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December 2023

Volume 74 | Issue 4

# Torchbearer

ST. JOHN ARMENIAN CHURCH NEWSLETTER

## In this issue:

New Lobby Mural, Rug,  
and Chandeliers Arrive!

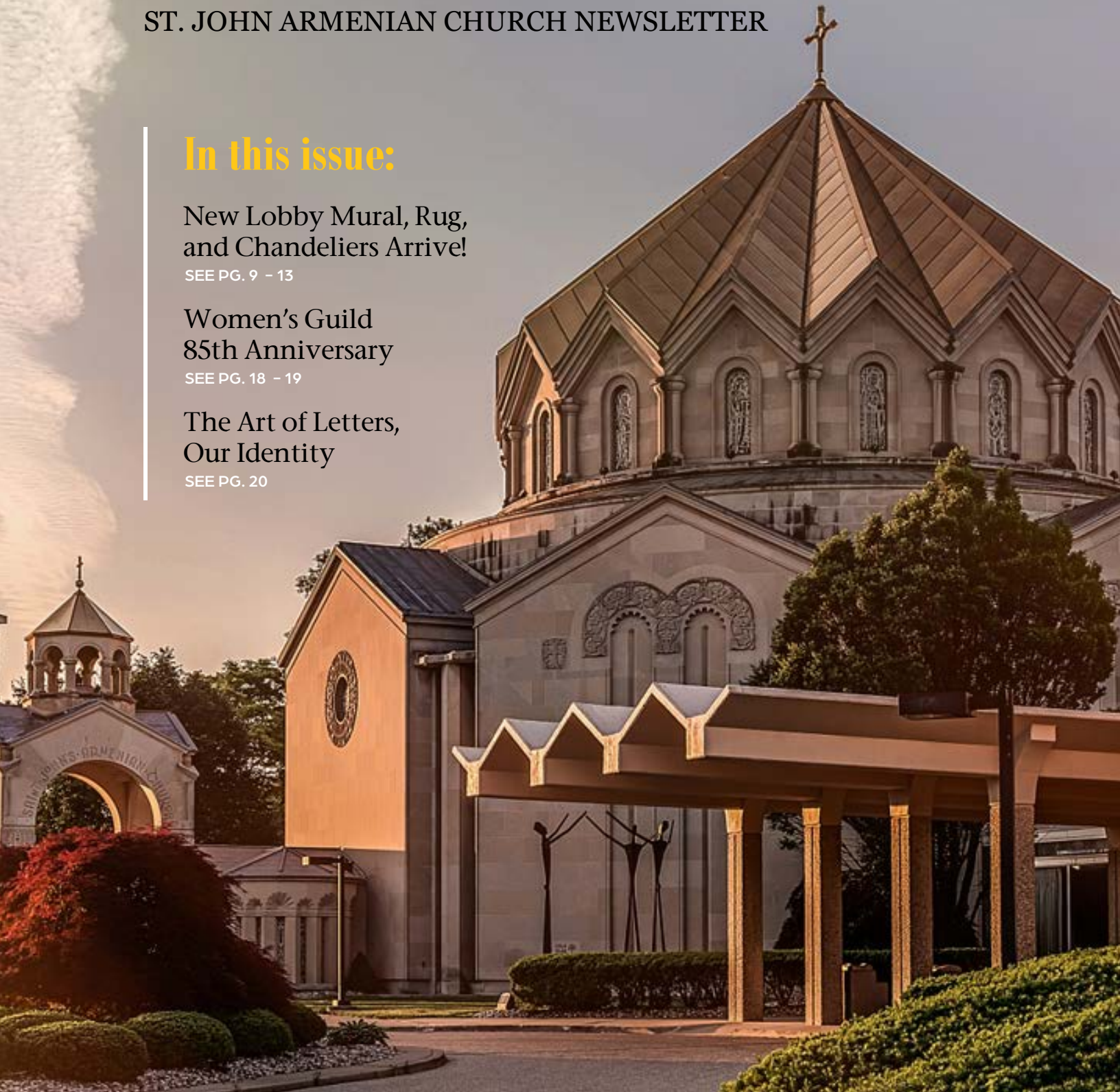
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Women's Guild  
85th Anniversary

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The Art of Letters,  
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## Torchbearer

**V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian**  
**Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian**  
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*Editor*  
*Graphic Designer*

## 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.

# Do I serve it? Or does it serve me?

For many, many years now, I have always tried to impart to our young people that technology is a good thing when used properly. Technology can be used as a tool, or it can be a vice, or one might say, an addiction.

*"Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to thy name!"  
(Psalm 142:7)*



From the Old Testament, Psalm 142, verse 7, shines light on what happens when we are imprisoned. When one is imprisoned, one is cut off from the freedoms that others enjoy. When we are cut off, then we can only think about our own situation, our own dilemma and our own selves. When one is free, one is free to give thanks to God!

Nearly everyone above a certain age has a mobile phone and uses it frequently. Too many times we become obsessed with our mobile devices. Too often, I see a younger generation CONSTANTLY on their mobile devices. For the most part, I am guessing that they are not reading scripture or on the VEMKAR App of our diocese or even doing their homework. More often than not, they are texting, playing video games or checking out social media such as Facebook, Instagram or TikTok. In many cases, they are communicating with one another in the same room, household or even at the same table!!

I try to impress upon our younger generation that my mobile device serves ME and I do not serve IT! Let's think about that for a moment. When we are serving something other than God Himself, then we are drawn into a world where we are taken down some pretty nasty paths or one might even say into a prison or an addiction. Yes, a phone or mobile device can be a prison for some. It becomes a place where we are so engrossed and enthralled with what we see, find and experience, that we lose sight of the real world and even where our focus should be as Christians. We often "cling" to our phones and I would even say, some might see it as a security blanket. To me, this is quite dangerous when we put so much stock and weight into a piece of technology which in reality was simply created to help us communicate better with one-another. What in fact has happened, is that it has become such a distraction that we forget about communicating with God Himself or even with one-another. The result, we are addicted.

When we think of addiction, what comes to mind are perhaps alcoholics who are homeless. We think of rehabilitation facilities where people with severe drug addictions go to "detox". It is interesting that one aspect of "detox" is refocusing one's attention back to God. When one is addicted, the attention turns from other's needs and even our focus from God onto only ourselves. Society does not think of technology as something we can become addicted to. Yet, just because technology does not show up in one's life in the same manner as drugs, alcohol or even other addictions, addiction to technology and the way it can pull a person down can manifest itself in different ways. If not controlled, it can take us away from our jobs, family, friends and even our relationship with God.

I can confess that I find myself surfing Facebook for minutes or even large chunks of time, whereby I then look at the clock and realize that more than twenty minutes has gone by. I was imprisoned and one would even say addicted for twenty minutes which took me away from focusing on God, my parish responsibilities and others.

