On Youth Sundays the children go to Church to participate in *Badarak*, take Holy Communion and hear our pastor's message which is tied to a topic that has been discussed in class.

When they do not attend Church as a class, they go to Worship where Paulette Apkarian teaches them prayers and simple *sharagans*. During this time our little ones learn to sing, dance and play the handbells to Christian songs

At the end of first grade the children are able to recite the *Hayr Mer*.

CHURCH SCHOOL
CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

For the first three years, it is about getting to know each other and their church. The children learn to be a part of a church community and grow in their faith in God.

With the continued dedication of their teachers, their parents and their own diligence attending Church School through the years, the little ones will come to their graduation day! This year, on Sunday, May 21, St. John Armenian Church School held its Graduation in our Sanctuary. Our three graduates included, Leah Baharozian, Graciela Boyajian, and Lora Derian. Leah Baharozian served as the Lector for the day. Each of the graduates were presented a silver Armenian cross.

Leah Boyajian graduated from A.G.B.U Alex and Marie Manoogian School and plans on attending Indiana University. In addition, Leah received the Robert Ajemian Scholarship.

Graciella Boyajian graduated from Royal Oak High and plans on attending Eastern Michigan University.

Lora Derian graduated from Berkley High School and plans on attending Kalamazoo College.

After church services, the graduates were honored with a tea. We congratulate them and recognize the years of dedication they showed in the journey through our Church School!



Graciella Boyajian



Lora Derian



Leah Baharozian

FULLER HOUSING PROJECT PHOTOS

CONTINUED FROM PG. 11



The blessing of the Smbatyan home.



Dinner celebration with the Smbatyan family.

The Assumption or Dormition of the Mother-of-God

By Rev. Fr. Garabed Kochakian
Contributor

Following the Third Ecumenical Synod of Ephesus in A.D. 431 and recorded in an Armenian Lectionary dated A.D. 434, a reference of the Marian Feast of the Blessed Virgin describes the ancient liturgical practices of the Jerusalem Church from 417 to 439. It is the Assumption of Saint Mary, the Mother-of-God [Asdvadzadzin in Armenian], celebrated on August 15th, described as ... “at the second mile from Bethlehem...”

Thereafter this solemn celebration was extended to the entire Christian East during the sixth century. Since the feast was celebrated on different days, it was decreed by the Byzantine Emperor Maurice (582-602) that the feast will be celebrated on August 15th under the name of Dormition which, literally translated, means “the falling asleep.” It also came to be celebrated in the Western Church by the eighth century when the Roman Pope Leo III officially confirmed and established it.

Though the account of the Assumption is not written in the Gospels, it is nonetheless the early church’s testament of the life of Saint Mary that became an important part of the mystery of God’s promise of salvation revealed through her. This story comes to us from an orally transmitted account of the Apostles and is dedicated to the Virgin. The source of this narrative is *Apocryphal writings*.

Although it is called the Assumption of the Mother-of-God Վերափոխում/Verapokhoom [the taking up of the Holy Mother- of -God,] in the Armenian Church’s sacred art it is frequently presented as the Dormition, or *the falling asleep*. From the listing of major celebrations in the Armenian Church calendar, it became one of the major Tabernacle Feasts [Daghavar - Տաղավար].

The Armenian word for this feast of the Assumption acknowledges her physical and spiritual ‘transport’ or *translation* into heaven by the embrace of her soul depicted in the arms of her Son. It is because she said “Yes” to God at the *Incarnation*, giving birth to Him as the Son that she, like Him was, bodily ‘assumed’ or taken into heaven, inheriting a place of glory with God the Father.



The Dormition of the Virgin, a 14th century Armenian manuscript illumination from a Gospel in the collection of Mesrop Mashdots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran), Yerevan.

The Dormition Icon - from an Armenian iconographer’s painting.

The artist has written the story as a funeral scene with the Blessed Mother at the center. There reclined on her deathbed - it is the *Dormition* [falling asleep]. But it is also her Assumption [being taken up in the arms of Jesus].

Observe the Apostles who are gathered around the Holy Virgin viewing her peaceful repose. Angels appear, descending from blue clouds leaping forth toward the Holy Mother from the realm of heaven attending to her lifeless body. And standing is the figure of Christ hovering above her reclined body.

ASSUMPTION
CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

He is holding the figure of an innocent infant which is her soul as Jesus is embracing her. The field of golden colored light covers the entire background behind Him symbolizing the presence of the Lord's Divine Majesty. Christ God has descended with His Light and receives His beloved mother into eternity as the Blessed Virgin is being transported into Heaven.

