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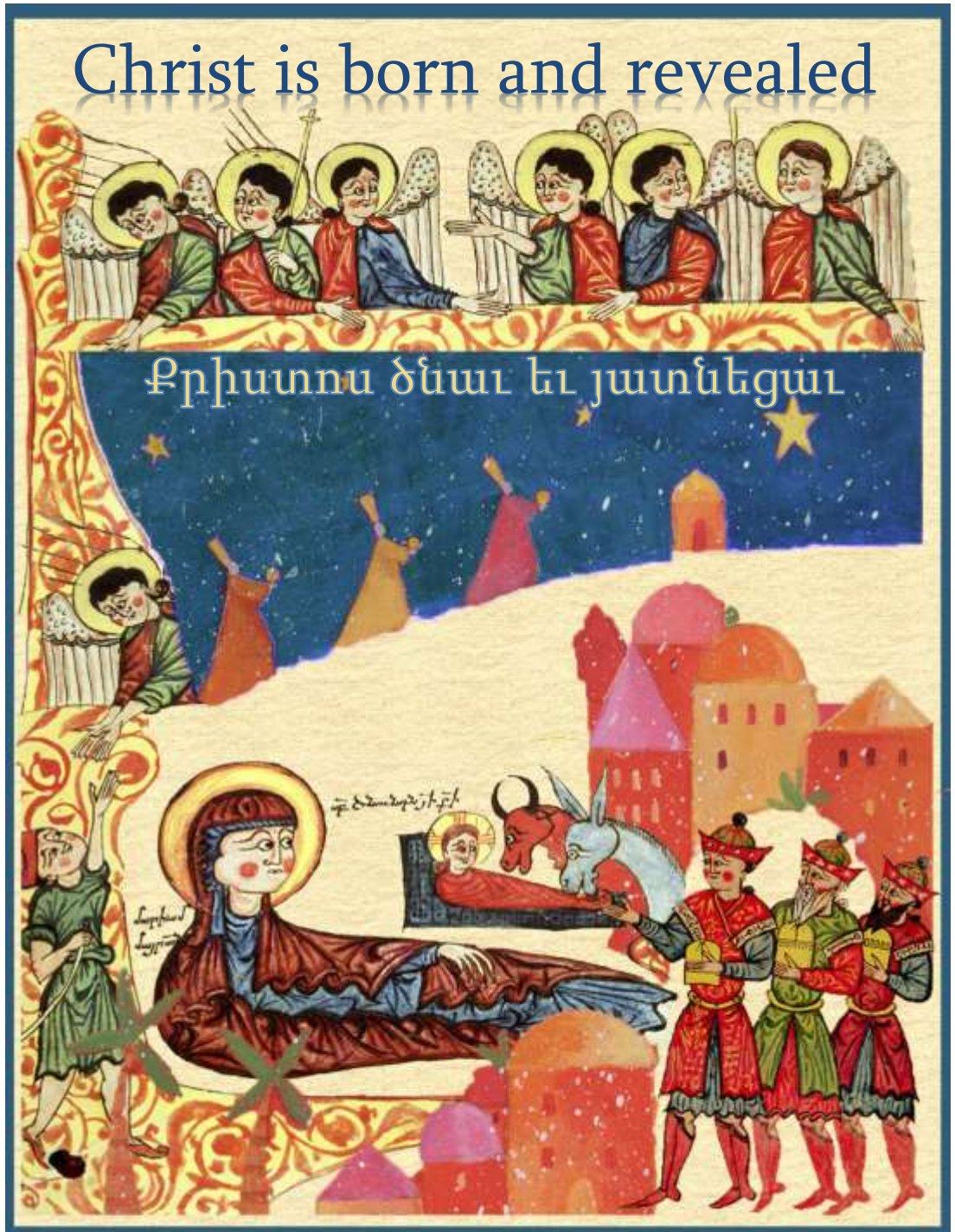
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Pastor's Desk: Under the Influence

