

# AVEDIS ԱԻԵՏԻՍ

St. Hagop Armenian Church

The Good News | Fall 2023

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## ROOTS & WINGS

'As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.' -Col 2:6-7

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## Pastor's Desk by Fr. Hovnan Demerjian – Roots & Wings

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*'There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One of these is roots, the other, wings.'* -Goethe

A parishioner sent me an article this Summer from the Wall Street Journal titled 'Eastern Orthodoxy Gains New Followers in America,' which traces a small but growing trend of those with no ethnic ties joining Eastern Orthodox church like ours. The reasons for this, I believe, can be captured in one word from our introductory quote from German renaissance man Goethe: Roots. In an increasingly rootless America, where we move around so often that family and communal ties no longer connect us, people are searching for roots.

This trend is even more pronounced in booming states like Florida. There is a somewhat pejorative saying that all that is not rooted down in America blows down and ends up in Florida. This is a big generalization, but it also contains truth. Many people come to Florida and to this community because they are leaving someplace else. Some have come to work their remote jobs in an easier place to live. Some are starting a new phase of life after divorce or after the kids are all grown up.

For all of these reasons, plus the great disruption of the Covid years, Florida is full of people who have uprooted themselves, and churches like ours provide a deep sense of rootedness, a community and a sense of place. The songs we sing every Sunday are a few hundred years old, the alphabet we use is one and a half thousand years old and the holy rituals and scriptures of Our Lord are several millennia old. Though our community here is new, it is a mosaic of old communities from Halep to Hayastan, from New York to Detroit.

Roots are important. They give us identity, keep us grounded, and bond us together; this is certainly true for Armenians, but also those of different and mixed ethnic background. We have many non-Armenians in our community whose lives were enriched by setting roots in the Armenian Church, and the Armenian church has been greatly enriched by their presence. Whatever our ancestral background, being rooted together in the St. Hagop Armenian Church culture, tradition and community is an essential first step in our journeys of faith, but it is not the final step. At some point, all of us who are attracted to our unique history and tradition come to a crossroads of a challenging question. What does this heritage mean for me right now, today? What does it mean in the triumphs and struggles of my marriage and in the daily lives of my children and grandchildren? Did God just work in the lives of other people in the past, or does he work on me, right here and right now?

Seekers may be coming to ancient churches to find roots, but they will only stay if we help them find wings. You and I will only stay, or only stay well, if we find wings; not looking backward, but forward and upward to all we are called with God to be. It is no coincidence then, that our church has so many holy days where we look forward and upward to find God and 'earn our wings.' First of course there is Christ's Resurrection, but then also his Ascension after 40 days. Last month we observed his Mother Mary's Assumption to heaven, and this month we raise up the Cross in Exaltation. These miracles of ascent do not merely defy the laws of physics. They ask us to defy the laws of our tribal, survival instincts. Our heritage and culture root us in this world, but following Jesus, our greatest calling and truest identity is greater still and gifted from above. Like us, even Jesus' disciples found this difficult to wrap their heads around. They've been following him for years, witnessing his miracles and teachings and what do they ask Jesus right before he ascends? 'Lord, is now finally the time when you will vanquish Israel's enemies and restore our homeland?' Like us, Jesus' early followers get so tangled up in their roots! We look backward and downward at what used to be, instead of forward and upward to what is possible with God! It is good for Jews, Greeks and Armenians alike to cherish our roots and traditions-so long as they never stand in the way of a higher calling in Christ.

Just what is that higher calling? Well, it is many things to many people, but Jesus conveys it to his Apostles with other worldly power and clarity. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Mt 28:18-20). 'Go,' is Jesus' first word, reminding us that roots alone can't move, can't accomplish his great commission. As God's chosen people, the Apostles were rooted in the greatest tradition and culture the world has ever known. Jesus is asking them to grow beyond their roots, to go beyond their people, even to sinners, even to enemies. Jesus is asking them to keep traditions, but hold them loosely, leaving room for God to inspire them again.

Jesus calls us to do the same. We cherish our Armenian roots and traditions, and we are grateful that they attract Armenians and non-Armenians alike to fellowship together. This is a blessed gift. But gifts are for giving and are never more important than the giver. Let us learn to look forward and upward for our greatest gift and highest calling as individuals and as an Armenian Church community. Let us imitate Our Lord who was rooted in this world, but not of it. Who gave himself to the world, but did not give in to it. Who is older than time and yet still delights in making all things new, now and always; amen.

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## Parish Council Report by Michael Shahnasarian, Ph.D.

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Personal circumstances have prompted me to deviate from my custom of delivering a traditional parish council report. Instead, I share this difficult message/reflection and request your forbearance.

As many of you know, my mother, Michele Shahnasarian, passed last month. She was a devout, faith-filled woman who I and my family deeply loved and admired. Her love and faith touched many St. Hagop parishioners as well.

I cannot adequately express my sincere gratitude for the outpour of prayers, support, and love extended during my mother's illness and demise. The St. Hagop community provided the type of heartfelt solace that only people of faith can provide.

