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Torchbearer

ST. JOHN ARMENIAN CHURCH NEWSLETTER

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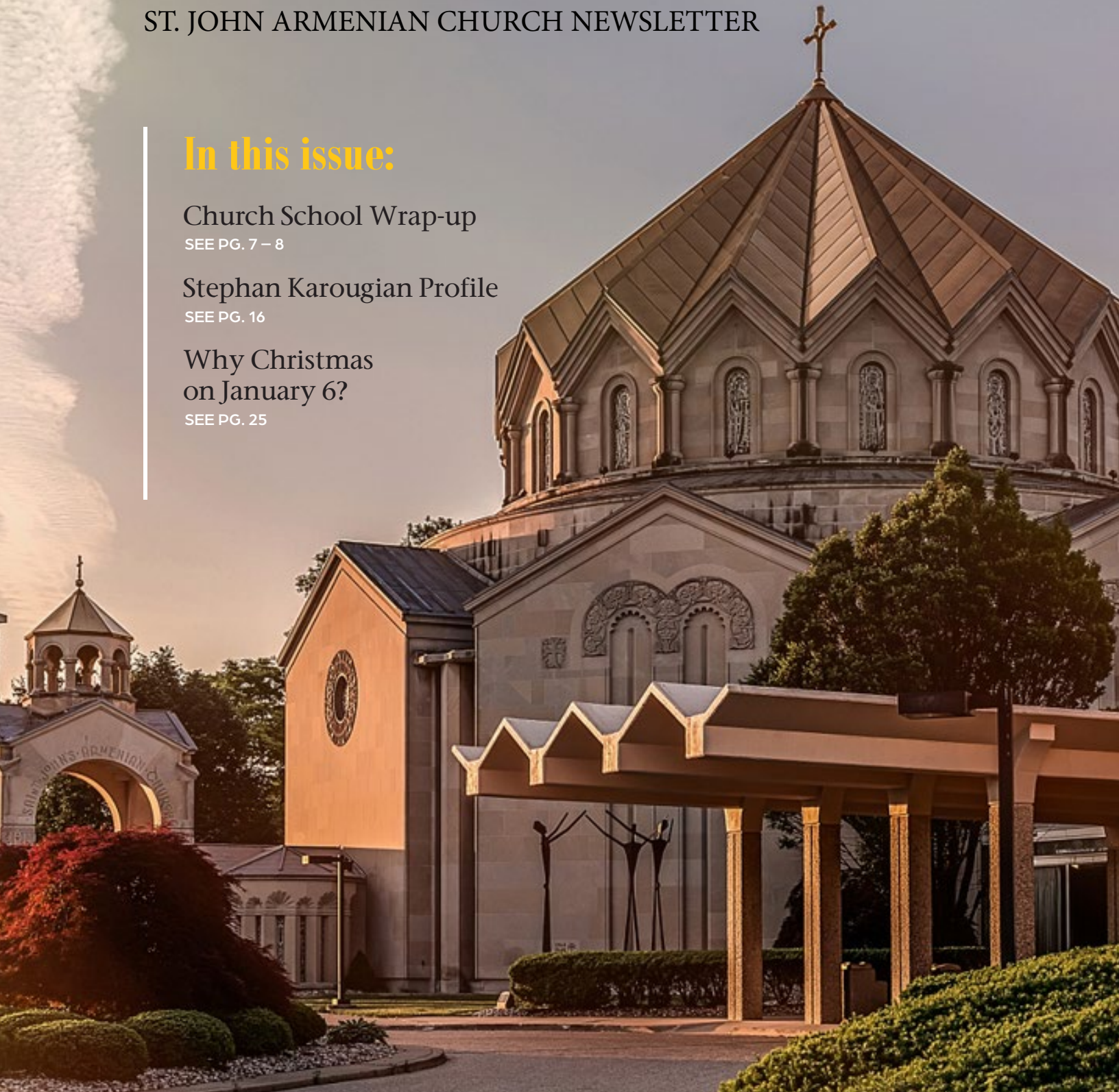


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Torchbearer

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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.

“Physician, heal yourself” (Luke 4.23)



Many of us have heard this quote from scripture. We know this to be true that a physician or a doctor can certainly not heal themselves of any really serious ailments. They could of course take an aspirin or dress a wound; however these are superficial things just about anyone could do. The reference is made to the absurdity of a doctor performing surgery upon oneself. This ancient proverb of course is referenced to Christ hanging on the cross and those mocking him could be heard saying, “He saved others but He can’t save himself”. It truly is an absurd thought. Or is it?



Many of you know that a few months ago my father died. It was painful for me and my family. On a personal note I can say that we were all comforted by the outpouring of love shown to us in the form of telephone calls, letters, cards, text messages, e-mails as well as in-person hugs. My mother, sister and I at times were overwhelmed by the true offering of sympathy to us.

Everyone, at one time or another, experiences the death of a loved one. It could be a friend, relative or just an acquaintance. Nevertheless, death eventually finds us all. It can be said however, that the death of a mother or father is different. These two individuals were given the task of raising us, teaching us, mentoring us and giving us their legacy. The lessons we learn from our parents cannot be learned or taught in any other setting. They instill within us right from wrong and they do their best to set us on the right path in life. I suppose that it is this tight bond that makes their death so painful.



In my personal case, my parents, my father especially, taught me the priesthood and what it represents. My mother was an example of the role of a *Yeretzgin* in a community and the role she plays alongside her husband. My father taught me what it means to be the best shepherd one can be to their flock. On a deeper level, he was also the sponsor at my ordination, served next to me during the celebration of my first Divine Liturgy in Holy Etchmiadzin and literally taught me how to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. This is why, immediately following my father’s death, I would sometimes be emotional during the celebration of liturgy.

OK, enough about Fr. Aren. Where is this going? I now understand the outpouring of love from others, especially those whom I have tried to console at their own time of need. Many have said, “you helped us though our grief, now it’s our turn to be there for you”. These words have been very touching to me and my family.