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. —Eph 5:15-16

Last week I had several days in a row where my schedule forced me to be gone all day and basically all night. I did manage, however, to squeeze in a quick dinner with the family one evening. And though I tried to stay positive, I remember looking guiltily down at my plate and thinking, 'my family is only getting the crumbs of my time.' On weeks like this, it is tempting to resent my church family from taking too much time from my home family. But then I recall how many parishioners also get the crumbs of my time, the sick person who lives an hour north, the shut in who lives two hours south, the many people who probably should have gotten thank you letters. It seems I never have enough time for anyone in my life, including myself; this is one of the toughest challenge of parish ministry. But it is not unique to parish ministry, I am sure many of you reading this can also relate, especially in this Christmas season. We live in a culture which pushes us to act as though there is never enough time. We are constantly rushing, possessed to live the most connected and productive life. Yet for me, somehow, all I am doing does not satisfy my being; being a good father and husband, being a good pastor to parishioners, even just relaxing and being myself! Well mercifully, in a recent lectionary reading from Ephesians, Paul reassures us that being good stewards of our time has never been easy, but that as Christians we can reintegrate a life which threatens to disintegrate into one hundred pieces.

But before we come up with a cure, we must name our disease. Paul points at what threatens our good stewardship of time when he says somewhat cryptically that "the days are evil." This is easy to misinterpret in all kinds of dualistic ways. But Paul is not saying that somehow all the workings of this world are evil, and that only in the great beyond will our time be well spent. On our worst days this outlook is tempting, but this of course can't be right. For in the first chapter of the Bible, God made the world and time, blessed it and called it good. Not until the third chapter did humankind and evil enter into play. As with any story, you have to start with chapter one, not chapter three! If we do this, we see that life as designed by God—all of it—is fundamentally good, and that evil must simply be the misuse of something good. And indeed that is what Paul goes on to say about proper use of our time; "do not to be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

It seems that all of our trouble with the proper use of our time, comes down to a foolish misunderstanding of what the will of the Lord is for our lives. Paul goes on to use the metaphor of intoxication to describe our foolishness. He says that we all tend to get drunk on the spirits of the age we live in, rather than living in the Holy Spirit. Though it is hard to see and admit, I know that I suffer from this 'drunkenness.' Though I can and do secretly blame anyone and everyone when my life gets out of control, the fact is that I am the one who overdoes it. I am the one who gets drunk on the spirits of the world; the self-esteem I get from running a church office well, the adrenaline from doing 12 things at once, the praise that comes with trying to please everyone. About all these ego-driven adrenaline rushes, Paul says "Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk...but be filled with the Spirit."

The truth of the matter is, that when it comes to stewardship of time, I am mostly the cause of my own suffering, and my church and home families suffer along with me. It seems I am somewhat addicted to filling up my days with the spirits of productivity, success and control, which leave me feeling empty, rather than filling up on the Holy Spirit, which leaves me full. I should know better, because the sometimes impossible demands of pastoral life have often left me no choice but to rely on the Holy Spirit. On the way to a family in need in the hospital, I have quietly prayed to myself; 'Dear God I have nothing left in the tank—nothing to give this sick family who needs help.' And just then, God gives me and that afflicted family His presence. Or I have been trying all week to find time to write my sermon— it's Saturday morning, then its Saturday night, now its Sunday morning; 'I am exhausted Lord, I have nothing left to say or give!' And just then, God gives me, and the people of this church a dose of His healing words, His healing presence.

As a New Year opens before us, I pray that you and I will become wiser in the stewardship of our time. I pray for the courage to set proper boundaries for ourselves and others when tempted to misuse our time on ego-driven pursuits. I pray that in 2018 we better understand (stand under) the will of the Lord, rather than stand under the influence of the spirits of the day. I pray that we learn to let go and let God fill us with his wisdom and Spirit. Because what I have seen in glimpses from my own experience, is that if I allow it, God's Spirit provides all I need, and all that my church and home families need. Like the miracle of the five loaves that somehow feeds the five thousand, my limited supply of time, can be multiplied by God into an abundant New Year, a healthy and joyful life lived under the influence of the Holy Spirit, now and always; amen.

PARISH COUNCIL REPORT by Michael Shahnasarian, Ph.D.

