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St. Hagop Armenian Church

The Good News | Winter/Spring 2024

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# How Much is Enough?

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## Pastor's Desk: How Much is Enough?

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By far the most common question that comes up when talking about stewardship-whether on a parish or Diocesan level is; 'How much is enough?' This question often arises in the context of monetary resources we give to church and other causes, but it also arises as we offer our time and skills for the benefit of others. 'How much is enough?'

To be more specific, here are a few ways this question comes up for me. I love this church and it needs time, talent and treasure to run as God would have it. But there are also so many pressing needs in the world. How many of those causes should I give to and how much is enough? Then there is the question of how we spend our time. For many of us, this commodity is more valuable than money. Coming to church takes a half day commitment, plus many more hours for our leaders. How do we give our time to church when there is so little time left for ourselves and family? How much is enough?

The Armenian Church, to my knowledge, has never attempted to answer such questions. Other churches have tried, but their answers are often lacking. When a church attempts to quantify the ABC's and 123's of giving, it usually turns what is a spiritual discipline into some kind of faithless legalism; if you give this much you are good with God, and if not-you aren't. The only good guidance I have found to the question 'How Much is Enough' comes from renowned English theologian C.S. Lewis. When asked 'How Much is Enough', Lewis said this: "I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. If our giving habits do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we want to do but cannot do because our giving expenditures exclude them." Lewis said this in the middle of WWII, so this was not theory for him. The war effort called for deep sacrifices for the greater good. Lewis and so many others made them.

How much is enough? The answer is 'more,' but I wish it wasn't true, because it's quite challenging. Yet this answer rings true with all we know of Scripture and Our Lord. Here again our faith challenges our deeply held instincts for self-preservation and the mental math we use to negotiate our daily lives in modern society. Here's how that mental calculus works every day. We need to buy something, so we ask ourselves what's the least I can pay to get a good product? We need to work, but we ask what is the least effort I can expend to do the job reasonably well? This is our everyday mental math, which allows us to manage our resources and survive in the world. The problem is that this daily training leaks into our spiritual life which works by a totally different calculus.

In this world, yes, we negotiate our resources and give the minimum to take the maximum. But Jesus reminds us that we are in this world but not of it. He wishes to prepare us for his coming kingdom, where we learn to give the maximum, because God has given us the maximum. Half measures and negotiations won't do for the things of God. Jesus says love your God and your neighbor with all your strength, soul and mind. The world has taught us to ask, 'How can I do this without disturbing my life? What's the minimum I can give, the least I pray and still be in God's good graces?

But this mental math of scarcity leaves us empty in this life, and unprepared for the next. For all we have now is borrowed, and nothing comes with us when we die. Jesus' brilliantly sums up kingdom giving, true stewardship in his story of the Widow's mite. She is the one who put just pennies into the Temple treasury, and yet Jesus said she put more than anyone, because she gave recklessly, more than she could. How Much is Enough? I am sure that question crossed the widow's mind, but her answer was, 'more- more than is possible for me-because for God all is possible. The widow shows us that giving at its heart is not something we do for God, rather it allows God to do something with us! If the answer to 'How Much is Enough' is 'More,' this let's God be God. If it is 'that's enough,' we trust in our small selves rather than the greatness of God.

This is a money thing, but not just a money thing. This is a change in worldview from scarcity to abundance. This is living a life of daring faith, purposely getting in over our heads so we can watch God pull us through. I do not yet live by this bold faith. But I can say that every time I've given beyond my limits-of money, time or care-God has expanded my limits and I've been blessed. And though this radical generosity puts our possessions at risk, it promises greater reward, in this life and unto the next.

There is a story which has always inspired me to live boldly beyond my perceived limits. Irish author Frank O'Connor tells that, as a boy, he and his friends would make their way across the Irish countryside. When they came to an orchard wall that seemed too high, too difficult to get over and continue their journey, they would take off their hats and toss them over the wall. Then they had no choice but to follow them. I pray that our Christian journey be as daring in its generosity with time, talent and treasure. May we throw all things of worldly value over the wall, trusting that God will provide; and we'll meet Him in glory on the other side. Amen.

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## Parish Council Report

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Last month a child less than 10 years-old innocently asked me, “Why do you go to church so much?” As the idiom Out of the mouths of babes . . . from Psalms 8:2 and Matthew 21:16, reminds us, the purity and unfiltered nature of questions children pose can be profound.