“Physician, heal thyself”. How does the one who is to help others heal at a time of loss, help himself through the grief? From the first day it was evident that I needed to practice what I preach to others. I needed to, and have indeed, leaned upon my faith and God to help me through the difficult moments. How can I tell a family mourning over the death of a loved one to “have faith in God” if I myself do not turn to God? There is, however, a catch. When someone dies, that moment is not the time to turn to God, to lean on Him. Our faith needs to be there BEFORE we encounter adversity or even Satan himself.

Yes, death is difficult and the death of a parent is even more difficult. Our faith in God must be the constant in our lives. We turn to Christ to rejoice with us in our joy and we turn to Him to mourn when we mourn. As a pastor, I see how often a family struggles deeply with a loved one’s death and yet the impression I get is that they are far from God, our church and community. We must work eagerly for that strong relationship with Him during the good times and the bad times.

“Physician, heal yourself” - an absurd thought? Is it? Christ Himself saved others, He did not save Himself, but He saved the world.



*Rev. Fr. Nersess Jebejian December 19, 1934 – October 27, 2022.
Served as Youth Director here at St. John’s in the mid-sixties
while he was Dn. Nersess.*

Father Aren

Dear Parishoners,

I would like to extend my thanks to you, on behalf of the entire Parish Council, for making 2022 another year of great accomplishments. The long discussed, and long planned, renovation of our Church facility began in January and was completed with joy and acclaim from a multitude of our parishioners and other users of the facility. The refurbishment of our beautiful Sanctuary was completed in time for Easter services. The Sanctuary Fund Raising Committee did a marvelous job working to obtain your many generous contributions, for which we are truly grateful. Not only has the fund raising covered the \$400,000+ cost of the refurbishment, an additional \$360,000 was received bringing the total to \$760,000 and ensuring that the Sanctuary needs will be covered for years to come.

It is very important to recognize the extraordinary effort of our clergy and St. John staff for keeping everything running smoothly despite the disruption of having to do their jobs in the middle of a construction project. Most of us who didn't see their day-to-day efforts aren't aware of the additional workload that was placed upon them. A few examples include: multiple office moves as construction progressed through the building; setting up and maintaining the Auxiliary Sanctuary to enable continuation of worship, funeral services, etc.; dealing with construction dust and a multitude of other inconveniences and hardships that added to the complexity and difficulty of their daily tasks as they worked to serve the rest of us. They all deserve our heartfelt thanks for all that they have done.

Outreach is such an important part of our role as a church and our constant desire to "Build up the Body of Christ" that we could fill this *Torchbearer* with our many examples. Our clergy, our affiliate organizations and our amazing volunteers are doing great works. If you want to feel God's warmth and

to feel your soul being uplifted, please reach out to us and we will help you seek the many paths where your talents can serve God. Though we can't attempt to capture all that is being done in this article, I would like to briefly mention a few. We have a new "Looys Ministries" program replacing our "Seerov Josh" initiative that helped many during the pandemic as well as work being done for "CASP", "Motor City Mitten", "Toys for Tots", etc. Religious Education is a vital ministry, particularly Church School. Though we have seen improvements in the past several years, more help is needed to drive attendance and participation to higher levels. A special shout out goes to those who have been called to serve as teachers and all who are working to support our children. Also, the Women's Guild sponsored an amazing *Khunjoyk* event to kick off the Church School year that brought our opening day to a whole new level.

2022 also marked our Parish's final approval of our "Support Organization" which also just received the approval of the Diocese. The final step of obtaining IRS approval is in progress and should be achieved in the coming months. The Support Org approval is a big accomplishment given that it has been under consideration for nearly ten years and has now been developed to a level where it is finally coming to fruition.

New security enhancements to help protect our parishioners and facility have been added during the past year. A new perimeter fence, which is also aesthetically pleasing, has been added to the east side of our property. New protective window film that inhibits breakage if someone tries to gain entry has been added to many of the facility windows and more is planned. Also, security training has been provided to church personnel for improved awareness and preparedness. Much of the cost for these initiatives and facility enhancements was covered by a government funded Security Grant.

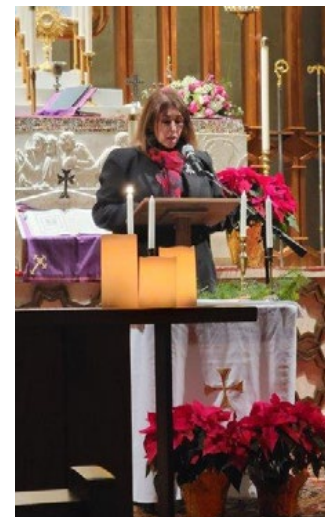
PARISH COUNCIL MESSAGE
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Advent by Candlelight

By Sara Andonian
Contributor

After a three year hiatus, the Women’s Guild presented *Advent by Candlelight - I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day* - on Wednesday, November 30, 2022. Approximately, 175 women were treated to 21 tables beautifully decorated by 24 hostesses. After viewing the tables, guests enjoyed dessert, coffee and conversation while seated with their hostesses and friends, old and new. The evening ended in the sanctuary with messages of *Love, Joy, Hope* and *Peace* shared by Kim Najarian, Alexandra Apkarian, Elise Papazian, and Sue Vian. The musical selections were performed by Dn. Rubik Mailian and Lance Luce (organist). As the guests left the sanctuary that evening, we were reminded of the true gifts of Advent and Christmas - *Love, Joy, Hope* and *Peace*.



Advent speakers Sue Vian, Kim Najarian, Alexandra Apkarian, Elise Papazian



Dn. Rubik and Lance Luce



ACYOA November Dance 2022

By Lisa Mardigian
Contributor

Our ACYOA Seniors held their annual November Dance on Saturday, November 26th under the chairmanship of Lerna Lacinian. The ACYOA hosted over 250 guests as they danced the night away, with entertainment provided by Harout Bedrossian & Band and DJM-Kay. Special thank you to our parents and volunteers who helped with our all American cuisine, the bar, security and front door sales. The ACYOA extends its appreciation to our pastors, administrator, and maintenance staff for all their continued support!! Lastly, a special highlight of the evening was the ACYOA Board presenting our Youth Coordinator, Lisa Mardigian a beautiful Michael Aram “Tree of Life” statue for her thirty years of dedicated service to the Youth of our parish.