We all have lost and will continue to lose loved ones . . . such is life and God's will. And with this loss comes grieving. In my case, beyond memories of my mother and the great void associated with her passing, triggers that continue to evoke an emotional response in me include expressions of sincere, faith-based compassion and caring from those who truly loved my mother and her family. The visceral response I feel is, paradoxically, both painful and overwhelmingly welcome, affirming to me in an ethereal way God's omnipresence and the extension of His will and word among humankind, fortifying my Christian beliefs.

Among other things, being more attuned these past few months to death, the purpose of life, and the life hereafter has enlightened me spiritually and brought me closer to God. During my mother's dying days, she expressed her need to feel loved and not to be alone as she accepted her inevitable outcome. Pope Francis recently wrote the following on life after death on earth, providing perspective on the interface between our earthly world and afterlife: "Brothers and sisters, let us ask ourselves: on what are we investing our lives? On things that pass, such as money, success, appearance, physical well-being? We will take away none of these things. Are we attached to earthly things, as if we were to live here forever? This world will pass away. And only love will remain. To base one's life on the Word of God, therefore, is not an escape from history, but an immersion into earthly realities in order to make them solid, to transform them with love, imprinting on them the sign of eternity, the sign of God."

As a psychologist, I appreciate that grief experiences vary widely and can manifest in highly personal, sometimes complex ways. Complicating factors in bereavement reactions can include, for example, the death of a child or young person, or unanticipated death of one caused by a traumatic event. In sharing these reflecting thoughts, my aim includes attempting to honor the souls of our beloved brethren - recent and past – trusting on some level you can relate to and process my comments within the context of factors associated with losses you have encountered.

I apologize for the funereal tone of this missive. Death is a part of life, albeit not the end of life as we Christians believe. In closing, I will share my mother's favorite Bible verse, from 1 Corinthians 13: 4 - 7, which Pope Francis's words above echo:

***Love is patient; love is kind; love is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.***

# St. Hagop Holy Land Pilgrimage-September 2024

**Trip Includes:** Trip Includes: Round Trip international airfare, Deluxe motorcoaches, 1st class hotels, Guided sightseeing, Entrance fees to sites visited (as listed in itinerary) Breakfast & dinner daily, Hotel Gratuities, Program, admin fees & taxes

**Not Included:** Optional Travel Protection, Miscellaneous fees such as individual transfers, Passports, laundry lunches, beverages at meals & baggage fees, tips for guide and driver, Document fees/visas for non-US Citizens.

**Trip Price with Airfare:** \$3698  
*based on group coach pricing with airlines.*

**Ground Only Pricing** (No airfare purchased from EOT): \$2,198

**Itinerary** (subject to change based on local conditions, availability, etc.):

## September 1 (SU) USA / Tel Aviv

Your spiritual pilgrimage begins as you depart on your overnight flight to Tel Aviv. Meals and refreshments will be served aloft.

## September 2 (MO) Arrive Tel Aviv Airport / Jerusalem

After arrival in Tel Aviv, you will be met by your Educational Opportunities representative who will be with you during your stay in the Holy Land. Transfer to your hotel in Jerusalem.

## September 3 (TU), Bethlehem

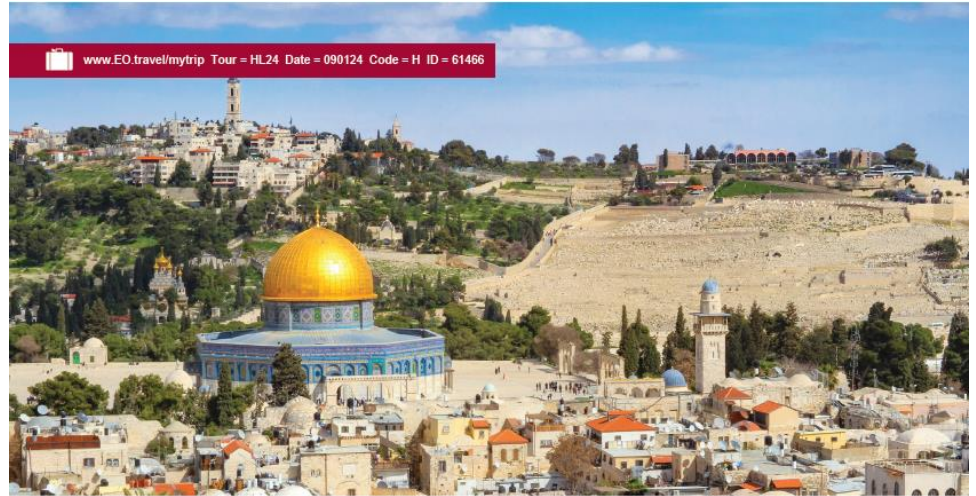
Travel to Bethlehem. Above the traditional Grotto of Jesus' birth, visit the Nativity Church. Tour the Manger. Behold the fourteen pointed star that bears the inscription: "Here Jesus Christ was born to the Virgin Mary." Of the fifteen lamps burning around the recess, five belong to the Armenians. See the two altars that belong to the Armenians, one is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin and the other is known as the Altar of the Kings. Visit the Armenian Monastery, most of which dates from the Byzantine and Crusader periods. The roof of the monastery offers a unique panoramic view of Bethlehem and its terraced environs.