We are all called, including myself to offer praise and to sing praises to God and to God alone. Living a Christ-centered life is one of discipline. I agree, it is not easy to be disciplined especially when we are drawn into a fantasy world which offers us all sorts of pleasures, yes, even sinful pleasures.

Forget about the ways that technology draws us away from God. How about when it draws us away from one another? How many times are we sitting with someone, having a discussion and their mobile device rings or vibrates? They immediately answer. Where does that leave us? Someone has “cut” in line and now the person across from us is non-verbally communicating to us that this interruption is more important than our conversation. Let’s think about the message we send others when we answer a phone call (mobile or otherwise). We are communicating that WE are serving the device, and that the device does not serve US.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus promises, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Addiction by definition does take us away from what is important in life. It pulls us away from God and our responsibilities to others. Jesus’s call to go to him is for all who are weary, not only those who are tired, but especially those who are ravaged by addiction of one kind or another. Addiction to technology makes us weary and wears us down.

One might say that this is just a byproduct of our social circumstances. In reality, we have lost sight of the prisons we have built around us. We have allowed technology to imprison us and to keep us not only away from those we love, but away from our relationship with God Himself, which becomes the very definition of addiction.

| *“Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to thy name!”*

Let us all find the strength to break out of our technological prisons and addictions. Let us not “jump” when a phone rings, but rather see the person who is in front of us and give them our love and attention. Let us be aware and disciplined as to how much time and power we give to technology which takes us away from our love of God. I pray that the Holy Spirit gives us the wisdom to tune out the noise of our electronic devices, as they pull us down, and open our souls to praising the name of the Lord.

~ Fr. Aren



Photos courtesy of FAR

## Parish Council Message

### *St. John looks in many directions in 2023*

Wishing everyone a blessed Christmas season. Don't forget your church family is always here for you! We love seeing you on Sunday mornings!

Although the past year was very tough with the huge loss of Artsakh, we continue to pray and raise funds to support Armenian Relief's AYO! platform that is supporting the displaced families from our ancient lands. You may donate funds #For Artsakhtsis [www.weareayo.org/donate](http://www.weareayo.org/donate).

Parish Council held a Special Parish Assembly on Monday, November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023 to present the generator project that we have been working on for several years in partnership with the Armenian Apostolic Society. The project is a large endeavor that will protect the Church Sanctuary and Cultural Building during power outages. We experienced large catastrophes in 2022 when on two separate occasions our transformer box was hit by a speeding car that did extensive damage. It was like lightning struck in the same place twice and was especially devastating with both events happening in the same year, the second time only weeks after the transformer boxes had been replaced. Since then, there

has been a lot of work to protect these boxes with fencing, bollards, and road work, but the risk of electricity outages due to storms and other causes still exist.

Each time the church experiences a power outage there is a strong probability that we will have flooding in the basement. This is an important concern that strongly supports the need for a generator for the cultural building, along with the importance of climate control for the Mardigian Library and Manoogian Museum. It will also be nice to have generator power for our coolers and freezers and to power our sanctuary and Grand Ballroom during power outages.

Much effort was put into researching generators to fulfill our needs with cost playing a large role in decision making as well. The project was presented during a Special Parish Assembly to determine if the parish was supportive of the large expenditure before we proceeded with our final decision. Parish Council received a very strong majority support for the project (97% in favor). We are grateful for the participation, support, and opinions of our stewards.

**PARISH COUNCIL MESSAGE**  
CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

Stewardship is extremely important to us at St. John Armenian Apostolic Church. Not only does your stewardship help to support our building and staff but allows us to provide many programs to keep our faith and culture strong. We hope that you will also donate your time and talents, as many of you regularly do to support our many programs. Our church organizations, Women's Guild, Men's Society, ACYOA, Choir, Music Guild and Fine Arts Committee are an integral part of our community and we more than appreciate all the time and devotion of these members.

We will also be hosting a New Year's Eve Event that promises to be a wonderful time for all. Come celebrate with us God's blessings from this past year and for the year ahead.

Sincerely,  
*Kim Najarian, Parish Council Chair*



Caterpillar Generator



## Message from the editor

*The Torchbearer* has always been a vital, much anticipated document, in the St. John community. Since a “reorganizational” meeting in the Fall of 2019, sixteen issues of the *Torchbearer* have been published online. They have been very well-received and have chronicled the many activities, organizations, and individuals in our community. A survey was distributed electronically in 2022 and has been valuable in helping *The Torchbearer* committee chart the future of the publication. We take time in this issue to thank those who have volunteered their time to make the newsletter possible. And we thank as well our pastors and clergy, Parish Council members, office staff, organizations, and writers for their time and contributions to our success. We would like to list all the individuals who have served and continue to serve on *The Torchbearer* committee:

- V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian
- Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian
- Navasart Michael Mardoyan
- Vardan Sargsyan
- Anna Svirid Sarkisian
- Alice Argnian
- Lisa Bahm
- Dan Cristiano
- Ardis Gregory
- Dr. Gary Zamanigian

# St. John's Outreach to Mission Communities

By Lisa Mardigian  
Youth Coordinator

On Sunday, October 15 and Sunday, November 5, St. John Church coordinated outreach missions to communities in Ann Arbor and East Lansing, respectively. Pastor, V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian and Dn. Rubik Mailian celebrated a *Jashou* Communion Service. Youth Coordinator, Lisa Mardigian organized students on the campuses of the University of Michigan and Michigan State University and mission families to attend. Light refreshments following the service were enjoyed by all!



Ann Arbor outreach mission



Lansing outreach mission



Daycamp arts and crafts



Hayr Aren at Day Camp



Daycamp staff

# Scenes from Summer Day Camp 2023



Blessing of the grapes





Members of the Renovation Committee with artist, Arev Petrosyan and art installation expert, James Leacock.

# Unveiling of New Lobby Artwork and Rug

**By Sara Sarkisian Bell**  
*Renovation Committee member*

Late this summer, we were blessed to witness the long-awaited unveiling of the beautiful new lobby rug as well as the new wall mural. During the planning of the renovation, the Renovation Committee worked with the architectural design team to establish the desired concept for the rug and the wall. Once the concept was set, the Committee was fortunate to work with the Hagopian team on the design of the rug and also with artist Arev Petrosyan on the wall.

The Hagopian family's generosity brought to fruition the magnificent inset lobby rug. Their amazing knowledge

and experience with Armenian rugs allowed the rug design to be developed, and this was quite a challenge due to the immense scale of the installation. The design of the rug is based on the Khach-Khoran Rug (1909) from the Lori region currently on display in the Alex and Marie Manoogian Museum. The Renovation Committee worked closely with the Hagopians to finalize the new rug's design and select the final colors to complement the newly renovated space. Very, Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian, Dn. Rubik Mailian, and the Hagopians participated in the blessing of the rug at the end of August.