Another year is drawing to a close, and what an incredible year it has been for St. Hagop Armenian Church! Among the year's many milestone events were hosting the 115th annual Eastern Diocese Convention, and celebrating two decennial anniversaries: Der Hovnan Demerjian's ordination, and the consecration of our church building. One of these events, alone, would be monumental in a calendar year!

Profits from the Diocesan Convention enabled St. Hagop to make a sizable contribution to the Fund for Armenian Relief and to repay part of its church construction loan. Also, during 2017, for the first time in church history we established an administrative position to facilitate and manage our growth. Among other things, this added resource has enabled St. Hagop to begin leasing its new hall to parties outside our church community, generating funds necessary to sustain our operations.

Other 2017 church highlights included our Armenian Mardi Gras. This evolving event is continuing to grow in popularity, attracting people beyond our church community.

St. Hagop implemented a major change in its operations during 2017, converting from a dues membership system to a pledge system. The new system derives from fundamental Christian premises central to the inclusory concept of membership and belief that gifts to the church should emanate from one's heart, rather than be externally imposed. Parishioners' response to changes in our stewardship practices have been extremely positive, encouraging the Diocese to further examine the viability of adopting our model elsewhere.

Above all, of course, our beloved church continues to serve as our Lord's home, where Armenian Christians and other believers gather to worship and commemorate important life and afterlife events. This overarching purpose, indeed, is the glue that has bound our extended church family for over 1,700 years, and will continue to bind us unto the ages.

On the dusk of 2017, your church will close the year with a New Year's Eve dance celebration, directed by Jack Dikranian, who ably led the 10-year anniversary dinner dance celebrating the consecration of our church building. Also, as we close the year, St. Hagop is concluding its 2017 pledge season and preparing for 2018.

John Arsenault and Artak Apyan presented stirring testimonials, sharing their reasons for being St. Hagop stewards. Fr. Hovnan provided uplifting stewardship sermons, and nearly 60 pledges for 2018 have already been received. If you have yet to submit your 2018 pledge, please do so as soon as possible as we are finalizing our budget and planning accordingly. Regardless of the amount you pledge, we aim for 100% participation among our congregation!

Those who made their 2018 pledges have undoubtedly been inspired by the likes of the words from Luke 6:35, *Do good to them, and lend to them without expecting anything back.* We encourage you to look into your heart and prayerfully commit your pledge to facilitate St. Hagop's mission: to continuously evolve as the bedrock of the Tampa Bay community, perpetuating our Armenian Christian faith and heritage.

Thank you for helping make 2017 a seminal year for St. Hagop. With God's help, I am confident our efforts to fulfill His plan for us will further evolve during 2018 and beyond.

Michael Shahnasarian, Ph.D.

Parish Council Chairman

SHANASARIAN HALL REPORT by Chrisanne Jensen/Administrative Assistant

It has been a very successful year for events at Shahnasarian Hall. We will finish the year with 35 events with a mix of types of events such as weddings, quinceaneras, birthday parties, and company Christmas parties! We have fine-tuned our routine of offering exceptional service to all our clients with help from our hall representatives, cleaning crew, and church volunteers helping to keep the hall looking new and beautiful. We already have many events on the books for 2018 along with blocks of time for church functions such as NYE, Easter week, and the Armenian Festival in April. We have also added more than 50 pictures to our website, Facebook page, and other social media sites. Get ready for big news in January when Shahnasarian Hall will be awarded the prestigious 2018 Wedding Wire Couples' Choice Award for recent five-star reviews submitted by past clients! We will post the award on our website with great pride! We will also host a bridal show on Tuesday, February 27th from 6pm – 9pm which was originally scheduled during hurricane Irma this past September. We encourage anyone to attend and meet local vendors that have become our preferred vendors for the hall.



Sunday School Report

A lot of exciting things have been happening in our Sunday School program this year! The Sunday School room has been remodeled and nicely decorated, thanks to Linda Maslar for her leadership. Andy Anusbigian was so kind to donate a laptop and tablets so that teachers and students can use them for class. Attendance each week has been growing and we love all the familiar faces we are seeing each week. The Christmas ornaments that the children made and sold in December were a big hit with everyone. Our wonderful Sunday School teachers are all looking forward to a great 2018 with lots of special surprises in store. Please contact co-superintendents Linda Maslar & Yn. Anna Demerjian with any questions.