The Apostles, also a part of this event, are portrayed filled with sorrow in their hearts and gaze at the Holy Mother-of-God with saddened faces and trembling expressions. Interestingly the artist has depicted only eleven of them. Missing from the group is St. Bartholomew who, as the received historical tradition of the Armenian Church explains, was preaching in India and not present at the time of her death.

The Apocryphal narrative states for three days the Apostles were keeping vigil at her tomb and when St Bartholomew returned he had requested that they open her tomb so he could see her. When they did, as the story continues, it was found empty as she had been bodily assumed into heaven. Jesus her Son had come to take her home to be with Him. Furthermore as Armenian Church tradition explains, in order to comfort St. Bartholomew's grief, the Apostles presented him with a painted icon of her face believed to have been done by St. John on a fragment of wood from the Holy Cross.

Note in the miniature above, the Icon of the Dormition, it is St. John the *beloved one* of the twelve, the one to whom the Lord entrusted the care of St. Mary when they both stood at the foot of the Cross. He is portrayed reverently bending toward the Holy Mother in the gesture of embracing her. His sad expression truly shows the great pain in his heart.

It is this Icon of the Holy Mother that was brought by St. Bartholomew when he began his Apostolic mission to Armenia.

Additionally, at this funeral celebration there are images of three bishops attired in black and white checked robes who were also present. One of them is St. James, the brother of the Lord - first Bishop of Jerusalem holding a Cross and vested, as if blessing the Holy Mother at her burial ritual. He is joined by two other bishops presumed to be Timothy and Hierotheus.

There is another interesting Apocryphal account related to St. Mary's falling asleep. In the icon there is another figure portrayed before her deathbed and standing in front of the reposed Virgin. It is Athonios (sometimes in other Armenian accounts of the same Assumption narrative called Jephonias). He was a fanatical Jewish priest, who often spoke against the Lord's Resurrection and was filled with envy and disbelief about St. Mary's role in the Incarnation. The story describes that driven by a rage of anger he rushed forward to throw her body to the ground.

Standing to the left and confronting him is an angel who stopped him by cutting off his hands when he attempted to defile her body. His hands are separated and left dangling from his body from the edge of her funerary bier. St. Peter, the Apostle placed to the right of Athonios, is admonishing him for his disbelief.

As the story concludes, Athonios repented for his disbelief, his evil intention and rejection of Christ. He repented for denying that St. Mary was indeed His mother and believed. By his confession and repentance his severed arms were rejoined to his body.

The iconography of this apocryphal account still offers a message to us today.

Consider this; when we have faith and hope, miracles can and do occur. Mountains are moved, water becomes wine, the paralyzed can walk, and like the healed woman with a flow of blood, the power of God can rebuild life when it is broken. All things can be *restored* when faith is born in one's heart and soul, in this case by Athonios' own repentance and faith.

With repentance we can be restored and given another chance to receive the grace of redemption and gift of forgiveness when we repent. In doing so, our Heavenly Father's gift of grace and redemption is offered to us.

The Holy Mother said "YES" to God and opened her heart, was transported and found her way to heaven. The story of Athonios who repented, opened his heart and then believed is a reminder how fallen humanity can be redeemed.

St. Mary is the Doorway to Redemption

The Virgin opened her heart and said "YES" at the outset of her life at the Annunciation with the words "*Let it be unto me*".

When we give our lives in obedience to the will and call of God, as did the Virgin Mary, when we turn our lives around asking for forgiveness like Athonios, we are embraced by the Lord to receive the inheritance of Salvation and to sit at His Right hand.

Asking in prayer:

O Mother of God, Mother of Light, and Temple of the Word of God, pray unto Christ your Son to reconcile us to the Father, and by your intercession to Him, receive our supplications and save us.

Discovering the Armenian Church St. John's Bible Study Group *Treks Eastern Mediterranean, Greece*



By Carol Yavruian and the Bible Study Group | Contributors

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8

An intrepid group from St. John Armenian Church has just completed a trek through the Eastern Mediterranean, Greece and Rome. After several years, these explorers have come to the end of an epic journey in the footsteps of ancient superheroes.

Unlike our predecessors, however, our journey has been far more comfortable. Fueled by coffee, and bolstered by central heating, our Bible Study has come to the end of the *Book of Acts*, also called *The Acts of the Apostles*. It has been a long, in-depth study, but well worth the time we spent.