Church School Wraps Up 2022

By Lisa Mardigian
Contributor

Thanksgiving Dinner

The Church School High School hosted their annual Thanksgiving Dinner on Sunday, November 20th. This year's dinner was back to our traditional buffet style with our students preparing and serving the turkey dinner. Approximately 150 adults and children attended this annual event. Proceeds will help sponsor four months of Motor City Mitten Mission meals to feed the homeless. Thank you to all our volunteers who helped prepare the dinner and to all who donated to underwrite the cost of the meal.

Christmas Family Fellowship

The Church School held their first annual Christmas family fellowship on Sunday, December 4th in the cultural Hall following Divine Liturgy. V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian and Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian gave their blessings and then shared brunch with our families. Each family enjoyed painting a "nutcracker" porch board and wooden dove ornaments to brighten up the Christmas season! We have a lot of talented families at St. John's! Thank you to all who helped and participated!

CHURCH SCHOOL
CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

Toys for Tots

The Church School hosted “Toys for Tots” again this year, coordinated by Sara Andonian. We collected twenty boxes and twenty-seven large bags full of gifts, three scooters, cars, trucks, dolls and more!! On Monday, December 19th, Fr. Armash blessed the toys before they were packaged up to donate!



Christmas Program

The students of St. John’s Church School participated in a Christmas Celebration and Sing-a-long on December 18th following Divine Liturgy with a reception following. Karen Kazarian and Lisa Mardigian with the support and guidance of our Church School staff, coordinated the celebration of the birth of our Lord. Each class recited a portion of the story of baby Jesus and led the audience in their assigned Christmas song. Our children shone on stage and it was enjoyed by all, especially our little kindergartners ending with Jingle Bells!! Thank you to our pastors, Church School staff, parent volunteers and especially our Church School students!! A special thanks to Armen Mardigian and our maintenance staff for sound and set up!



Church School Benefits from Renovation too!

By Sara Sarkisian Bell
Contributor

Our Church School teachers and students have been enjoying the newly renovated rooms and office this semester. Our upstairs classrooms have received new flooring, paint, and bright LED lighting, in addition to the windows that were replaced last year. Even the corridor and stairwells have received new lighting, paint, and flooring, making the experience of getting to Church School much warmer and more inviting. Head of the lower school Lena Montgomery stated that “the light colors in the hallway, flooring, and paint have made our rooms so much more conducive to a positive learning environment.” Additionally, an added bonus is the Church School was able to gain an additional room upstairs by transitioning a former storage room into a classroom, allowing our 6th graders to come upstairs for class. The Church School office also has a new home across from our new administrative suite, giving them a great place to work with our office staff as well as be easily accessible to our students entering the building each week.

Beyond the upstairs classroom renovation, our students who attend class in the downstairs rooms have also benefited from the construction project. Head of the upper school Roseann Attar stated that “the high school students love having class in the newly renovated conference room.” Also, our kindergarteners have enjoyed benefiting from the large space and sunlight in the Ararat Room. Kindergarten teacher Sara Andonian said the space gives them “room to move and windows to see all the gifts that God made and gave to us.” All the students and teachers wish to express their sincere appreciation to the entire SJAC team that worked so hard to make our classrooms and hallways a welcome learning space.





bRing in the New Year at St. John!

Just hours after the highly successful New Year's Eve celebration in the Cultural Hall ended, *Badarak* was celebrated and the pomegranates were blessed! Then all those present proceeded into the Lobby where V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian, on behalf of the pastors and the Parish Council, raised a champagne toast in great anticipation of a happy and healthy 2023 for all of the St. John community!





Armenian Christmas Luncheon Committee



Christmas Scarves all assembled!



Knitting Group



Christmas Market

Women's Guild's impact on our community!

By Carol Cholmakjian
Contributor

The Women's Guild fall season began with a visit to Ma-noogian Manor. Elise Papazian, Denise Boyagian and Linda Jevahirian joined our clergy, choir and the Men's Society to celebrate The Exhaltation of the Holy Cross with the residents in September.

Our Bazaar committees were led by Dawn Aginian, Denise Boyagian, Rose Najarian, and Sue Carman-Vian who, along with another seventy-five members, volunteered to work at the Hot Foods & Bake Sale tables or contributed baked goods for our sold-out sale.

For the twelfth year our Social Services Committee, directed by Carol Ohanesian, sent care packages to college students starting their fall term. Eighty-nine boxes were filled with personal items, Armenian baked goods, a prayer card, mementos, and a letter of encouragement from their parish back home. Many students sent thank-you notes for their surprise package.

Renee Apkarian and her *Mahs* Committee made sure our parishioners had *mahs* ready to be blessed for every service. She was also involved with our donation of 100 meals that the Motor City Mitten Mission (MCMM) distributed to the homeless in Detroit.

Through Sue Carman-Vian's work with Alternatives for Girls, our members were able to help over sixty women and girls in crisis by donating gift bags filled with toiletries, clothing and other personal items.

During our November bake sale days, supervised by Yerchanig Joy Callan, members made *sou beoreg* and *katah* available for pre-sale before the Thanksgiving holiday. As with all our bake days, no kitchen experience is necessary since every recipe is broken down into simple steps. As a bonus, many of us have made new friends while working together.

WOMEN'S GUILD
CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

Also in November, Iris Samson, St. John’s housekeeper, had her wedding and reception at our cultural hall. As a gesture of thanks for always being so helpful to us, twelve Women’s Guild members got together and made *cheoreg* and cheese *beoreg* for her *mezza* table.

A new event this year was the Christmas Market, where our members had a chance to sell their items including artwork, baked goods, ornaments, gift baskets, handcrafted greeting cards, and more. Lisa Derderian produced this innovative way to start our election meeting.