## September 4 (WE), Monday: Dead Sea, Jericho, Masada Jerusalem

Depart Jerusalem for the Jordan Valley. Continue through the Judean Wilderness to view the Dead Sea, on to ancient Jericho, the oldest known city in the Western world. Drive along the shores of the Dead Sea to reach to the Archeological excavations of Qumran, where the Dead Sea scrolls were found by a wandering shepherd. Visit Masada, Herod's mountain top fortress that became the last stronghold of the Jewish Rebellion against the Romans. Ride the cable car to the top to explore. Peer down upon the remains of the Roman camps and siege ramp below. Time permitting; you'll stop briefly at the Shores of the Dead Sea for a quick dip in the salt and mineral-laden waters.

## September 5 (TH), Armenian Patriarchate

Visit the Armenian Patriarchate and tour the Armenian Monastery Complex. View Armenian manuscripts in the chapel of St. Toros.



# Armenian Holy Land Pilgrimage with St. Hagop Church of Tampa/St. Pete September 1 - 11, 2024



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Visit the recently renovated and reopened Edward and Helen Mardigian Museum, located in the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem, and see the newly transferred 6th century Armenian Mosaic of Birds. This brilliantly colored and delicate mosaic floor is thought to be one of the first monuments to the Unknown Soldier. (non brochure note: no bus needed)

#### **September 6 (FR) Jerusalem**

This morning, drive to the top of the Mt. of Olives for a spectacular view of Jerusalem. Visit the Church of Pater Noster (commemorating the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father"), the Chapel of Ascension (commemorating the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven), and the Russian Ascension Church where you will see Armenian Mosaics from Byzantine period. Proceed to the Chapel of Dominus Fleuit, where Jesus wept over Jerusalem and foretold its complete destruction. On to the Garden of Gethsemane and the Church of All Nations, which commemorates the Agony in the Garden. Visit the Church of the Virgin Mary, and the Tomb of Our Lady where the Virgin Mary is believed to have laid before her Assumption. Visit Church of Pentecost and Tomb of King David.

#### **September 7 (SA): Jordan River, Galilee Sightseeing, Nazareth**

Today, you will visit the sights around the Sea of Galilee. On the way to Galilee, see the Jordan River, where Jesus was baptized and have the opportunity to go venture into the water. You will then go to Galilee and visit the Church of the Beatitudes, the traditional site of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Enjoy time for meditation and prayer in the tranquil site with its breathtaking view of the Sea of Galilee. Walk down the hill to Tabgha, the traditional place of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes. Enjoy an included fish lunch and take a memorable boat ride across the Sea of Galilee. This afternoon drive, to Cana of Galilee, where our Lord performed the first miracle - changing water into wine at the wedding feast, and then continue to Mount Tabor to see the site of the Transfiguration of Jesus. Finally, visit the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth, which is St. Mary's home and where the angel Gabriel announced that she would become the Mother-of-God. Return to Jerusalem.

#### **September 8 (SU): Jerusalem**

Attend Divine Liturgy at St. James Cathedral. Have a delicious lunch at Bulghourgi Armenian Restaurant (not included). In the afternoon, attend Antasdan service at St. James Cathedral. (non brochure note: no bus needed)

#### **September 9 (MO): Jerusalem**

Explore the Old City. Depart for the Western (Wailing) Wall (The Jewish Holy site) near the Dome of The Rock (The Muslim Holy site). Enter into the Old City through St. Stephen's Gate. View the Pool of Bethesda where Jesus cured the paralytic who had been ill for 38 years and visit the Church of St. Anne. Continue to walk in Christ's footsteps along the Via Dolorosa (Way of the Cross). Proceed through the exotic Arab bazaar and winding cobblestone streets to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which is the most venerated shrine in Christendom, and the center of Christian worship in Jerusalem. See the stone of Unction, Golgotha – the site where Christ was crucified, the Armenian Gallery (Vernadoon), the 12th-century Armenian Chapel of Helena, its rock walls covered with crosses scratched by medieval pilgrims and where the Cross of Christ was discovered. Finally, visit the Tomb of Christ.

#### **September 10, (TU): Armenian Patriarchate**

Enjoy a free day in Jerusalem and a special farewell dinner this evening.

#### **September 11 (WE): Return home**

Flight to the U.S. with same day arrival.

For full brochure & details visit:  
[www.sthagopfl.org/holy-land-pilgrimage/](http://www.sthagopfl.org/holy-land-pilgrimage/)

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# Reflections on 2<sup>nd</sup> Medical Mission Trip to Armenia by Dr. George Kamajian

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Dr. George's journal from his 2<sup>nd</sup> Medical Mission to Armenia in June 2023, will appear in 3 parts in our newsletter:

## PART I

### Traveling Doctors

This is my 4<sup>th</sup> trip to Armenia. My first medical mission was after the '88 earthquake, under the auspices of USAID. For the past 2 years I have served under the umbrella of Traveling Doctors. This organization, of which I am now US based medical director, was started by Armine Barkhudaryan in Armenia 5 years ago. Our mission, to provide medical services to individuals and communities unserved, underserved, or cut off from basic healthcare services around the world.