2018 Stewardship Pledge Update as of 12/21/17

So far we have been blessed with **59** pledges totaling **\$117,940** for 2018! Our goal is for all to participate regardless of amount! We invite you to mail in your pledge card or make an online pledge for 2018, it is not too late!

In prayerful consideration of my stewardship of God's resources and my commitment to St. Hagop's mission and programs:

My/Our Stewardship Pledge for 2018 is \$ _____, given


() weekly () monthly () quarterly () annually

Yes, please issue me offering envelopes No, offering envelopes will not be needed

Signature: _____ **Date:** ___/___/___

Name(s):	
Address:	
Phone/Email:	

Please mail this pledge card to the church office, or place in the offering plate by Stewardship Sunday—November 26, 2017. No payment need accompany this pledge form. We ask that 2018 pledge monies be paid by the end of the 2018 calendar year. Payments may be made online through the St. Hagop website. Once you submit this form, you will receive an account number and offering envelopes (if you choose).

 **ST. HAGOP**
ARMENIAN CHURCH
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May the Lord Remember All Your Offerings
Յիշեցուցէ՛ Տէր զամենայն Դատարարս թո՛ւ

Stewardship Pledge Card

Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to St. Hagop! Those who have submitted a pledge by 12/21/17 to support St. Hagop are identified below.

George & Joan Agnacion, John & Susan Arsenault, Grace Austin, Tatyana Badalyan, Cornelia Biggers, Fr. Hovnan & Yn. Anna Demerjian, Hasmig & Jean-Jacques Demerjian, Sason & Patricia Demirjian, Rita Dilanian, Leilani Doty, Araxi Dulgeroff, Harbig & Mary Garabedian, Martha-Anne Garabedian, Richard & Pauline Gilgan, Adrienne Guendjoian, Teresa Haidarian, Berge & Tamar Hajian, Zvart Jambazian, Seda & Irene Hakim Karamian, Janet Haydostian, Mary Haydostian, Hayley Hovhanessian, Greg & Stephanie Hovsepien, David & Darwin Jamgochian, Stepon & Loretta Jamgochian, Eileen Barsamian Jennings, Dr. George & Debra Kamajian, Taisia Kasparova, David & Nancy Kazarian, Mari & Garbis Kesisoglu, Richard & Marge Kratlian, Sophia Kugeares, Hagop & Mary (Tobe) Mashikian, Mallory Maslar, Richard & Linda Maslar, Vazken Melkisetian, Ida Merakyan, John & Virginia Messerlian, Vasken & Karen Minassian, Agop & Victoria Mouradian, Bejan, Rebekah, Daron & Alice Nouri, Sima Palakian, Leon & Sharon Sarkisian, Martha Samuelian, Vahak S. & Elizabeth J. Sarkis, Charles & Eva Sarkisian, Chris Sassouni, Yates Sayers & Alexis Shahnasarian-Sayers, Norair & Maro Shaldjian, Stepan & Seta Serpekian, Vicken & Courtney Serpekian, Elizabeth Shahnasarian, Margaret & Edward Shahnasarian, Michael & Jean Shahnasarian, John & Kelly Shamsey, Robert & Christina Shamsey, Daniel & Norma Takoushian, Denise Matthieu and Antoine van Veen, Ida Varadian, James & Cathy Wilson, Dr. Haig & Louise Yardumian



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Photo 1-Fr. Garabed Celebrates Badarak on Dec. 10



Photo 2-Tatev Baroyan Benefit Concert on Nov. 3



Photo 3-St. Hagop 10th Anniversary Dinner Dance Oct. 21

Save the Date-Armenian Heritage Festival-Saturday April 21 & Sunday April 22, 2018

St. Hagop's 2018 Festival titled "OUR ARMENIAN HERITAGE" will take place the weekend of April 21-22. Please mark your calendars and tell your friends to save the dates to come and learn about our Armenian history, culture, food and more.

We need YOUR help to prepare for the festivities and work together that weekend to make this a great success.