Jackie and Faouzi El Chemmas in memory of *Diramayr* Virginia Melkonian again sponsored the Armenian Christmas Luncheon on January 6th. The Mardigian sisters, Laura,

Lisa, and Marilyn, donated the fruit in memory of their Aunt Almas Derderian. As part of the good will offering for the meal, the Social Services Committee requested donations of gloves, hats, blankets, etc. for MCMC to distribute. The Knitting Club, which meets monthly and is headed by Linda Assarian, made over eighty scarves for the Mission.

Paulette Apkarian and Denise Karakashian posted three new videos in our Guild Gatherings series: “Baking *Nazoug*” (Nancy Panaretos and Marilyn Sarkesian), “Let’s Bake a Lemon Meringue Pie” (Paulette Schmidt and Denise Boyagian), and “Learn to Make *Beoregs* with Fillo Dough” (Mary Keoleian). Our full playlist of thirty-nine Guild Gatherings videos can be accessed through our website:

www.stjohnwomensguild.square.site



Armenian Christmas Luncheon



Mahs Making



Christmas market



College Boxes ready to go

Together Again at St. John for Christmas!

Krisdos dzunav yev haydnetsav!
Christ is born and revealed!

Orhnyal eh haydnootyoonun Krisdosi!
Blessed is the revelation of Christ!

The faithful gathered again in the newly renovated Sanctuary at St. John to celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ first with the *Jrakalooys* service on Christmas Eve, January 5th, and then Holy *Badarak* and *Chronek*, blessing of the waters January 6th and 8th. The congregations were large and the mood festive as certainly the ability to pray together again after these last few years became a reality.

Alexan Kazarian, son of Michael and Karen Kazarian, had the honor to be Godfather of the Cross. Alexan was then recognized at first the Women’s Guild Christmas Luncheon and then again at the Church School Christmas Dinner following each service.



A special Christmas treat for all of us from the Eastern Diocese Vemkar –our own Dn. Rubik Mailian!

youtu.be/foAwq8-QXz8



Renovation Sale

By Ann Marie Egigian
Contributor

The Renovation Committee of St. John Armenian Church held a three-day parking lot sale of items that were brought out from our recent renovations. The sale took place November 6 – 8, attracting some very enthusiastic customers. Day two was the most successful of the sale dates, when a large van of excited stagers pulled into the lot seeking a mighty bargain for a film they were shooting. The third day was Election Day, and as voters passed by our pods, profits continued with the sale of chairs, sofas, desks, glass vases, mirrors and other miscellaneous items. The biggest success of this sale was that we were able to move items from storage and make a modest profit in the process!

Our motto: “Keep It Moving – There’s Nowhere to Store!”

In addition, the remaining items were listed on free websites and there are now homes and families with furniture and household items they would not otherwise have.

A big thank you to those individuals who worked the sale dates: Sara Sarkisian Bell, Ann Marie Egigian, Serena Egigian, Lisa Mardigian, Mark Mardirosian, and Carol Yavruian.

Also, special thanks to our Parish Administrator, Paul Andonian; Church Secretary, Anna Tokmajyan; and our Head Custodian Ron Ware and his staff. We are grateful for your dedicated efforts, and we always work better together!



Volunteer Event

By Corrine Akarakcian and Craig Tarpinian
Contributors

On November 18, 2022, the Clergy and Parish Council sponsored a special appreciation evening for the volunteers of our church. This event honored all of the wonderful volunteers that have helped in our church organizations, programs and events. There were over sixty people in attendance (adults and children, the whole family). Many people brought their backgammon boards and other games. It was a night filled with fellowship, fun, food and beverages for everyone to enjoy.

This evening was also meant to encourage volunteerism and help further build our community and the Body of Christ. Denise Boyagian shared the outstanding efforts of the Women’s Guild programs and events. She also introduced details of our upcoming new *Looy’s* Ministry program. Harry Dulger enlightened us on how the Motor City Mitten volunteers help the homeless. Dn. Rubik Mailian and Craig Tarpinian explained how fulfilling it is to volunteer for the Komitas choir and Church School. There are many more opportunities, if you are interested in sharing your time and talents. Please fill out a volunteer form and return it to the church office. The form is available at the link below.

[VOLUNTEER FORM \(www.bit.ly/3Zy3tZO\)](http://www.bit.ly/3Zy3tZO)

Men's Society Prepares Thanksgiving Baskets

By George Saboonjian
Contributor

On Saturday, November 19, the Men's Society, with the cooperation of over thirty Church School Students and parents along with Lisa Mardigian and our pastors V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian, and Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian, assembled and distributed sixteen Thanksgiving food baskets. These stewards displayed the giving of time and talents in sharing and fulfilling love for our neighbors. Special thanks to Charlene Goshgarian, Edward Korkoian, George Saboonjian, and the Royal Oak Meijer store for their support. A very special thanks to Roseann Attar who yearly gives her time and talent in the implementation of the outreach program.



*Save
The Date!*

*The St. John Music Guild
proudly presents*

THE NAGHASH ENSEMBLE FROM ARMENIA

"The Sound of Ancient Armenia Reinvented for the 21st Century"



Friday, March 10, 2023

See Naghash before their performance at Carnegie Hall the next day.

*St. John Armenian Church Cultural Hall
22001 Northwestern Highway, Southfield, Michigan*

Stephan Karougian: The Man Behind The Voice

By Alice Argnian and Ardis Gregory
 Contributors

Meet Stephan Karougian, 87 years old. If you have ever attended *Badarak* at St. John Armenian Church on any given Sunday you might have heard Stephan Karougian's amazing voice when he sang a solo, duet, or with the Komitas Choir in concert under the expert direction of Dn. Rubik Mailian. Stephan has been a member of the Komitas Choir for fifty-four years, having previously been a soloist with St. Sarkis Armenian Church in Dearborn, Michigan.