### Why this trip

There are many reasons to visit Armenia: the food, the air, the people, the views of Mt Ararat, the brandy, the dance, lavash, the music and perhaps a few friends and relatives. This trip, like my others over the years, is a medical relief mission ONLY. The Armenians in the capital city, Yerevan, for the most part do not need my specific medical expertise. Most Yerevan physicians are as well trained as any professional in the world. My purpose was to go to the "remote" villages and take care of people. No committees, no celebrities, no handshaking, no meetings, minimal photographs, no politicians, no parties, just direct patient care to those in need.

### What this is not

The purpose of this retrospective journal is not meant to be Armenia bashing. It is the truth as seen by my eyes. America's poverty rate is said to be at 11% (although I've seen Detroit, Philly and the deep south and I am sure that number is underreported). Armenia has a poverty rate in excess of 25%. Neighboring Georgia is 17%. Russia is 10%. Azerbaijan is 6%. Amazing what a little oil money will do for a country. Armenia, as in every country in the world, has oligarchs, corruption, good people, and not so good people. Yes, there is an Armenian mafia. Yes, the church is corrupt from the top down. Yes, there are still very spiritual clergy that remain. But the soul of the people is incorruptible.

From a health care perspective, the people we treated were not ignorant of modern-day medicine. There is a glaring inconsistency in access and opportunity to health care between the cities and the hospitals and clinics of the remote villages. There is a glaring inconsistency in initiative and resources, unfortunate remnants of the old Soviet systems that still stand. Our team worked in an environment where we clearly understood that we were not offering miracles. Even in America no one mode of treatment, mainstream medicine, acupuncture, chiropractic care, herbal therapy, holistic therapy or legislation has a monopoly of success. We just did the best we could within the structure of Armenia's existing health care system and the lives of the people we touched. Change must come from the top down and that is a very slow transition in Armenia.

### Inauspicious Start

My luggage is AWOL, missing in action, untraceable. Delta and Air France have no local representative on the ground in Yerevan. I attempt to initiate a cascade of phone calls, something very difficult to do when there is no phone or internet connection and after 29 hours of air travel. After all, I have the tracking numbers on my ticket. How hard could it be? Apparently, very hard.

It is my first full day in Armenia. I have an appointment to deliver \$20,000 worth of wound vacs to the primary burn hospital in Yerevan. This amazing lifesaving technology offers hope to those soldiers who still suffer from residual phosphorus burns from the 2020 war. After all, how much is the life of one Armenian soldier worth? But my hands come empty. "It's just one more day," I am told. Tell that to a patient suffering in bed, I say.

In addition, 600 lbs. of medical equipment are not in this country. I am supposed to begin my clinic work tomorrow. And there is the issue of clean *vardeegs* (underwear) and those daily medications that keeps my heart going and my prostate functioning. None of this is happening. Instead, I am treading water.

### Russians in Yerevan

There is nothing else to do but wait. I buy gelato at the bottom of the Yerevan cascade, sit with Armine, my director, and people watch. *The Russians are coming, the Russians are coming.* No, they are here. They are as obvious as Gulliver walking around Lilliputians. There is a significant noticeable physical difference in height. It's not just blue eyes, Slavic cheekbones, and blond hair. The women are all uniformly stunning. The Russian expatriates live comfortably in Armenia because everyone speaks Russian. Their oligarch

money goes a long way. Many of these men have escaped Putin's military conscription. In fact, the Armenian dram has risen dramatically by 30% this past year, with the influx of new money, often oligarch money. Where there is money, there is power.

### **“Satanna!”**

We are in exhibition hall of the National Gallery of Armenia. Winslow Martin (aka Winslow Martinian 😊) has dedicated over 20 years of his Boston Brahmin life documenting the daily lives and historical events in Armenia. He is an *odar* Armenophile. Inexplicably, loves those things I am often most embarrassed about in my tribe. I am a guest at his retrospective one-person exhibition, the first of its kind by a non-Armenian, in the history of the National Gallery.

“*Satanna!* (Satan)!” The middle-aged woman screams that one word. The disruption is incompatible, bordering on the bizarre in the formal and elegant gallery environs. She points to a photograph of current Armenian prime minister Nikol Pashinyan on the exhibition display wall. Her outburst is disruptive at least and disturbing considering the dignitaries and champagne in attendance of this preview.

Winslow's Armenian translator is trying to be diplomatic, despite the woman's agitated speech and hand gestures. The woman in question is livid. Perhaps it has something to do with Artsakh and recent peace negotiations? Losing the war? Betraying the revolution? She keeps repeating the word “*Satanna*”.

Winslow is having none of it. “I would be happy to discuss the political issues with you anytime,” he calmly responds. “This however is an art show. I am not making any political statements.”