**MURAL**  
CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

The other new addition to our lobby is the incredible new mural called “Deep Mystery” created in Yerevan by artist Arev Petrosyan. It took some time for the Committee to find Arev, but they knew when they saw examples of her work that she was the perfect choice to create the new lobby feature wall. The Committee worked closely over Zoom with Arev over the last year to finalize on the design concept and all the details. Arev worked tirelessly through the spring months of this year to create the mural, which consists of seven plexiglass panels creating a total composition that is over twenty-seven feet long and seven feet tall. Arev was deeply inspired by her visit to Detroit in the summer of 2022 when Dn. Rubik Mailian sang sacred music for her in our sanctuary. The artwork speaks to the Armenian spirit and specifically to our community, with words from a 17th century illuminated manuscript in our Museum regarding St. John the Baptist and inspirational imagery from our altar

painting. The tree imagery reflects the growing generations of our Armenian community along with the symbol of Mount Ararat. The mural was unveiled in September while Dn. Rubik sang the same *sharagans* he sang for Arev last year. The event was capped off by a show of Arev’s work and her presentation regarding the creation of “Deep Mystery” and her history as an artist.

The Renovation Committee is also deeply grateful to James Leacock and his installation team. Their expert skills allowed them to easily meet the challenge of installing such a monumental work in museum-quality fashion. Our community is also immensely grateful for the generosity of Michael and Linda Karibian, whose generosity on behalf of George and Anne Latzkian allowed the work of creating this art to be undertaken. These two incredible works, the mural and the rug, will undoubtedly be enjoyed and appreciated by many generations to come.



The mural is blessed!



Installation of the “Deep Mystery” mural.



Donors Michael and Linda Karibian flank artist Arev Petrosyan



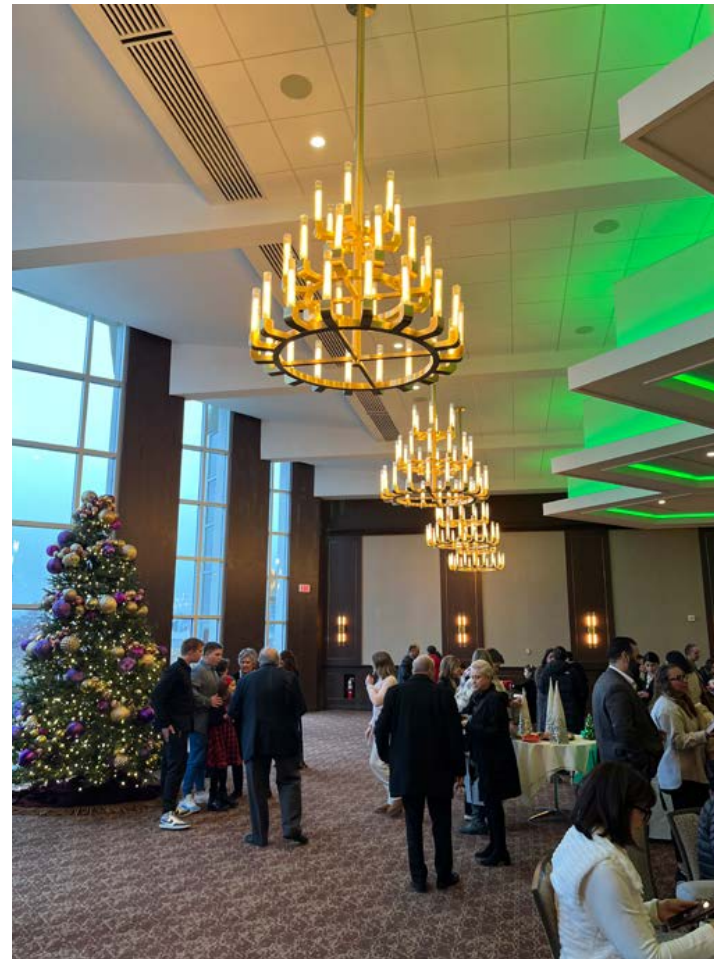
The Hagopian Family as the rug is installed and blessed!

## The Crowning Touch to the Renovation Arrives!

The chandeliers in the Grand Ballroom were installed after much anticipation December 15. The coordinating sconces were in place at the completion of the Ballroom renovation in July, 2022. The light fixtures were designed and placed by local artisan Grant Johnston and make a stunning

addition to the ambience of the space.

Along with the addition of furnishings and signage, the renovation process is all but complete!



## “DEEP MYSTERY” - Comments by the artist

### Little bit about Story

Exactly one year ago, I was invited to this church by Father Aren. Here I got to know a group of wonderful people, whose love and dedication to serve the church and the Armenian community, amazed me. I stood in front of the white wall, where there was supposed to be the picture, painting, the story of which first rang in my ears, yes, I'm not wrong... from the beginning it rang, rang from the sounds of ARAVOT LUSO, by Mr. Rubik... who was specially invited that early morning to sing “Sharakans” in this magic church... later over many mornings, in distant Armenia, in my studio, the sounds of Sharakan “Aravor Luso” will provide me as inner light, perhaps light that guided me here.

### Description of the painting

And so, today, here, I present to you the painting that, in my opinion, fully represents our identity, our faith, our culture, connection with nature, the exceptional and unique power of the Armenian alphabet and letters as an important element of national identity and strong power of our unity.

It is presented with modern technique, on plexiglass, with a variety of materials. A multi-layered image, (by the way, the number of layers is 21) done with mixed techniques, in some places with collage solutions. Light, bright, non-shouting colors, graphic approaches, silver and gold leaves give the impression of spontaneous light. The reflection seems to make us participants of the moment and our presence will prove the importance of being as an integral part of the present time.

At first glance the transparency in some places gives feeling of the lightness. weightlessness. But I would like to mention that it's quite heavy; seems unbelievable but it's about 210 kg, 462 pounds by the way. Looking back, I'm wondering, if it's really done by me? These huge and heavy wall paintings, were really created by this small Arev? Funny and unbelievable but yes, it's me ...

But this is all about material and performance. and profoundly, this painting is a set of collective mysteries that tell about our journey, national memory, power of faith, divine power, unity and eternal ontology - history.

In the upper part of the central point of the painting you will see the symbol of the church. From the various corners of the whole painting a stream of irregular, free-flying birds, concentrating to the center, as if by magnetic force brings them as a group, on the image of the Holy Spirit, from which the divine

light radiates. I can compare this image with now today, those who present today, here, gathered in this bright hearth.