Stephan was born in Tekirdag, Turkey on November 7, 1935, to Arsen and Yeghsapet Karougian along with his twin brother, Hagop. His vocal talents became apparent at an early age and he was invited to sing, not only at St. Nicholas Armenian Church, but also in the neighboring Greek church choir. Notably, he also served both churches as *Tibir* or altar boy, and sub-deacon on occasion when needed. Stephan fondly remembers the encouragement he received in his studies at the Levon Vartukyan School.

As a young man, Stephan was drafted into the Turkish Navy and had many stories to tell about his years of service. After completing his tour of duty Stephan was encouraged to learn about the carpeting industry where he was taught anything and everything about the carpeting business. He brought this knowledge and experience with him to the United States in 1963, and was able to be gainfully employed as a carpet layer and in the area of sales.



Stephan, his brother, and his mother lived with relatives in Southfield, Michigan and he attended Cooley High School. It was there that he learned to speak English. His knowledge of Armenian, Greek, Turkish, French and eventually English enabled him to be gainfully employed and eventually open his own carpet business, "Carpet Fashions" located at that time in Southfield.

In 1968, Stephan joined the St. John Armenian Church Komitas Choir and was quickly noticed for his exemplary tenor range voice despite the fact that he never received formal vocal training or learned to read music. This vocal talent, his love of music, and his desire to serve the Church took the Komitas Choir to new levels of performance.

In 1973, Stephan met the love of his life, Shnorhig Grace, and they were happily married for 48 years. Their love of travel took them to many places in the United States and abroad. This included enjoying their condo in Florida. Their active membership in the Knights/Daughters of Vartan and The Cultural Society of Armenians from Istanbul fostered many lasting and enduring friendships. Spending time with his godsons Armen, Nareg, and Ara Nazarian was also a joyous part of their active and joyful lives.

Sadly, in 2019 Stephan lost his beloved Shnorhig. He remained in their home in West Bloomfield until recently relocating to the Manoogian Manor where he enjoys the company of family, friends, and other residents. Stephan describes himself as a "humble guy" who has been gifted with a talent for singing. We at St. John's have been blessed by this gift as over the years we have listened to his moving and melodic voice. We thank him for sharing this God given talent with us.



Rev. Fr. Hrant Kevorkian, pastor of St. Sarkis Armenian Apostolic Church, Stephan Karougian, Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian, assistant pastor of St. John Armenian Church.

Motor City Mitten Mission

By Greg Baise
Contributor

St. John Armenian Church Men's Society (SJAC-MS) is continuing its outreach mission by partnering with the Motor City Mitten Mission Program (MCMM). This came to our attention through SJAC parishioner and SJAC-MS member, Harry Dulger and our assistant pastor, Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian. This eastside program initially started with their "Mats and Pillow" project, making Plarn (plastic yarn) out of plastic grocery bags for use in mats and pillows for homeless people. Our Women's Guild is very active in this process.

The SJAC-MS became interested in the MCMM because they also have an ongoing program providing meals to folks living on the streets across the city. As explained by Harry Dulger, the program serves around ninety meals, 7 days a week. This program takes prepared food directly to the homeless in the area. Harry stated that MCMM Director, Gail Marlow, is personally involved and works tirelessly as a volunteer serving the needs of the homeless throughout the city. Harry himself has worked the delivery van, a simple white van filled with food, clothing, gloves and underwear to help homeless families. They will sometimes find motel rooms, especially for families with small children. They sometimes even provide housing, furniture and appliances. If it wasn't for MCMM, most of these folks wouldn't eat or have shelter.

To support the MCMM meals program, the SJAC-MS is donating meals twice a month. The meals we prepare include a very nicely prepared generous main course, plastic ware, napkin, and even a piece of dessert. Each meal for ninety people costs us around \$250. The initial cost for this outreach was underwritten by generous single donors from our community. Financial help in the future would, of course, be welcome. Two days of meals feeding about ninety people were done in February, March, April and May. Volunteers for preparation on the SJAC end include Alice Argnian, Peter Argnian, George Saboonjian, Danny Cristiano, Michael Boucher, Paul Yousoufian, Greg and Edith Baise and others.

We will continue to prepare two each month into the foreseeable future because, unfortunately, there will always be homeless people. Again, Harry reiterates, MCMM is all volunteers, nobody gets paid. Everything goes to support the homeless. We plan for this to be an ongoing mission of the Men's Society as well as the entire church community as we all work together in building the body of Christ. It's all very simple, "whatsoever **you do to the least** of your brothers and sisters, **you do unto me**," says the Lord Jesus.



Marvin Chacker, Greg Mamassian and Michelle Margosian



St. John's Motor City Mitten leader, Harry Dulger

A Reading of the Nativity Icon

By Rev. Fr. Garabed Kochakian
Contributor

This Nativity Icon of an Armenian illumination tells the whole story of Christ's birth, but in different time frames.

The Angels declare the glorious miracle announcing that the Messiah has come, and a star sheds heavenly light upon the Infant Jesus in the cave, embraced by the Blessed Virgin Mary and seated upon her knee. Surrounded by the shepherds, the Magi, and even the beasts of the earth they all rejoice, for God the Word was born among us. The invisible became visible.

Also notice in this scene Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, standing to the left of the Mother of God, with his right hand touching his chin, seems somewhat bewildered and perhaps even having doubt at what has occurred concerning this awesome Theophany. In the panel beneath this scene are the midwives who attended to the infant Christ giving His first bath that was a foreshadowing of His Baptism yet to come, when again God the Father's voice will be heard announcing the message of Salvation.

Whenever we look at icons, or painted images, of the Nativity of Christ, we often see the Holy Family, surrounded by angels, Wise Men, shepherds, animals, and we might think ...well here it is, in a nut shell - the 'whole story' that took place on that starry, starry night when God came to earth. But wait.

When we read the accounts of the birth of our Lord Jesus, and particularly from the accounts in the Holy Gospels of Luke and Matthew, we encounter a certain period of time between events as they are described. Luke tells us about the herald angels and their great appearance and announcement to the shepherds in the field who were



watching their flocks. They heard God's promise through the angelic melody sung about *Peace on Earth to Men of Good Will!*

But about this account one might ask, where are the three kings, the Magi who traveled from the East and why are they depicted here? In other images of the Nativity story, we always think that on that evening they were there too.