The woman ignores his gesture at defusing the situation. She paces back and forth in front of that one photograph. In the photo Pashinyan is wearing a red surgical face mask, presumably from Covid times. The rest of the picture is in black and white, representative of Winslow's mostly monochrome theme on the gallery walls. In the end, she walks away, sputtering incoherently even to those who understand Armenian.

Winslow returns to his guests. His also *odar* wife and son stand by calmly but confused. Something like this would never happen in America. He shrugs his shoulders. “Armenians”.

### **Customs**

How could they lose my luggage?

“*Bid-dee-ka!*”. It's coming.

Three days later I was still wearing the same *vardeegs*, underwear. No shower, no shave, no medications. Sunday (I arrived in Armenia on Friday) we get the call that the luggage had arrived. No, they could not deliver it to us, we still had to go through customs.

I was so excited to get my luggage that I ignored the implications of the yellow zip ties secured to all the suitcases. American airport security just puts a polite note in your suitcase saying it has been searched. The zip ties originate somewhere in France, is my guess. I didn't care. At least I was going to get my stuff.

“What are these?” The guard asked in broken English and Armenian, pointing to the x ray view box.

“They are medical supplies.” I confidently produced the documents from the Armenian minister of health, the two hospital clinics I was visiting in Tsovaghyugh and Stepanavan, and a letter written like a Rosetta Stone, translated in English, Armenian, and French introducing me as a medical provider come to Armenia on a charity medical mission.

“Sorry, the new law says you must first have approval from the government and then you must pay custom duties on all the medication and supplies you bring into this country.”

Can I go outside to talk to my friend. She is only a few feet away. No. If I left the customs area, my supplies would immediately be confiscated, seized, interdicted, I was told by one of the younger uniformed officials. Then I would have to go to court to get them. Although Armine was literally 20 yards away, there was no internet, or my phone couldn't connect. I keep punching buttons on my cell phone. How many times can I press redial? When I get through, she tries to calm me down. “I will make a few phone calls,” she says optimistically.

I begin to get agitated. It doesn't take much. I am 12 thousand miles away from home, from the familiar. It's been days without a toothbrush, clean clothes, and “my stuff”. I am tired. I am cranky. These are supposed to be my people and they are giving me a hard time. Sensing my anger, one of the commanders comes within inches of my nose “We couldn't come to America and bring in these drugs, so why do you think you can come to Armenia and just walk in?”

I lost it. “I’ve been coming here on medical relief missions since before you were born. You didn’t stop me after the ’88 earthquake,” I pointed out. “I brought in thousands of pounds of supplies.” The commander crossed his arms and looked at me blankly. “You didn’t stop me bringing in medical supplies when the country was crying “*kords chee-ga, Loois chee-ga, huys chee-ga*” (there is no work, no light, and no hope) in the early 90’s. “Last year I came with hundreds of pounds of supplies when we traveled to Artsakh and navigated the very intimidating Lachin corridor between the Aziris and the Russians. No one stopped me then.”

“Well, we have new laws” I was told.

“*Amot kees-ee* (shame on you). I called out as they walked away from me. “Is this how you treat a fellow Armenian? I’ve come from ½ around the world. I left my family and my work to come here to help this country and you make it impossible?” I follow them into their customs office without being invited. I am sure they thought I was a crazy American drug trafficker about ready to kill them. In a way, they are correct.

“*Hankeest*, relax, don’t get excited”, they said. “All you have to do is get a list of your supplies, submit it to the ministry, pay a few drams and in a few weeks or so, you can come by and pick up your supplies.”

I was livid. “I’m supposed to do surgery tomorrow. If I can’t bring in these supplies today, people will die (I admit partially borrowing that from *A Few Good Men*).” Again, I am ignored.

“No need for you to stay, nothing is going to change. GO home.” He walks away.

I plopped down in a chair just outside the door to their office staring at the custom officials through their large glass window. “I’m not leaving until I get my suitcases.” I am adamant. They are non-pulsed, and I am totally ignored.

“*Toon keedess*” (you know best), I am told sarcastically. I am looking for a sympathetic eye from any one of a dozen customs officials, but I see nothing.

It’s now hour 3 and the customs officials and I are ignoring each other as other flights come in. I am sitting to a poorly dressed Russian speaking African, who is not stopped picking his nose and eating the boogers for hours. Passenger after passenger goes through the customs check point with luggage far exceeding my paltry 5 suitcases. Some, dressed in Gucci or other exquisite design cloths strutting around on impossible 12-inch heels, are waived through the customs check points without even a glance. They are followed by legions of their porters as if they were returning from Safari. No one bothers them. Maybe it’s just who you know. I am half tempted to just walk into the little cubby hole, take my luggage and leave. After all freedom is only 20 Yards away.

One of the older guards approaches me. He doesn’t speak English and my Armenian is terrible. He takes out his phone and shows me a picture of an Insulin syringe and bottle of Insulin. He points to my bags. “*Ga?*” (Do I have any) he asks.

“*Chee-ga?*” (I don’t have) I reply shaking my head. And even if I did, the damn thing would have to be refrigerated to maintain viability. My luggage has already been in limbo for 4 days. Any insulin would have deteriorated by now. I wonder if I did have insulin for this guy, would I be waived through the checkpoint.