I think it is important to talk about the tree - it is not just a tree that I used for beauty. It stands as a symbol of the Armenian man, as a symbol of the family, the continuation of the gene. Every branch gives birth to a new branch, leading us to infinity, showing past, present and future. The tree also has visible divisions, generations that make up our past, present and future. It begins and grows by being nourished by the culture, in the inner part of the tree, I used a fragment of a carpet as a soil base. a symbol of culture. I believe, and it is a fact that the type of Armenian man is exactly that, creative.

In the left corner is the Armenian script, taken from 1683 “SURB Stepanos” MEGRY prayer book kept in St. John Church museum - it serves here not only as prayer, or for reading but it is engraved as the ARMENIAN letter, which has accompanied us in all times, giving us exceptional language thinking and identity awareness.

In the central part, the Bible mountain, Masis, Ararat stands majestically, silent and powerful, unshakable. It seems to tell about the Armenian man, his history of centuries, about the creation of the world. With its inexplicable beauty and majesty, it gives us hope for success and victories. He seems to know the story of every family, the history of Armenian life. And I am probably one of the lucky ones who see his presence every morning from the balcony of my house.

The complete picture is collected from the right and left sides, with patterns taken from carpets. It symbolizes our cultural past, traditions, our creative national profile. I used the famous “Sun Carpet” (XIX Artsakh, Gathering, “Diagonal Shield Carpet,” XIX Syunik) strengthening the connection between Artsakh and Armenia as one national value.

And finally, summarizing this work I have done for months, I want to present it with deep conviction that it should be presented to the generations, passing on to them our national values, centuries-old traditions, our consciousness and faith.

One bright day, my great-grandchildren, will stand in front of this image. I believe that “Aravor Luso” will be heard in their hearts at that very moment.

I also believe that God is love, and we should make every effort to preserve that love in ourselves. A part of God, without which life is nothing.

*Edited for print publication*

With love,  
Arev Petrosyan

# “Deep Mystery” Mural:

*Remarks by Dr. Ara Belian*

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, we gather to celebrate a remarkable artist, Arev Petrosyan. Her art beautifully connects, but is definitely not defined or limited, to her Armenian heritage. Her work showcases an unwavering dedication to creativity.

Coming from a family deeply rooted in the arts, Arev’s artistic journey began early in life. Her father, the esteemed sculptor Benik Petrosyan, and her mother, Alice Adamyán, a virtuoso violinist and educator, nurtured her profound appreciation for the arts.

Upon graduating from the College of Fine Arts in Yerevan, Arev embarked on a career designing television studios and sets, quickly establishing herself as the most prominent studio designer in Armenia. However, in 2005, she experienced a transformative artistic breakthrough, venturing into vibrant and dynamic mixed-media art - exclusively on plexiglass. This unconventional choice soon became her signature.

This breakthrough gained international recognition, leading her to participate in exhibitions and art events worldwide.

In 2015, Arev received an ‘Honored Artist of Armenia’ Medal from the President of Armenia. That same year, she opened the Arev Art Gallery in the heart of Yerevan, housing her work alongside sculptures by her brother, Areg Petrosyan, and pieces by her late father, Benik Petrosyan. The gallery became a hub for cultural events, from book presentations to live classical music and wine nights.

In 2014, Arev Petrosyan gifted a monumental artwork to the Holy Trinity Church in Fresno, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the first Armenian church in the United States. This piece celebrated a century of faith and heritage while deepening her ties to the Armenian community in America. Interestingly, this artwork was serendipitously discovered by one of our own parishioners, prompting our church to invite Arev to create the mural that now graces our lobby.

Just last night, I had the privilege of a private unveiling of our church’s mural. I learned that it was inspired by the deep, meditative voice of Deacon Rubik Mailian, who sang in the sanctuary during Arev’s visit to our church. His voice resonates throughout the mural!

The work also showcases her unique style, featuring gold and silver leaf in her iconic plexiglass medium. I invite you all to attend the official unveiling and blessing of the mural tomorrow after the Divine Liturgy.

Arev’s work is deeply intriguing, exceptionally unique, and cutting-edge. Her art delves into the viewer’s spiritual journey, and will continue to leave an everlasting mark in the art world.

# St John's Bazaar 2023: A Feast of Food, Fun, and Fellowship

By Lisa Mardigian  
Youth Coordinator

St. John's annual Bazaar took place on the weekend of October 6 & 7. This year's Bazaar included lamb, *luleh* kebab, and chicken dinners, hot foods, baked goods, The Country Store, bookstore, \$100 Raffle, Fine Arts Exhibit, Snackshop, Hye Bar and vendors. The Women's Guild and church volunteers, under the direction of Yerchanig Joy Callan provided baked large and small *cheoreg*, large and small *kahta*, meat *beoregs*, *khalkha* and *sou beoreg* along with donations of *simit*, *khorabia*, *nazoog*, *khadayif*, *bourma* and miscellaneous desserts. Other menu items prepared for sale were spinach *tepsee beoregs*, Greek-style chicken meatballs, stuffed cabbage and *dolma*, *lamajoon* and *kufteh* provided by Gary Reizian. Harry Torigian and Paul Tootikian cut the meat for skewering. Our ACYOA, Nick Boyadjian prepared our *luleh kebab*! Alberta Godoshian and crew made the rice pilaf and Paul Yousoufian made the bulghur pilaf. We had great kitchen help guided by Anna Tokmajyan throughout the weekend making sure everything ran smoothly. Our grillers Brian Thomas, and Serop Babayan did a great job throughout the weekend! Most everything sold out by Saturday evening and what was left was sold Sunday after church.

Ara Hachigian and family organized and operated The Country Store with all their specialty products including *tourshi*, jellies, *basterma* sandwiches, mezza platters, cheeses and more! The bookstore was set up and organized by Lucy Ardash and Anahit Dilakian. This year's raffle was chaired by Jim Stamboulian. Paul Andonian organized cash/credit checkout operations. Treasurer, Marilyn Dadian and Assistant Treasurer, Sako Ghazarian reconciled cash boxes for each day. The Health Fair, organized by Greg and Edith Baise, took place on Saturday with a Mobile Health Unit in the church parking lot, a blood drive in the Veteran's Building and flu shots in the main building. The Petting Zoo was well received Saturday afternoon. Jennifer Morris operated our kidsroom all weekend. The Grandma's Attic tent sale was co-chaired by Amara Boyajian and Arda Kafafian. Marilyn Dadian coordinated the ACYOA Juniors for the Snackshop. Patrons enjoyed specialty drinks



at the Hye Bar coordinated by Bob and Trish Magee while listening to entertainment featuring the Nigosian Band Friday evening and the Johnites Band on Saturday evening!