What is the Book of Acts?

Acts tells the story of the men and women who were called to spread the news of a risen Savior to the remotest corners of the known world. It records the growth of the Church and provides the bridge between the Gospels and Epistles.

There are three parts or phases to this book: Peter witnessing to the Jews in Jerusalem; Philip witnessing to the Samaritans in Judea and Samaria; and Paul witnessing to the Gentiles in the uttermost corners of the earth.



Meet Luke, our Guide through Acts

Acts was written by Luke, author of the *Gospel of Luke*, and covers the years from about 33 AD to 62 AD. A Greek physician, he was known for his meticulous work and is considered a trustworthy historian. As a travelling companion of Paul, Luke was able to provide an eyewitness account of events.

“In short, the Bible is the Word and the Word is Jesus Christ Himself. To study the Bible is to come closer to Him. He doesn't ask us to do this, which might make Bible Study optional, He commands us to do this. On the lighter side, Bible Study is simply fun.”

“I read the Bible because I have a thirst for the Word of God.”

Why is Acts so important?

In Chapter 2, Luke records Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descends upon the Apostles and other followers of Jesus Christ, beginning the transformation of a small group into a powerful force. Acts also records:

- The transition from a primarily Jewish to a primarily Gentile church membership in a single generation.
- The nature of Christianity as distinct from Judaism; but also as its fulfillment.
- Important events in the early history of Christianity, from its start in Jerusalem to its spread throughout the Roman Empire.
- The account of Stephen, the first martyr.
- How Antioch in Syria replaces Jerusalem as headquarters of the church.

Why Study the Bible?

“Throughout the centuries, the Holy Bible has been, and continues to be, the main source of inspiration, guidance, consolation and sustenance for the Armenian people.” (Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Preface to the NRSV Armenian Church Edition)

Here’s how one of our Bible explorers put it:

“Our clergy do a great job of listening to various opinions and viewpoints regarding the meaning of the passages we study. There is respect shown for all the opinions expressed. I don’t ever recall hearing them saying, “No, you’re wrong. This is what the passage means!” The discussion is always open and inviting as opposed to being a rigid top-down instruction.

At first, it seemed odd that we would spend 1.5 hours on only two pages of text, but this is the difference between just reading the Bible and having a deeper/richer understanding of why something is being said in a passage and how it relates to the situations the subjects are facing during that point in history. Despite having read the Bible a number of times, I learn something new and interesting each time I attend Bible Study.

The opportunity to obtain the perspectives of all of our fellow classmates is very enriching.”

Why is a Bible Study with an Armenian perspective a unique opportunity?

“The existence of the numerous Bible manuscripts in Armenian can be explained by the great importance the Armenians attached to the Bible and its teachings..... (the Bible is the source of) every aspect of worship in the Armenian Church...” (Bishop Vahan Hovanesian, Ph.D., “A Glance at the Holy Bible in the Armenian Church Traditions, NRSV Armenian Church Edition)

How many churches can offer study leaders who have lived and studied in Jerusalem? Lived in the Eastern Mediterranean and actually walked in the footsteps of Paul, not as a tourist, but as a native? How many have access to one of the earliest translations of the Bible? As well as a history that can trace the roots of our Christian faith to the Apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew?

*Our Bible Study Group is more than an assignment,
it is a journey, an adventure,
a community of friends...and it’s fun!*

Did you know?

- The word ‘Bible’ comes from the Greek word for papyrus.
- The surviving Armenian manuscripts provide the second largest collection after the Latin manuscripts.
- Many non-Armenian scholars call the Armenian Bible the ‘Queen of Translations’ because of its beauty and accuracy.

“By coming to Bible Study, and reading the Bible daily, I show up (at Church) on Sunday engaged and prepared.”

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



Commemorating the 125th anniversary of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America's founding - July 2, 1898!

The Armenian Church of America: 125 Years
www.bit.ly/44mnKlZ

A Message from the Primate

"The Lord Has Done Great Things For Us":
 125 Years of the Armenian Diocese of America

<https://youtu.be/PhUU9mGooXQ>
 (In English)

<https://youtu.be/oK6PEYkMYls>
 (In Armenian)



In the Dark About the Transfiguration - The Armenian Church

<https://armenianchurch.us/in-the-dark-about-the-transfiguration-4/>



The Man Who Remembered God - The Armenian Church

<https://armenianchurch.us/the-man-who-remembered-god-4/>