At 3 hours and 45 minutes, the oldest customs guard comes up to me and says that I can take my luggage and go. What? That’s It? He turns his back and walks away. No further questions. No comments. Just go. I grab my luggage and leave the check point. Maybe they are waiting to ambush me, shoot me, throw me into prison. I’ve seen the movies. I’ve seen *Midnight Express*. I’ve read the books. I literally hold my breath. Somehow, I drag the 600 lbs. of my 5 suitcases across the security line. Nothing happens. I am safe.

On the other side of the barrier, Armine awaits. She is smiling. “I told you it was going to be OK.”

## Politics

Armenia’s journey is convoluted. Everyone has an opinion and unlike contemporary America, everyone is willing to discuss their points of view (without bloodshed, name calling or belittlement). Who or what is at fault? Is it the Turks, the Americans, Muslims, the Ukrainian and Israeli drones? What about the diaspora’s responsibility to the homeland. Where is Mother Russia and the CSTO? Although its people are 3500 years old, there is an inherent schizophrenia in Armenian society as the country attempts to navigate the world of independence.

David Hakobyan, former head of the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) and now semi-retired advisor to presidents, ministers, and popes throughout the world (including those of Armenia and what remains of Artsakh) is more charitable and optimistic than most. “It’s a biblical journey. It took the Jews 40 years of wandering the desert before they came to the promised land. They could have made the trip in 2 weeks if they had taken a direct line. It’s the same thing with Armenia. We gained independence in 1991. Our 40 years is not up. Only then should you worry about the future of the country.”



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## The Armenian Genocide Through the eyes of Mike Mosikyan, by Nara Zakaryan

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*Nara Zakaryan's essay won 1st Place in the 2023 Knights & Daughters of Vartan Armenian Genocide Essay Contest. Nara is the daughter of Armen and Srubbi Zakaryan and wrote this essay as a 9<sup>th</sup> grader at Jefferson High School, Tampa, FL.*



Mike Mosikyan is one of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide and his testimony is a part of the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive. His picture on the website in the scout uniform was very fascinating and I decided to choose his testimony. Mr. Mosikyan was interviewed in May 1977 in Montebello, California, almost 6 decades after the horrible massacres of the Armenians in their historical homeland occupied by the Ottoman Empire.

He was born in 1906 in Yeşilyayla village of Sivas region of Ottoman Empire. He describes their village was one of the largest and most beautiful settlements in Ottoman Empire which had around 3,000 habitants, all Armenians. The village had two churches, two schools for male as well as for female students, which was pretty rare for that time. He remembers that the First World War started and most of the Armenian male population of their village was called to the Turkish Army, and later they learned that they were killed by the Turkish military. There were mostly elderly people, women and children left in the village. Mr. Mosikyan recalls the Turkish officials arrived the village and demanded that all Armenians need to leave their homes in 2 days. Since then, the horrible story of Mr. Mosikyan and his villagers had

begun, and they were unaware that they were part of the Turkish government-organized death marches and were living their final days. He recalls Turk gendarmes escorting them during the deportation telling the villagers that if they convert to Islam, they will be able to live freely. Mr. Mosikyan was only 8.5 years old at the time of his deportation, but the horrific memories of those days remained with him. Mr. Mosikyan indicated that after roughly two weeks of marching, their caravan approached a gorge full with thousands of stripped corpses. He said that they saw armed people following their caravan on both sides of the gorge. Mr. Mosikyan noted that they eventually understood they were Turks and Kurds from neighboring settlements waiting for the sequential caravan of death marching

Armenians at the gorge. Then they and Ottoman gendarmes murdered Armenians and stole everything from their dead bodies, even their clothes. He told that they heard shooting of a gun that killed the priest of their village and the attack on their caravan started. He was able to escape and later found that his mother had been murdered, and he has never heard anything about his sister. Mr. Mosikyan, along with 19 other Armenian children from their village, attempted to escape from Turks by moving from one location to another; but, due to hunger and exhaustion, they decided to surrender to Turk villagers on their way. A Turkish couple decided to adopt Mr. Mosikyan and gave him a Turkish name – Elbey. He avoided converting to Islam by telling he was afraid and requesting a one-year delay. Mr. Mosikyan was serving as a shepherd, helping a Turkish family with their cattle pasturage. After getting typhus disease, Turks decided to kill him and bury him alive because he was unable to work. It is a miracle that Mr. Mosikyan was saved from death so many times.

The United States ended up being Mr. Mosikyan's final migration destination. He saw America as his "second father" since it allowed him to immigrate to the country during World War II and saved his life while he was an orphan in an American orphanage.

Mr. Mosikyan's tragic story is one of thousands of similar stories of Armenian Genocide survivors. His hardships and heartbreaking life represent the Armenian nation's sorrows, which, like the Phoenix, rose from the ashes. It's unbelievable how a human being can torture and kill another innocent human being simply because of his or her nationality. Despite the fact that Mr. Mosikyan and his loved ones were victims of this unfathomable tragedy, he emphasizes his willingness to forgive Turks and live peacefully with them as neighbors if justice wins. He underlines that people need to have equal rights and the issues cannot be solved with use of force.