Thank you to all of our St. John Armenian Church family and friends, that made our 2023 Bazaar a success. Without your continued support, this wonderful weekend of fellowship would not have been possible!

**MORE BAZAAR IMAGES**  
CONTINUES ON PAGE XX

**BAZAAR PHOTOS**  
CONTINUED FROM PG. XX



# The St. John Mission to Manoogian Manor

**By Daniel Cristiano & George Saboonjian**  
*Contributors*

The collected representatives of several St. John organizations continue to eagerly further the mission to serve the residents of Manoogian Manor.

On Saturday, July 22, 2023 V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian, Deacons, Choir, Women’s Guild and Men’s Society members of St. John Armenian Church participated in the Transfiguration of Our Lord Services for our precious seniors at Manoogian Manor. After the services and the resident’s lunch, the Men’s society provided ice cream to the more than 45 residents. The anticipation and joy expressed was truly a humbling experience. Again, we received so much more than was given.

The Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross Services at Manoogian Manor Saturday, September 23, 2023 were attended by members of the Men’s Society, the Choir and the Women’s Guild. Fr. Aren and Dn. George Boyagian provided the services for the nineteen residents present. Men’s Society members present included Kazar Terterian, Edward Korkoian, George Saboonjian, Daniel Cristiano and of course, Dn. George Boyagian. Choir members present included Marianne Dardarian, Margret Simonian, Denise Karakashian, Yvonne Korkoian and Sandi Negoghosian. Representing the Women’s Guild Sara Andonian, Denise Boyagian, Elise Papazian and the women of the Choir.

Sara Andonian provided the basil for the service and Denise Boyagian provided cheoreg for the residents on behalf of the Women’s Guild. George Saboonjian provided pumpkin pie for the residents on behalf of the Men’s Society for their luncheon dessert.







Mané Galoyan accompanied by Nathalie Doucet



Martin Shoushanian, Annette Mamassian, Violet Cholakian, Mané Galoyan, Nathalie Doucet, Diane Ekizian, Dn. Rubik Mailian, Robert Simonian



Our guest interviewed by Diane Ekizian

## Song and Conversation with Armenian Soprano

**By Violet Cholakian**  
Contributor

Armenian soprano, Mané Galoyan, performed in the St. John Armenian Church Cultural Hall Friday, October 20, 2023 to an enthusiastic audience. The evening was filled with Italian, Spanish and Armenian music. The two arias she performed with accompanist Nathalie Doucet, ‘*O mio babbino caro*’ by Puccini and ‘*Al penser en el dueno de mis amores*’ by Chapi showed her vocal range of brightness, full tones, and energy. The two Armenian selections by Komitas, ‘*Kele Kele*’ and ‘*Kanche Krounk*’, were sung with passion and clarity, bringing an enthusiastic response and emotional connection with the audience.

The evening continued with a conversation with Mané led by Diane Ekizian, Music Guild member. The audience learned about Mané’s childhood and family life in Gyumri

Armenia, her sister’s music career as a pop singer in Armenia, her connection to opera and upcoming role in the Detroit Opera production, “*Cunning Little Vixen*” in May 2024. A proud moment for everyone was her comment that she always “embraces her heritage and feels welcomed and connected when performing before her Armenian audiences.” Being a resident of Detroit now, despite her frequent travel schedule, Mané can know that St. John and community can be ‘home’ for her.

An afterglow reception welcomed Mané where she had the opportunity to meet and greet everyone. Guests from the DSO and Detroit Opera enjoyed the evening’s songs, conversation and “warm Armenian hospitality.” The evening was sponsored by the St. John Music Guild whose mission is to present a wide variety of genre/repertoire, performed by high-caliber musicians. Thank you to the community who continues to support our endeavors.



## The Gala Celebrating The Women's Guild 85th Anniversary and The Armenian Heritage Costume Collection 50th Anniversary

**By Nyree Giragosian**  
*Contributor*

A spectacular time was had by all who attended the St. John Armenian Church Women's Guild 85th Anniversary and the Armenian Heritage Collection 50th Anniversary Gala Saturday, October 28, 2023. Over 200 guests enjoyed mouthwatering Armenian appetizers while Armenian music played in the background. The guests were welcomed into our beautifully renovated banquet hall where they were seated at their tables and anxiously waited for what would come next.

In honor of the Women's Guild Anniversary, 20 past chairs of our church's 85-year-old organization, dating back to 1962, were honored before we were served our delicious dinner. One by one, each honoree lit a candle on our anniversary cake as they were introduced by current Women's Guild Chair Sara Andonian and Women's Guild Anniversary Chair Jacqueline Melkonian ElChemmas. Sara Andonian then raised a toast to their years of service. Thank you to the following past chairs (listed by year served) who were honored at our Gala:

- Rose Shahinian
- Angela Banerian
- Mary Keoleian
- Isabelle Vahratian
- Alice Terzian
- Nina Sarkisian
- Rose Mardigian
- Mary Demir
- Lora Kazanjian
- Jane Hovsepien
- Jacqueline Melkonian ElChemmas
- Marianne Dardarian
- Linda Assarian
- Linda Tiffany
- Joyce Obenhoff
- Dawn Karagosian
- Linda Stamboulian
- Yerchanig Joy Callan
- Barbara Rupas
- Lisa Derderian
- Denise Karakshian
- Denise Boyagian
- Carol Cholmakjian
- Sara Andonian

Following a delicious dinner of shish kebab and salmon, the second half of the evening began – a presentation of the Armenian Heritage Costume Collection. Since 1977, when the collection was first performed at St. John Armenian Church, this collection has enriched audiences all over the United States and Canada. Under the guidance of the Armenian Heritage Collection chair, Paulette Apkarian, this 50-year-old legacy was brought to life for us all. The following twenty-six models had the honor of participating in the program:

- Shahan Ashkarian
- Armen Arslanian
- Michael Baghdasarian
- Sona Baldwin
- Stella Baldwin
- Melanie Boskovich
- Vartuhi Dilakian
- Nazelie Doghramadjian
- Patricia Fantazian
- Hiyk Ghazarian
- Sevag Ghazarian
- Gayane Hovhannisyan
- Isabelle Kazarian
- Marissa Kazarian
- Adam Krikorian
- Mona Kurjian
- Madisen Lundquist
- Areg Mailian
- Sevana Mailian
- Madeline Mardigian
- Nayiri Ourlian
- Maria Palaian
- Lindsay Sahakian
- Christine Santourian
- Jennifer Scappaticci
- Olivia Thomas

The Gala committee worked diligently for the past six months under the guidance of the Anniversary Gala Chair Jacqueline Melkonian ElChemmas. We thank her for her leadership and also thank her committee for their tireless dedication, making the evening an experience we will not soon forget! We would also like to thank Armenian Heritage Collection chair, Paulette Apkarian, and her committee for ensuring the theatrical production of the collection performance was flawless.