A PLANNING MEETING will take place after church SUNDAY, JANUARY 28. We are looking for volunteers to participate before the festival to prepare the food, share their cultural items, make costumes, monetarily support the Festival and get out publicity.

On the festival weekend, we need YOU to come and help sell food items, cook, sell raffle items, man the children's activities, entertain, and man the stations to make this a St. Hagop success. WE NEED YOUR HELP AND EXPERTISE! THIS IS A COMMUNITY PROJECT! Volunteer now!

Contact Louise (lyardumian@icloud.com) or Rita (rita_keshishian@hotmail.com) to volunteer or for more information! Thank you for your participation in our 2018 Festival, "OUR ARMENIAN HERITAGE." See you at our planning meeting after church on Sunday, January 28!



Office Hours: 9 am-5 pm

Worship Hours: Sunday 10:30am

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Avedis Newsletter is a publication of St. Hagop Armenian Church in Pinellas Park, Florida.

Submissions are welcomed and should be sent to the church office. All text should be electronic format, preferably Word. Editorial board reserves the right to modify or reject any submissions. All material must be received no later than the published deadlines below:

Issue	Submission
March/April/May 2018	February 15th
June/July/August 2018	April 15th

It costs over \$1,100 to print and send each issue of Avedis. We would like to communicate as often as possible with our parishioners. Will you help defray some of the costs? Please send your check memo: Avedis Newsletter 1/2 issue (\$550); 1/4 issue (\$275) or other (\$) amount.

The *Avedis* is grateful to accept business ads, which help us, pay for our newsletter and help you reach your customers. Please email the office at office@stthagopfl.org if you are interested. Make checks payable to St. Hagop Armenian Church.

Rates are per issue:
\$50 for a business card,
\$150 for a half page and \$300 for a full page

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

*****Divine Liturgy, Sunday School & fellowship take place every Sunday from 10:30-12:30 unless noted below*****

Fri. Jan. 5	Jragalooys Divine Liturgy – Armenian Christmas Eve	6:30pm
Sat. Jan. 6	Armenian Christmas Day (no church services)	
Sun Jan. 7	Divine Liturgy-Armenian Christmas Observed Blessing of the Waters	10:30 AM 12:15 PM
Tues. Jan. 9	Parish Council Meeting	6:00 PM
Sun. Jan. 14	Divine Liturgy	10:30 AM
Tues. Jan 16	Event Committee Meeting	7:00 PM
Sun. Jan. 21	Divine Liturgy Youth Bowling and Pizza Party Calvary Cemetery Presentation	10:30 AM 1:00 PM 1:00 PM
Sun. Jan. 28	Divine Liturgy Armenian Festival Volunteer Meeting	10:30 AM 12:30 PM
Sun. Feb. 4th	Divine Liturgy	10:30 AM
Sun. Feb. 11	Divine Liturgy Annual Yalanchi Contest	10:30 AM 12:30 PM
Mon. Feb. 12	Great Lent Begins	
Tues. Feb. 13	Parish Council Meeting	6:00 PM
Sun. Feb. 18	Divine Liturgy Annual Parish Assembly	10:30 AM 12:30 PM
Sun. Feb. 25	Divine Liturgy	10:30 AM
Sun. March 4	Divine Liturgy Talent Show	10:30 AM 1:00 PM
Sun. March 11	Divine Liturgy	10:30 AM
Tues. March 13	Parish Council Meeting	6:00 PM
Sun March 18	Divine Liturgy	10:30 AM
Sun. March 25	Divine Liturgy-Palm Sunday	10:30 AM
Thurs. March 29	Votnlva-Washing of the Feet Vigil/Khavaroom Service	7:00 PM 8:00 PM
Fri. March 30	Burial Service	7:00 PM
Sat. March 31	Easter Eve/Jragalooys Divine Liturgy	7:00 PM
Sun. April 1	Divine Liturgy- Easter Sunday Special Fellowship & Youth Easter Egg Hunt	10:30 AM 12:30 PM
April 21-22	St. Hagop Armenian Heritage Festival-Save the Date!	

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Parish of the Gulf Coast of Florida

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