Mr. Mosikyan also emphasizes that a human being needs to overcome difficulties to understand what real life is.

Unfortunately, history has a tendency to repeat itself, as we can see. Turkey and Azerbaijan, so called "one nation, two countries," continue their animosity toward Armenians in Armenia and Artsakh. There are some signs of normalization in Armenian-Turkish relations; however, without facing its past and continuing its denial of the Armenian Genocide, any steps of Turkey would be hypocritical. The occupation of the majority of Artsakh, as well as the forcible deportation of the Armenian population from their historical lands, reminds the tragic events of the last century. The blockade of Artsakh by Azerbaijan, that has unconditional support of Turkey, has caused serious humanitarian crisis. Azerbaijani leader claims part of Armenia, even capital Yerevan as Azerbaijani's "historical lands". This may sound ridiculous; however, the Armenian society lives in that reality every day.

I believe that members of our society are so used to a comfortable and smooth life that even small obstacles in their life frustrate them easily. I believe that we must be stronger, cherish every happy moment of our lives, and enjoy them with our loved ones. As Armenians living abroad, we have to know our history very well and learn lessons from it. I am also a descendant of a genocide survivor. My mother's grand grandfather was from Sasun region of Western Armenia, Ottoman Empire. We have to be more united in order to able to overcome these challenges and not allow repetition of another massacre and loss of our statehood. I believe in the wisdom of my nation, and I am certain that we can come together, become stronger, and be able to protect and save our ancient motherland.

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## Special Ghapama Fellowship Sunday November 5<sup>th</sup> after Worship

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**ST. HAGOP TAVLOO TOURNAMENT**

ROUND 1

ROUND 2

FINAL MATCH

ROUND 3

**ORGANIZER: SASON DEMIRJIAN**

'DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT IN A RACE THE RUNNERS ALL COMPETE, BUT ONLY ONE RECEIVES THE PRIZE? RUN IN SUCH A WAY THAT YOU MAY WIN IT.' 1 COR 9:24

**ST. HAGOP**

**GHAPAMA FELLOWSHIP**

Join us Sun. Nov. 5th after church for a special Ghapama fellowship; a traditional Armenian celebration of abundance for the whole family. There will be a tavloo tournament and music and delicious baked, stuffed pumpkin as per tradition! Contact Sason at [sasoni@yahoo.com](mailto:sasoni@yahoo.com) or 516-551-2074 to register for tavloo. ♪'Hey Jan Ghapama'♪



## **SAVE THE DATE**

Wednesday, December 6, 2023

**St. Hagop Advent Dinner**

6:30pm at The Shahnasarian Hall

### **Join Our St. Hagop Family for The Annual Candlelight Advent Dinner**

Following up on a wonderful dinner last year, this year will also be a short worship, testimonies from parishioners and catered fellowship. Look out for the sign-up sheet in early November. Don't forget to bring a friend and/or your neighbor! Come and nourish your body and soul to enter into the Holiday Season!

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### **Shahnasarian Hall Room Refresh**

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By the leadership & hard work of Alysia Ekizian and Carla Megerian, the furniture donations of Eileen Barsamian & Donna Sirounian and input of Chrisanne Jensen, our Heritage/Dressing Room got a refresh this summer! Thanks also to Linda Maslar for rearranging the Heritage display, to John Arsenault and Greg Ekizian for hanging art work, and our parish council for their support. Enjoy pictures below and feel free to use our Heritage room on Sundays!





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**B U Y . S E L L . I N V E S T**

**SUNDAY SCHOOL UPDATE- School Begins on September 10<sup>th</sup>—Join us Again!**



Calling all parents of youth ages 5-12! The start of Sunday School is upon us-Sept 10<sup>th</sup>. We'll start where we left off pre-pandemic with great teachers, rotating classes and interactive lessons on church & culture. This semester we will have one large class for ages 5-12. We welcome older children as teaching assistants, and welcome toddlers to our church playroom. Sunday School starts at 11:00 sharp (room opens 10:45). After a 30-45 minute class, children will come to church for communion, worship & sermon.

**This Year's Teachers & Organizers:**

Suzie Abadjian

Yn. Anna Demerjian

Fr. Hovnan Demerjian

Suzy Hovhanissian

Linda Maslar

Surbuhi Zakaryan

Please contact us with any questions at [sundayschool@sthagopfl.org](mailto:sundayschool@sthagopfl.org) We look forward to seeing our beautiful children again and growing closer together as young families as we worship God!

# Pledge Stewardship-Reflections on Last Year & Preparations for New Year Ahead

**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 2024 is:**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_, given ( ) weekly ( ) monthly ( ) quarterly ( ) annually

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

**I /we wish to support St. Hagop with time and talent in these areas:**

\_\_\_\_\_



**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_/\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Name(s):	
Phone/Email:	

Please mail this pledge card to the church office, or bring to offering plate by Stewardship Sunday—November 26, 2023. No payment need accompany this form. We ask that 2024 pledge monies be paid by the end of the 2024 calendar year. Payments may be made online through the St. Hagop website.