**Women's Guild 85th Anniversary Committee.** First row: Sara Andonian, Anna Svirid Sarkisian, Paulette Apkarian, Jacqueline ElChemmas - Chair, Dolly Matoian, Yn. Roberta Kochakian, Sara Sarkisian Bell. Second row: Marilyn Dadian, Nyree Giragosian, Denise Karakashian, Carol Cholmakjian, Diane Ekizian, Linda Tiffany



**Armenian Heritage Collection 50th Anniversary Committee:** Paulette Apkarian - Chair, Marilyn Sarkesian, Terry Palaian, Patricia Kezelian

# “The Art of Letters, Our Identity”

**By Linda Karibian**  
*Contributor*

On Saturday, November 4, 2023, Rev. Fr. Garabed Kochakian lead the Women’s Guild painting workshop, “The Art of Letters, Our Identity.”

The morning began with a power point presentation followed by a demonstration by Fr. Garabed and a prayer prior to the actual artwork. Each “artist” was given a set of gouache paints and all the materials necessary to create their own illuminated Armenian letter(s). The room fell quiet as each person concentrated and was drawn in to the peace of creating a unique work of art for themselves. A light lunch was also served, but the artists were eager to return to their projects. As the afternoon drew to a close, many were reluctant to stop their work, but in the end gathered for a photo holding their letters.

The committee consisted of Linda Tiffany, Sara Andonian, Sue Carman Vian, Nora Noraian and Linda Karibian.

The Women’s Guild would like to thank Fr. Garabed and Yn. Roberta for their hard work bringing our rich art and heritage to our Church in this unique, personal way. It was an amazing day enjoyed by all!





## Honoring Paul Yousoufian's 30 Years of Service to St. John's

**By Kim Najarian, Paul Andonian**  
*Contributors*

On Sunday, October 10, 200 St. John parishioners gathered after Divine Liturgy in the Cultural Hall to celebrate Paul Yousoufian's thirty years of service to the church as Catering Manager and to wish him well in his retirement.

Paul has devoted his time and talents to the church, working diligently night and day during this time and is retiring at the end of 2023. During his tenure at St. John's, Paul has touched the lives of countless parishioners and members of the community, providing events and meals during their most memorable and happiest times, as well as most trying times.

The community helped to contribute to the luncheon with 65 individuals participating in making manti for this special event, to be served along with cheese *beoreg*, salad and dessert. The love and appreciation for Paul's years of service was shown during the preparation as well as during the event. He received many accolades, including from his valued catering staff, as well as gifts to mark the occasion. Paul was presented with a gift of a laptop computer, printer, and gift certificate from the church and its organizations.

We wish Paul well, congratulate him on his outstanding career and wish him the very best in his retirement. But as Father Aren said, he is still a valued member of our church, most importantly of the Men's Society and he will continue to be an important part of our parish.



## Reflection on the Eastern Diocese Young Adult Pilgrimage to Jerusalem

**By Celine Philip**

*Participant from St. John Armenian Church*

From June 4th to June 12, 31 young adults aged 18-27 led by Father Guregh Hambarzumyan (pastor at St. John the Baptist Church in Greenfield, Wisconsin) and Father Hovsep Karapetyan (pastor at St. Mary Armenian Church in Washington, DC) embarked on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The young adults were all sponsored by their respective churches in the Eastern Diocese, and representatives came from states such as Illinois, Wisconsin, New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Massachusetts. This year I was blessed to have the opportunity to be sponsored by St. John's to attend this pilgrimage.

We had a packed seven days, exploring a plethora of holy sites throughout the area such as the site of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, the Jordan River, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Church of Agony, Mount Tabor, the Mount of Olives, the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth, the Cana wedding church, the tomb of Lazarus, and walking through the Old City on the path Jesus walked to his crucifixion (the Via Dolorosa). At most of these holy sites, we would take the time to do bible studies based on the story the site related to. This was a very poignant way to truly embrace where we physically were located and connect what is written in the Bible to the environment.

We also had the once in a lifetime opportunity to spend a night in the Holy Sepulchre. The night started with participation in a midnight service, after which we had the freedom to explore the Holy Sepulchre with a small fraction of the attendees that would be there during daytime hours. I was in awe of how peaceful and safe I felt in the Holy Sepulchre, and I took the free time to write about what I was feeling at that moment. At 4:00am, we partook in Divine Liturgy at the Tomb of Jesus Christ, filling the Holy Sepulchre with beautiful Armenian hymns and chants as we had a few pilgrims who regularly sang in the choir at their home churches.

No trip to Jerusalem is complete without visiting the Armenian Quarter so we had the chance to explore the quarter on several occasions. During our first full day in Jerusalem, we sat down with Archbishop Nourhan Manoogian, the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, to get to know his journey to his current position as well as what the current state of the Armenian community is in Jerusalem. Later in the week, we toured St. James Cathedral and attended an evening service. On our last full day, we toured the newly opened Edward and Helen Mardigian Museum, the Holy Translators' School, and had a question-and-answer session with Father Mardiros Chevian, Dean of St. Nersess Seminary, and Bedross Der Matossian, Armenian historian and graduate of the school. Der Matossian highlighted to us that the biggest way we can support the Armenian community in Jerusalem is to meaningfully engage with them and support their existence.

One evening, we visited the community center in the Armenian Quarter and got to play sports and games with the youth there as school had just let out for summer. The adults were preparing for the school's graduation which was taking place the next day. I got to talk to the kids about what they like to do during the summer, their favorite shows, how often they come to the community center, and what America is like. We all had so much fun and they all kept asking us to come back to Jerusalem so we could meet again.

Our free time consisted of supporting the Armenian ceramics shops in the Armenian Quarter, attending a light show at the Tower of David, or going for an evening walk to get knafeh, ice cream, or wine while enjoying the company of our groupmates.

We had a debrief on our last night in Jerusalem and got to share our favorite parts of the trip as well as how we want to bring what we've learned home. My main message to you is that going to Jerusalem, especially as an Armenian, is a very touching and unique experience that I would highly recommend to anyone.

# Arts of Armenia: a Learning Camp for Children

By Dolly Matoian

Contributor

From a trip to Armenia by the Komitas Choir of St. John Armenian Church of Southfield, Michigan in 2007, a new program was conceived and is flourishing sixteen years later. While choir members and spouses toured and singers joined the Etchmiadzin Choir on Sunday morning, it was a visit to an Arts and Crafts school that became the impetus to our Arts of Armenia program. It started with an idea from our choir director, Dn. Rubik Mailian, that our choir sponsor a program to teach the parish's children the various Armenian arts.