Saint Matthew continues the story from where the Gospel of Luke ends, and he presents the visitation of the Magi (the Three Wise Men) as shown in this Armenian illuminated miniature icon. The image completes the two accounts, giving the full story of who visited the Lord on the night He was born. Luke's narrative is a miraculous event that began with the three kings from a faraway place in the East. Their journey transcends space and time as it continues until today for all Christians who still travel and like them are still seeking the Lord Christ in their lives.

As the story continues...

King Herod fearful of the news of Jesus' birth and challenged by the news of a Newborn King, secretly summoned the Wise Men asking them to go and find this child, the new King of the Jews. Their journey obviously took time, and following that bright star that led their way, they finally arrived in Bethlehem; but much later than that Holy Night when the Invisible Creator became Visible, and when God's Glory was fully revealed. Some historians and scholars who have studied this historic event believe that their journey may have taken a few months or even two years. But the time frame really doesn't matter because they found Him.

Consider this...

Whatever the duration of time might have been, as the Magi, driven somehow by the Spirit of God, went as King Herod had commanded to search for the promised Messiah. Luke's Gospel describes the location as a manger. But Matthew's Gospel describes a different place where they found Him. It was not in a cave/manger as the icon depicts, rather in a house. The Wise Men went to the house. There they saw the child with His mother, Mary.

Behold they encountered the Christ Child; the little infant was still resting and being cuddled in the arms of His mother, Mary. Seeing Him they threw themselves down and worshipped Him offering treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Matthew 2:11)

NATIVITY ICON
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Whatever time it took will still always be mystery to us - a few months, a year or two as some biblical scholars think. What is most important is, the Magi found the real *Star of Wonder, Star of Night* who was God with us. This particular icon of the Nativity brings together both space and time, weaving it into one narrative and tells the whole and full story. As we gaze upon the icon known as the Birth of God on earth, we might even find ourselves also as participants.

The very fact of the Magi seeking Jesus, no matter how long it took them and, however long it takes us today in our faith journeys, is an important part of the Christmas narrative for us as well, celebrating our own life's journeys, seeking the Star of Wonder, searching for Christ the King. Some people find Him sooner, and others find Him later in their lifetime. Nonetheless, as the icon teaches us, we too, like the Magi, are on a journey every day of our lives. And, however long it takes, with our moving, walking, talking, looking, searching, and seeking to find Christ, we will find Him, when we pursue Him and follow Him with passion and fervor just as the shepherds, the wise men and people in Bethlehem searched and found God with us.

The words from the Old Testament echo that journey.

But from there you will search again for the LORD your God. And if you search for him with all your heart and soul, you will find him. (Deut.4:29)

Yes, the journey and the discovery of Christ the Lord will happen when we follow the signs that God our Father puts in front of us like the Holy Star: a burning heart, a spark of desire from within, a hope envisioned. They are all signs and the Light of Christ shining in and through others who will reveal Him to you, to me and to the world

It is all there, waiting for us; as it was for the people who sat in darkness and who found a Great Light, people who lived even after Christ the Messiah, Our Lord God rose to heaven.

These people grew up and as adults understood more clearly the miracle of that holy starry, starry night. That is why the Icon of God's coming Salvation showing his birth is an important image to look at every year. That one picture tells the whole story.

For all who desire to see God, even today the journey to find Christ our God continues, opening every possibility, following Him - Jesus Christ the Star of Wonder, and the Light of the World. And, wherever His Light may shine, His luminous power will beam in each believing heart, soul and mind

who receives His Kingship.

On January 6th we joyfully sing the Christmas hymn, *Khorhoot Medz*, "O Great and Wondrous Mystery", and it continues our search, our journey and becomes the beginning of eternity, as we celebrate God with Us.

Krisdos Dzunav yev Haydnetzav Medz Avedis. Christ is Born and God is revealed.

And so, it doesn't matter which date the birth of Christ, the Alpha and Omega, is celebrated - December 25th, January 6th, January 7th, January 19th or to what family or tradition, a Christian may belong. What is most important is where you're headed, your journey in life and the joy in finding Him.

One picture is worth thousand words, as this Icon shows. It could very well be that the Magi who came later may be telling us something very important to ponder, telling us the whole story, no matter the delay in time, it is still unfolding, *O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.*

And guess what? You just might see yourself in the Icon, a part of that whole story: the story of the Great Mystery of God's Revelation.

What a blessing that is!





L to R: David Dardarian, Martin Shoushanian, Michael Vartoogian, Jerry Dayinian, Edward Korkoian, Rayeanne Magee, Vahram Fantazian, Gregory Movsesian, Daniel Cristiano, Howard Atesian, Raymond Boujoulian, Paul Kulhanjian, and Frank Tafraian



Special Blessing for Veterans and First Responders

Remembering Veterans Day

By Dan Cristiano
Contributor

On Sunday, November 13th the Armenian American Veterans (AAV) of Greater Detroit commemorated Veterans Day 2022 at St. John Armenian Church. *Hokehankisd* prayers were requested for our deceased Veteran comrades, many who died in conflicts while serving in the United States military around the world. V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian also provided a special prayer service for our AAV members and First Responders who were present in church that day, as well as for those who could not attend. Following *Badarak* and *Hokehankisd*, Fr. Aren, Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian, Rev.

Fr. Garabed Kochakian, Dn. Rubik Mailian, Dn. Onnig Boyajian, choir member Vaughn Masropian, and candle bearers prayed at the Veterans Monument in front of the Veterans Building. Fr. Armash offered a blessing at the fellowship reception that was held in the Veterans Building for parishioners to gather, meet our Veterans, and break bread. The AAV sincerely thanks St. John Armenian Church for the beautiful prayer services and Paul Yousoufian for catering a tasty reception!

All Veterans, including all military branches, the Coast Guard, the Reserve and National Guard are welcome to join the AAV. Please contact any of our Board Members or the Church for more information.