May the Lord Remember All Your Offerings  
Յիշեալէ՛ք Տէր զամէնոյն Պատրուոյս քու

**Stewardship Pledge Card**

September 1, 2023

Dear St. Hagop Church Faithful,

Each year around this time, we are given the chance to take a quick self-test about how our Christian faith lines up with our practice; that test is called stewardship. It is not the only self-test to check if our faith is lining up with our actions, but a very good one. It bids us to ask ourselves a very simple, yet profound question; ‘How have I been blessed by God?’ and looks for the answer in how we return these blessings to God and others.

The ancient and Biblical practice of Stewardship helps us take inventory of our time and our wealth and see if it matches up to our beliefs. It is a test we use often as individual Christians and the test our Parish Council uses to steward the resources of St. Hagop Armenian Church.

So what does the self-test of Stewardship show about St. Hagop and our applied Christian faith? Well in this eighth season of pledge stewardship at St. Hagop, we had innumerable faithful offering major gifts of their time and talent to lead our council and committees, serve our fellowships, maintain our buildings, teach our children, and minister to needs in Armenia.

Paralleling this generosity of time and talent, our parish again showed generosity in monetary offerings, with 99 parishioners/families giving a total of \$158,435 in 2023, which were both increases over last year. This generosity was well-timed, as several major AC repairs and general inflation have increased expenses this year. Much gratitude to all who became stewards this year, and to those stewards who increased their giving.

With Fall approaching, we are planning for our 2024 stewardship campaign. Pledge Sunday is November 26, 2023, and you will receive a letter and pledge card for 2024 in early-November. As you prayerfully complete your pledge for 2023 and contemplate your 2024 stewardship, we hope you will help us again pass our yearly test of stewardship, returning gratitude to God for his many blessings, including the great blessing of this church community of which we are all a part.

**In Faith,**

Der Hovnan Demerjian  
Pastor, St. Hagop Armenian Church

Michael Shahnasarian, Ph.D.  
Stewardship Chairman

**Office Hours:** 9 am-5 pm Monday - Friday

**Worship Hours:** Sunday 10:30am – 12:30pm

**Sunday School Hours:** Sunday 11:00am – 12:30pm

**Fellowship Time in Shahnasarian Hall** – 12:30pm – 1:30pm

**Contact Information**

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**Editor**

The Rev. Fr. Hovnan Demerjian

**Contributors**

Michael Shahnasarian, Dr. George Kamajian

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:

Next Issue	Submission
Winter 2023	December 15th

It costs over \$2,000 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 (\$1000); 1/4 issue (\$500) 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 us at [info@stthagopfl.org](mailto:info@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

**Parish Council**

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Co-Chair – Rita Keshishian  
[rita\\_keshishian@hotmail.com](mailto:rita_keshishian@hotmail.com)

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

***\*\*Divine Liturgy takes place every Sunday from 10:30-12:30 unless noted below.***

***Sunday School takes place every Sunday starting at 11am.***

***Fellowship in Shahnasarian Hall to follow immediately after service***

<b>Sun. September 3<sup>rd</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. September 10<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Fellowship Registration/1 <sup>st</sup> Day of Sunday School	10:30AM-1:30PM 11:00 AM-12:00 PM
<b>Tue. September 12<sup>th</sup></b>	Parish Council Meeting	6:00 PM-8:00 PM
<b>Sun. September 17<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School (Khachverats/Exaltation of Cross) Blessing of the World & Special Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. September 24<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. October 1<sup>st</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. October 8<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Tue. October 10<sup>th</sup></b>	Parish Council Meeting	6:00 PM-8:00 PM
<b>Sun. October 15<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. October 22<sup>rd</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship St. Hagop 16 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Special Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. October 29<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. November 5<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship Ghapama (Celebration of Abundance) and Tavloo Tournament	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. November 12<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Tue. November 14<sup>th</sup></b>	Parish Council Meeting	6:00 PM-8:00 PM
<b>Sun. November 19<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>November 23<sup>rd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup></b>	Thanksgiving Days/ Office Closed	
<b>Sun. November 26<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship Stewardship Pledge Sunday	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. December 3<sup>rd</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship Society for Orphaned Armenian Relief Presentation	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Wed. December 6<sup>th</sup></b>	Advent Candlelight Dinner	6:30 PM
<b>Sun. December 10<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship Santa Visit & Christmas Season-Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Tue. December 12<sup>th</sup></b>	Parish Council Meeting	6:00 PM-8:00 PM
<b>Wed. December 15<sup>th</sup></b>	Winter Avedis Newsletter Deadline	
<b>Sun. December 17<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. December 24<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. December 31<sup>st</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. December 31<sup>st</sup></b>	New Year's Eve Dance	8:30 PM-1:00AM

Please note that no Requiem Services may be held on the following major feast days of the church;  
(Christmas, Palm Sunday/Easter, Pentecost, Transfiguration & Exaltation of the Cross)



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