

## **THREE PRIORITIES THAT SHOULD CONSTITUTE THE HEART OF COMMUNITY-LIFE**

This is the summary of the Pontifical message of His  
Holiness Aram I given at St. Garabed Church,  
Hollywood, U.S.A. 6 October 2011.

We greet our community within the jurisdiction of the Western Armenian Prelacy, U. S. A. with Christian love and fatherly blessing. We also greet the Prelate H.E. Moushegh Mardirosian, the clergy and the church council, H.E. Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, the Primate of the Western Diocese, H.E. Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan, the Primate of the Eastern Diocese, and the political, social, cultural and educational organizations and associations functioning in our community.

It is a profound spiritual joy to be with our people once again, to know more about the concerns and challenges they face, and to share with them our thoughts and expectations through frank dialogue. We always stress in our messages that the church is the people of God. Because the church is the people of God, being at the service of the church means being at the service of the people. The church and the clergy should fulfill their God-given vocation in the life of the people with this self-understanding and firm commitment. They should become dedicated preachers of the Gospel message and the ardent custodians of our values, traditions and ideals.

We will be with you during the coming three weeks and will have enough time to engage in interaction with you. Since this is our first public encounter, I want to draw your kind attention to three specific areas that will become the focus of our reflections and messages during this pontifical visit.

### ***A) Renewal of spiritual life***

Spirituality constitutes the basis of our individual and community life. By spirituality we mean the living presence of the church in all aspects of our life and our active participation in the total life and mission of the church. Beyond its institutional forms, the church by its very essence is a Christocentric community. We become members of this community of faith by enriching our lives with moral and spiritual values. The spiritual life is not achieved by simply reading the Bible or acquiring knowledge about the history, theology or traditions of the church. In order to achieve the spiritual life, one must become church by participating in the church's mission of faith. This quality of life, reflection and action is underpinned by the truths and values revealed through the Christ-event. Therefore, spiritual life is not a self-contained existence; it calls for a committed struggle against evil, a self-sacrificial service to the poor and sick.

Indeed, this is the way our church perceives spirituality and its crucial importance for our people. As Christians, we must know that without spiritual values, our life will lose its quality, its meaning and purpose. Without spirituality life sin will easily invade our life. Therefore, the renewal of spiritual life is imperative. And the renewal of spiritual life is a return to the truths and values of the Bible as they have been experienced and interpreted by the Armenian Church. It is having Christ at the center of our life. It is

professing Christ as the true light and hope of our life in the darkness and uncertainty of this world.

### ***B) The Restrengthening of the Armenian Schools***

We always emphasize in our messages and writings the unique importance of the Armenian school, reminding our people that the Armenian school is not an educational institution that simply provides knowledge, but, rather, an intellectual-spiritual mission aimed at Armenian-Christian formation. The co-existence of church and school is not accidental; they complement and strengthen each other. In fact, the Armenian school has played a crucial part in the course of history. It has formed and protected the identity of the new generations, becoming, with the church, a stronghold of Armenian life. Our church, especially the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, believing deeply in the pivotal role of the school gave it a clear priority by building new schools, preparing teachers, elaborating educational programs and extending financial support.

We welcome, with special joy, the presence of so many schools in our community here in California and the support given to those schools by the Prelacy, our organizations, donors and our people. We know that our schools here, as in all diaspora communities, are experiencing enormous difficulties and challenges. We cannot remain silent and indifferent in view of this situation. We must focus on reinvigorating the vocation of the Armenian school and making it financially self-sufficient. In fact, as we make our church a living reality in our community life by participating actively in its mission of faith, we can likewise strengthen our schools by supporting its educational work tangibly. We appeal therefore to our community leaders to consider the school a top priority on their agenda, we appeal to our donors to increase their contribution to the schools and we appeal to our parents to place their children in the Armenian school where they are formed by the moral, spiritual, cultural and national values of our church and nation. Without the Armenian school our identity will lose much of its integrity and vitality.

### ***C) Reinvigorating the Armenian Cause***

The Armenian Cause, Hay Tad, which is aimed at the restoration of the human rights of our people, is a daily struggle for every Armenian. In fact, is there an Armenian on this globe who does not know about the Armenian Genocide, which was carefully planned and systematically executed by the Ottoman-Turkish government in 1915? We lost one-and-a-half million Armenians. We also lost our church, community and individual properties, and were expelled from our ancestral lands and dispersed all over the world. The genocide is a crime against humanity according to international law. Not only have our people not forgotten the genocide perpetrated against their forefathers and foremothers, they also claimed justice and reparation.

Our common struggle for the restoration of our nation's legitimate human rights continues with renewed impetus. Our struggle acquired its full strength with the participation of our people and the government of Armenia. The legal and supreme owner of the Armenian Cause is the Republic of Armenia. Hence, we are called to unite our efforts and reorganize our work. The world is in constant change in many respects,

including geopolitical realities and interests. Our strategy, methodology and tactics too need to be changed. Our work must be relevant and responsive to the new environments and realities. We do appreciate the growing and expanding activities of the Armenian National Committee of U.S.A. Indeed, the role of the U.S.A. is decisive in the restoration of our people's rights. Hence, it is our people's firm expectation that this great country, which gave refuge to so many Armenians after the Genocide, clearly express its solidarity with the Armenian Cause.

Here are three priorities pertaining to our church and community life. They should become daily concerns and challenges, impacting our reflections and actions.

We would like to express our profound joy on the occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the restoration of Armenia's independence and the creation of the Republic of Karabagh. We personally took part in the 20th Anniversary celebrations in Erevan, Armenia and witnessed that our homeland is in a process of growth. The diaspora is the extension of Armenia. We are one nation, having one history and one future. Therefore, we are called to fully participate in efforts aimed at state-building and nation-building in Armenia and Karabagh.

May God bless you all. May God protect our people all over the world and deepen its unity. May God bless the United States of America.

**ARAM I  
CATHOLICOS OF CILICIA**

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Los Angeles*