The Madrigal Chorale Performance

By Sandra and Alice Nigoghosian
Contributors

A Madrigal Chorale Holiday Concert was sponsored by the St. John Komitas Choir and presented at St. John Armenian Church of Greater Detroit on Friday, December 2, 2022 at 7:30 p.m. A “Free Will Offering” was suggested as our guests were greeted at the door by Choir Members, John Yavruian and Vaughn Masropian. The Very Reverend Father Aren Jebejian welcomed about 30 Chorale members and more than 200 guests to our beautifully decorated Sanctuary. Fr. Aren suggested that “we sit back, wrap our winter coats around us - as the lights and heat will be turned down - in order for us to appreciate and enjoy the beautiful voices of the Madrigal Chorale.” He mentioned that a member of the Chorale will look familiar to some of us - as she is our own Soprano Choir Member, Annette Mamassian. Fr. Aren thanked Deacon Rubik Mailian, St. John Komitas Choir Director, for coordinating this event. He also added that “This evening’s spiritual music will stir the joy in our hearts and souls because, in a few weeks, we are going to be receiving the birth of our Lord and Jesus Christ.”

Deacon Rubik requested that the Madrigal Chorale include two Armenian Hymns in their program and he provided the lyrics and music for: “The Birth of our Savior” [subtitle: Silent Night, Holy Night] by Stepan Shakaryan and *Khorhoo-rt Medz* [O Great Mystery] by Rouben Gregorian, Arr. Rubik Mailian. A few of the ten musical songs in English included: Ding! Dong! Merrily On High, Arr. Howard Helvey; Christmas Day, Gustav Holst; O Holy Night, Arr. Ryan James Brandau; Hark! The Herald Angels Sing, Arr. Josh Sparkman; and This Christmastide, Donald Fraser. As we sat back listening to the



accompanist, Sara Hazen-Robinson, and the crisp voices of the Chorale blending together to fill the air with warmth and grace, we felt our own Christmas spiritual journey begin.

Following the program, Fr. Aren invited everyone to the Cultural Hall to enjoy the reception which was prepared by the St. John Komitas Choir members. We spoke to Brandon Ulrich, D.M.A., Artistic Director, who shared that the “Chorale appreciated being invited to sing in our sanctuary and considered it a privilege to bring their sacred work to the St. John family.” We also spoke with John Niesen, President, Madrigal Chorale, who also shared that “whenever we look out and see a receptive audience smiling, singing along, or moving their hands in time to the music, this truly inspires our singers to perform even more enthusiastically.”



Badarak by Candlelight

The tradition continued as the 6th annual Divine Liturgy by Candlelight was celebrated by Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian in our hushed sanctuary Sunday, November 6th. It was, as well, an instructional liturgy with V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian providing the commentary. Ironically, the electrical power to the church was turned off by DTE in order to perform emergency electrical service, so the sounds of the organ, the heating system and the lack of lighting was by necessity. The photos tell the story as sunlight streamed through the stained glass windows of the dome and the beautiful voices of the Komitas Choir, stationed in the center of the church, surrounded us, while the *Badarak* proceeded as it had for centuries without the modern amenities. It is always a wonderful prelude to the holiday season!



Plaque presentation by WMR to St. John Armenian Church in recognition of not only its ongoing and expanding role in the WMR mission but also for humanitarian global excellence.

World Medical Relief hosts its Gala at St. John's

By Greg Baise
Contributor

After a two-year hiatus due to COVID-19, World Medical Relief (WMR) held its 69th Annual Gala Saturday, November 19th in our newly renovated SJAC Cultural Hall. This Gala is a once-a-year event where WMR raises funds for their operations for the entire next year. St. John Armenian Church has established a particularly close relationship with our regular volunteering as well as the shipments to Armenia. This truly was reflected in the evening's event. This year's emcees were both from our Armenian community, Toros Bardakjian and Belinda Kabodian.

An Armenian-American, Toros Bardakjian was born in Aleppo, Syria and immigrated to the United States at the age of 5. He spent his childhood growing up in Pasadena, CA, where he attended private Armenian School and learned how to speak Armenian. At the age of 15, he officially became a U.S. Citizen, and he now lives in Livonia. His career has led him down two parallel paths. First, for the past 10 years he has spent his time with Community Choice Credit Union managing the Member Center at their main headquarters in Farmington Hills. Second, he uses his public speaking skills to MC events from weddings to corporate events. He finds pleasure in serving others and his community.

To summarize his outlook of life, Toros says, "Be willing, be present, be genuine, be kind, then listen to understand, not to reply. All good things will follow."

Belinda Ameriguan Kabodian, grew up in St. John Armenian Church, married in this church some 33 years ago, and her daughters were baptized here.

Her career began in 1985 when she achieved her ADN (nurse) and then her BS in community health in 1992. As a nurse, currently, she is a Community Health Nurse for Ascension Southeast Michigan, located right here in Southfield. Her responsibility is primarily to teach health and wellness to the community. In doing this, she is both a passionate and motivated speaker. Belinda is also a regular volunteer from St. John Armenian Church to World Medical Relief where her deep medical knowledge is put to very good use in the all-important technical micro-sorting process, the very last step in our sorting process.

This year's WMR Gala was a huge success with over 320 attendees helping to raise much needed money for this important outreach. St. John Armenian Church's active involvement did a lot to help make this event a success.

WMR
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Not only was this event hosted at our Armenian facility, the primary entertainment for the evening featured our own Armenian Arax Dance Group.

St. John Armenian Church was recognized for its ongoing contributions to World Medical Relief with a special plaque, the “Humanitarian Global Excellence Award”, presented to our pastors, V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian and Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian.

World Medical Relief is a Southfield neighbor that stands virtually within walking distance of our St. John Arme-

nian Church. Along with this physical proximity, we are reminded of a deeper closeness that binds us together. Our priests, remembering what our Lord said, have told us many times *“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”*

Just a note, the 70th Anniversary Gala for World Medical Relief promises to be even more spectacular and our entire community will be welcome to join WMR in celebrating this very special event.