For three years, a dance instructor and an artist were brought from Armenia to teach our children. After these few years, the classes were taught by professional and certified teachers from our own parish. Under the leadership of Dn. Rubik and Denise Karakashian, chairperson, the committee has remained with the same members and instructors for the sixteen years from its inception. The students are introduced to Armenian literature, music, art, dance, food, and important events in Armenian history, such as the Battle of Sardarabad or Artsakh.

The classes in the one-week camp program run from 9:30 to 3:30 and begin each day with the Lord's Prayer, *Hayr Mer*, and the National Anthem of Armenia, *Mer Hayrenik*. Classes have a theme for the week, such as Royalty and Saints, An Armenian Wedding, and Faith and Family. This year's theme was Historical Figures and Monuments.

Various art classes have involved making *khachkars*, wedding *narods*, bird letter drawings of students' initials, painting miniatures from Bible stories, and painting flags of historical dynasties. This year, students chose to paint the Sardarabad Memorial, *Mamig yev Papig* or the Armenian letter "eh". Rev. Fr. Garabed Kochakian and Zabel Belian have taught these classes. We were joined by a new instructor this year, Alex Koceyan, now a fine arts student at the College of Creative Studies in Detroit. He was a student from the first year of Arts of Armenia.

Dance classes taught are such Armenian dances as *Kochari*, *Lorke*, *Pampoori*, *Musa Ler*, *Tamzara* and *Artzakhian* dances, the last being 5000 years old, which is verified by archeological evidence found in cave drawings. Teachers for dance are Nayiri Karapetian and Dikran Callan.

**ARTS OF ARMENIA**  
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Dn. Rubik Mailian, Music instructor, teaches students traditional folk songs that tie into the theme each year. This year's songs were "*Sardarabady Kacher*", "*Aravod Looso*", "*Seghan eh Arad*" and "*Soorp Asdvadz*".

The students also attend cooking classes where they learn to make two or three Armenian baked or cooked items. Some of the foods they have made are *manti*, *che-oreg*, *bourma*, *lahmajoon*. This year the students made *dolma*, *lavash* and *hummus*. They enjoy eating their masterpieces in class or even for lunch. Instructors for these classes are Yerchanig Joy Callan, Marianne Dardarian, Yn. Roberta Kochakian and Dolly Matoian.



Students also enjoy story-telling sessions about Armenian fairy tales, legends and warriors, such as the epic poem, David of Sassoun, and the story of the beginning the Armenian language. Anahit Toumajan teaches this class.

In addition to the classes they attend, the children are given a tour of the Manoogian Museum by Museum Director Lucy Ardash. They have seen artifacts and learned the stories behind them that connect to their classes. Some highlights this year include paintings by Sarian, an oriental rug made in 1907 by orphans their age, the Komitas statue and his death mask and a 500-year-old khachkar.



A walk to the Martyrs' Monument on our own St. John campus served as an example of the very important monument in Etchmiadzin. In addition, a field trip is planned each year. Students have visited such places as the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Henry Ford Museum of Innovation, Pewabic Pottery and an artist's studio. This year our travels took us to Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church, St. John's Episcopalian Church where our ancestors worshipped before having a church in Detroit (where students and clergy sang *Hayr Mer* in the chapel), and to the first church built by the Detroit Armenian community on Oakman Blvd.

Religious sessions might include talks about vesting and an explanation of a priest's attire, or artifacts in the church. This year, Hayr Aren explained the mosaics. Very Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian, Rev. Frs. Armash Bagdasarian and Garabed Kochakian taught these classes.

Guest artist, John Merigian, joined us and gave a talk about the sculpture of the three figures he constructed that stand on church grounds outside the front doors. He explained his thoughts and inspiration for the piece entitled, "Let Us Rejoice" and took students to the sculpture to explore.

The students greatly enjoyed their classes, met new friends, and learned the *Arts of Armenia*.







## Khunjook 2023 – A Festival for All!

**By Nyree Giragosian, Karen Kalajian**  
*Contributors*

For the second consecutive year, St. John Armenian Church transformed its tranquil grounds into a vibrant hub of excitement as it joyously welcomed families and eager children back to Church School. After a lengthy summer recess, the church grounds buzzed with the joyful sounds of children’s laughter, warm embraces, and eager anticipation for a new school year. As the children’s smiles lit up the day, they happily reunited with their familiar friends and eagerly extended hands to form new bonds with fellow parishioners, destined to mature into lifelong friends.

The Women’s Guild orchestrated a festive *Khunjook*, a family fun picnic, on Sunday, September 10, 2023. Families enjoyed an inflatable obstacle course with thrilling slides and a dedicated bouncy house for the youngest attendees. Craft tents offered the children creative outlets for artistic expression, and a colorful photo booth with whimsical props

captured precious memories. Over 200 guests enjoyed a raffle of themed baskets, ventured their guesses in a Jelly Belly jar guessing game, and savored the delicious Hunter House Food Truck, serving mouthwatering burgers and crispy fries. The tantalizing scent of freshly popped popcorn wafted through the air, mingling with the aroma of fresh fruits, vegetables, cookies, pretzels, and candy. Against this backdrop, the music of the Nigosian Band, playing spirited Armenian dance music, transported everyone together into a world of delight.

The *Khunjook* committee worked enthusiastically together to ensure our families would enjoy this delightful day! Thank you, Paulette Apkarian, for your leadership, and thank you to the committee for your tireless dedication, ensuring that this day would be cherished by our church community for years to come. The team’s commitment deserves our heartfelt gratitude. A special thank you extends to our dedicated committee members:

Alexandra Apkarian  
Paulette Apkarian  
Renee Apkarian  
Christine Atesian  
Marilyn Dadian  
Michelle Samarian Ducato  
Lauren Reizian-Gershonowicz

Nyree Giragosian  
Frances Hagopian  
Sarah Hagopian  
Kathy Hasse  
Karen Kalajian  
Dawn Karagosian  
Lynne Kojamarian

Donna Lafian  
Diana Mardigian  
Jenni Morris  
Christine Sarafian  
Maral Thomas  
Kathy Torigian

**KHUNJOOK**  
CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

Our *Khunjook* event was a resounding success, and it would not have been possible without the incredible generosity of dozens of people. Your dedication to our Women's Guild and St. John Armenian Church is not just appreciated, it is etched in our hearts forever. Our community is a treasure, where support flows, especially towards our youth, given with open hearts and love. Thanks to our remarkable donors who selflessly gave their time and resources, our "Free Will Offering" event became a true celebration. We would also like to give recognition to the newest member of our

family, Marie Semarjian, and her husband Chuck, Armen Arslanian, Lisa Mardigian, Karen Kazarian, Laurie Reizian, and Brian Thomas. Your contributions have made a difference and we thank you.

As we reflect on this year's success, we are already excited about next year's *Khunjook* and cannot wait to see the joy and anticipation in the eyes of our children once more. Together, we are creating memories that will last a lifetime.



# The Women’s Guild of St. John Armenian Church: In the Beginning...

*Excerpted by Marianne Dardarian from: “Years of Progress - St. John’s Armenian Church 1931-1956”*

At an afternoon tea given by the Senior Women’s Guild (later know as the Ladies’ Auxiliary) on November 22, 1938, the Rt. Rev. Bishop Mampre Calfayan, acting Primate of the Armenian Church of North America, organized the Young Women’s Guild, now simply the Women’s Guild. Bishop Calfayan appointed Siran Yagoobian as president and requested she select her Executive Board.

On Sunday, November 27, 1938, the following were presented to His Grace and were announced at church services: President - Siran Yagoobian; Vice-President - Lillian Boyajian; Secretary - Queenie Hanoian; Assistant Secretary - Victoria Zamanigian; Treasurer - Rose DerStepanian. Charter members in addition to the Board were: Varsenick Apkarian, Sylvia Artinian, Peggy Gavjian, Armenouhi Hovsepian, Florence Ruzgerian, and Armenouhi Terzian.

The purpose of the Guild was:

- to perpetuate Christianity, the Armenian Church and language by cultural, educational, and social activities.
- to cultivate among members the spirit of mutual love and cooperation.
- to cooperate with the church for moral and material progress.

Some of the early accomplishments and activities were:

- in April, 1939, the first dinner-dance at the Chinese Tea Garden was given and made a profit of \$125.00
- contributions made to Antelias, Jerusalem, the Theological Seminary, and the organization of an Armenian Boy Scout troop
- yearly contributions to St. John Armenian Church
- flowers for the altar every Sunday
- participation in the Altar Guild
- support of the Polio Fund
- Easter Sunday Children’s Breakfast



One of the earliest photos available of the women who lead us in the early years of our Guild.

**Seated left to right: Lucy Ezmerlian, Marie Toumajian, V. Rev. Isahag Ghazarian, Agnes Yagoobian, Victoria Zamanigian**

**Standing left to right: Emily Jameson, Queenie Hanoian, Rita Yagoobian, Sarah Paklaian, Rose Yessaian**

- Mother’s Day Banquet
- draperies for the Cultural Hall
- Junior Choir robes
- Bibles presented to those members who have completed 10 years of faithful service and devotion to the Guild (a custom that continues today).

Funds were realized through bake sales, Khunjooks, dinners, dances, picnics, socials, and short plays. In 1951, the Young Women’s Guild donated \$9,000.00 toward the planning of a new church.

With the growth of the Women’s Guild, there is no limit to its ability to serve our church to which we are all dedicated.



# God's Angels

By Rev. Fr. Garabed Kochakian  
Contributor

The month of November in the Armenian Orthodox Church is dedicated to the bodiless powers in heaven who took on human form. These powers are God's Angels we often see depicted in painted Icons showing the announcement to the Virgin Mary about God's coming, thereafter His birth, baptism, His crucifixion, burial and ascension into Heaven.

The Church describes Angels as God's protectors, messengers of Good News, and whenever necessary, guides who come to us in different ways as in dreams or actual manifestations. There are also Guardian Angels *Bahabahn Hreshdag*. Through them, they have become God's presence to be with us and even save us from danger and all peril. *The Book of Hebrews* in the *New Testament* reminds us,

*Be not forgetful to entertain strangers:  
for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*

Most importantly, our Church tradition and teaching about angels describes them as *Guardians*, angels assigned to us at the time of our conception and then forever, to our living souls until our life's journey is completed on earth. At that time, Jesus tells us that they come to carry us to the Kingdom of Heaven.

In a parable from the Gospel of St. Luke, chapter 16, the Lord shares a story about a beggar man named Lazarus and a rich man. It imparts a message telling us that worldly and earthly possessions are of no benefit in the afterlife and that those who have suffered on earth will receive their reward in Heaven. Aside from the story that teaches about faith and having an open heart, a most important point is that Jesus tells us the Angels "came for his soul at the time of his death" as the Gospel writer states clearly, "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side." In the end, they carried Lazarus, who had faith and lived in hope of an Eternal Life with God in His Kingdom.

As Christians, we live in the present, and as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ we also live for the future and a place in Heaven. That is why our Guardian Angels are ready to help when they detect a need in our lives especially noting faith in our hearts.

Over the years I have given sermons about my own en-



counters with Angels... especially Guardian Angels. When we keep our hearts open, always seeking God's protection and guidance, those Angels have been there to make things happen.

Certainly, you too have had some of those *Holy* encounters, hearing Angels sitting on your shoulder and whispering into your ears, feeding your hearts, and even seeing them. Instantly, by their interventions, they feed our souls and minds with God's wisdom to be that good and faithful servant He wants us to be and spare us from adversities and calamities.

God's Angels have been with us all both in the past and now in the present. All we need to is to have faith, hope and an open heart like Lazarus did. They will come, not just at the end of life here on earth, but always in all the moments of our lives today when they know they are needed, and for sure, even when we are unaware they appear to us.

*Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers,  
for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels  
without knowing it.*

[Hebrews 13:2].



## The Armenian Heritage Costume Collection 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Presentation

**By Paulette Apkarian**  
*Contributor*

During the anniversary Gala, we celebrated the Armenian Heritage Costume Collection and the individuals who had the foresight, dedication, and enthusiasm to reconstruct a bit of cultural history by creating reproductions of authentic Armenian dress from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

As we look back, Varsenick Apkarian, Anoush Papelian, and Sona Yavruian spent countless hours in planning, researching, and creating the costumes for over two years. No effort was spared to retain the historic accuracy and the proud traditions of their ancestors. In addition, it was fortunate that Archbishop Paren Avedikian was available to advise and inspire them. Also, Opal Hairston of the Wayne State University's Hillberry Theater began the actual construction of the costumes. Opal realized and accepted the

difficult challenge and had the remarkable ability to execute these costumes from small drawings and sketches.

Once this magnificent collection was completed, a spectacular theatrical production was created incorporating the music, geography and culture of the Armenian people. At this time, Margaret Derderian and Rosemary Hoplamazian joined the three dynamic ladies to assist with the presentation.

Since October 8, 1977, when the Collection was first performed at St. John Armenian Church in Southfield, Michigan, it has enriched audiences all over the United States and Canada. Since this first performance, it has been obvious that the years of work were well spent, because the audiences are always visibly moved.

As we presented the Armenian Heritage Costume Collection, we remember these dedicated individuals with profound respect. It is our tribute to them..... who left us this remarkable gift.