On December 3, St. John volunteers, including a few new faces, gathered to sort medical supplies for WMR.



On October 16, V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian presented a plaque to World Medical Relief director, Dr. George Samson on behalf of St. John Armenian Church in recognition of the organization's important local outreach.

Parish Council Message

CONTINUED FROM PG. 4

In closing, words cannot express how grateful we are to all of our parishioners who have stepped up to support our Church during these difficult times with their “Time, Talent & Treasure”. Despite the personal impact that the events and instability of the past three years has had on many of you, our entire parish has stepped up with the aforementioned Sanctuary funding, unsolicited incremental contributions

to our Facility Renovation and substantial contributions to those suffering in Ukraine. Our church organizations, despite making significant contributions to the above causes, actually increased their regular annual gifts to the Church.

The Parish Council is grateful for everyone’s contributions over the past few years. We look forward to working together to continue building our church and The Body of Christ.

Michael Toomajian, Parish Council Chairman





Fr. Armash; Fr. Harutyun Damadyan, our guest priest from Istanbul; Fr. Aren, Edith Baise and Brother Robert Wotypka

Capuchin Coat & Clothing Drive

By Greg Baise
Contributor

On Friday, November 25, 2022, coats collected from St. John Armenian Church were delivered to the Capuchin Soup Kitchen in Detroit. The St. John Armenian Church community surpassed all records with this year's coat drive for the Capuchins with 113 coats! We needed 2 fully loaded SUVs! Along with our pastors, V. Rev. Fr. Aren Jebejian, and Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian as well as our guest priest from Istanbul, Rev. Fr. Harutyun Damadyan, Greg and Edith Baise were also present to help.

Brother Robert Wotypka has now taken over the pastoral ministries from our beloved Brother Bob Malloy after his twenty years of service. This was not our first interaction with Brother Robert as he reminded me - in 2008, we worked together at Cabrini Clinic, with me in my current role of volunteer pharmacist and him working patient in-

take as a Mercy Corps Volunteer. I told him about the two degrees of separation that uniquely exists in our Armenian Community and welcomed him as a new member. Along with St. John's, I look forward to many years of closeness in working with Brother Robert and the Capuchins in supporting their outreach to the poor.

In addition to the Coat Drive, this will be our third year of purchasing socks, underwear, winter hats, scarves, gloves and blue jeans. These items of need were brought to our attention three years ago when Fr. Aren asked Brother Bob how St. John might help the Capuchins more. These were the items that Brother Bob mentioned and St. John Armenian Church Men's Society has been providing them ever since. We will be turning next to our brothers at World Medical Relief to find other items that could help support this Capuchin Mission such as PPE and blankets to help fend off the cold. In working together like this we will continue to follow *"the call to go forth in His name."*

Why Do Armenians Celebrate Christmas on January 6th?

By Rev. Fr. Armash Bagdasarian
Assistant Pastor

It is often asked why the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church does not celebrate Christmas on December 25th with most of the rest of the Christian world. Obviously, the exact date of Christ's birth has not been historically established nor is it recorded in the four Gospels. However, historically, all Christian churches celebrated Christ's birth on January 6th until the fourth century. The feast of Christmas was not a separate church feast for the first four centuries of Christian history. It was celebrated with Epiphany in the one great feast of God's appearance on earth in the form of the human Messiah of Israel.

The Nativity began to be celebrated on the twenty-fifth of December to offset the pagan festival of the Invincible Sun, which occurred on that day. Until the fourth century, all Christendom celebrated the birth of Christ on January 6th, but in the year 336, the Roman Emperor Constantine decreed that the Christmas celebration be moved from January 6th to December 25th, to compete with an earlier pagan holiday, the rebirth of the Unconquered Sun (*Sol Invictus*). The year before, in 335, Emperor Constantine completed work on the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, bringing the city of Jerusalem under Roman control. While these significant changes to Christianity occurred under decree of Emperor Constantine, Armenian Christians remained unaffected, simply because no such pagan festival and practices



existed in Armenia. Therefore, the Armenian Church continued to celebrate The Birth of Christ on January 6th.

At the time, Christians observed these pagan festivities. To put an end to this pagan practice, the church hierarchy designated December 25th as the official date of Christmas and January 6th as the feast of Epiphany. However, Armenia was not affected by this change for the simple fact, as noted before, that there were no such pagan practices in Armenia at the time and the fact that the Armenian Church was not a satellite of the Roman Church. Thus, remaining faithful to the tradi-

tions of their forefathers, Armenians have continued to celebrate Christmas on January 6th until this day.

"Armenian Christmas," as it is popularly called, is a culmination of the celebrations of events related to Christ's Incarnation. Theophany, or Epiphany (or *Asdvadz-a-haydnootyoon* in Armenian) means "Revelation of God". This is the central theme of the Christmas Season in the Armenian Church. During the Armenian Christmas season, the major events celebrated are the Nativity of Christ in Bethlehem and His baptism in the River Jordan.

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



Among the Armenians, who was St. Nicholas

The familiar saint of the Christmas season has more than a few mysteries associated with him. Among them is why the Armenian Church calendar honors St. Nicholas not once, but twice in the Advent season. Bishop Daniel Findikyan investigates the history behind this double celebration.

<https://bit.ly/3CMGGPZ>



Joseph the carpenter

Understanding Joseph's role in the first Christmas can be the first step in approaching Jesus—and learning what it means to be a person of faith.

<https://bit.ly/3GZWWQ4>



“Armenian Cultural Hour”

The Cultural Committee of Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Church (Providence, RI) continues its popular online series

<https://bit.ly/3H1Oyjl>

Editor's Notes

The *Torchbearer* Staff would like to thank all the contributors who willingly come forward and share their talents and their insights into St. John parish life. We also thank all those who share their photographic talents to embellish the articles that we offer. Many, many thanks and Happy New Year to all our readers.

Corrections

The following was incorrect in the September Torchbearer. Please accept our apologies.

Anoush Mardigian is the correct name of the model in the Museum Tour article.