Caught completely off-guard by this query, I reflexively responded, “Because without God we are nothing.” The child’s question and response I provided lingered with me for several days, and I would like to share my ensuing thought processes in the context of our St. Hagop Church family life and the parish council’s recent contributions to it. I will begin by addressing the Why do you go to church so much? question at face value: namely, reasons for our physical church attendance.

Our Sunday Badarak is the fountainhead of our communal Armenian Christian life: it unites us in worship and focuses our being and purpose. Among its highlights for me are the procession Fr. Hovnan leads and blessing he provides near the beginning of the service, with the smell of incense permeating the ritual; hearing Holy Scripture chanted in Armenian; the kiss of peace and beautiful words of the hymn that accompanies it; hearing Zvart Jambazian beautifully sing the Sanctus (Soorp Soorp), with our choir led by Louise Yardumian and Stepan Serpekian bringing life to sacred music passed on over the millennia; praying the Hayr Mehr (Our Father) together; and, the confession, communion, and sermon that bring our worship service to its crescendo. Simply put, the entire divine liturgy moves me and inspires my habitual attendance!

Our active participation in the Badarak service helps define us and provides comfort, solace, and guidance on how to live an Armenian Christian life. Expounding on church attendance beyond Badarak, of course, St. Hagop provides a divine sanctuary in which we repent, worship, and pray and reflect. We commemorate in it the most important sacraments and life events we live – baptisms, marriages, and funerals.

Beyond a physical presence in church, which I surmise was the concrete frame of reference undergirding the child’s question, the derivatives of church involvement – specifically, for this discussion, focusing on the parish council, the governing body of our church - continue to inspire me with its work to transpose biblical and spiritual teachings to our daily lives.

In the backdrop of the divine liturgy’s splendor, in addition to the altar servers and choir, your parish council works behind the scenes to facilitate the interface of nonsecular and secular tasks essential to St. Hagop’s existence. During the Badarak, this work ranges from welcoming the faithful to participate in church rituals that include spreading the kiss of peace, facilitating Holy Communion proceedings, and processing weekly monetary gifts. Beyond their service at Badarak, parish council members either lead or liaison with every St. Hagop ministry. A few highlights of our collective efforts during recent months include the following:

- Mission Armenia – Yn Anna, Grace Austin, and Der Hovnan have researched and presented to the parish council deserving projects in Artsakh that have prompted monetary gifts on behalf of St. Hagop and its benefactors to multiple causes – including a pharmacy, temporary housing, and relocation projects to better the cause of our needy brethren.
- Church Property Maintenance – Maintenance of St. Hagop’s buildings and grounds is typically not at the forefront of our minds when we reflect on our church home. Nonetheless, like the homes in which we live, ongoing maintenance of our property – which has recently involved tending to the church roof and doors, chandeliers and lighting, and church hall interior painting, along with various electrical, technology-based, and other assorted infrastructure repair and maintenance needs – consumes much of your parish council’s time and our church resources. John Arsenault, our church sexton, has shepherded St. Hagop’s upkeep efforts, while also tending to many church hall operational details.
- Stewardship - St Hagop is completing its 8th year anniversary since converting from a dues system with a record 102 pledge units accounting for \$158,686 in pledges. Your church also just completed its 2024 pledge campaign

season; this included 2 inspirational sermons Fr. Hovnan delivered along with heartfelt testimonials on stewardship by Dan and Norma Takoushian, George Kamajian, and Jack Dikranian.

- Events Committee, Women’s Guild, and Fellowship - The Women’s Guild and Events Committee sponsored events the past few months that included a traditional ghampa meal celebration, tavloo (backgammon) tournament, Armenian philanthropy presentation, and children’s Christmas party. Throughout the year Lucy Calikyan and Rita Keshishian led the Women’s Guild to provide us with food and drink to enrich our fellowship gatherings after Badarak. The Women’s Guild out-did itself while hosting its annual pre-Thanksgiving bake sale . . . so many delicious Armenian delicacies! And, the events committee, led by Alysia Ekizian, sponsored another beautiful Advent by Candlelight evening, with Jack Dikranian, Irina Karakhanyan, and Haig Yaghoobian offering moving presentations on their Armenian Christian journeys.
- Church Finances – Led by Chuck Begian, St. Hagop’s treasurer, your parish council’s prudent positioning and monitoring of its assets, along with ongoing budget discipline, has resulted in our church forecasted to end 2023 with a surplus in income and expenses below budgeted amounts.

More details on the above and St. Hagop’s operations will be provided in our 2023 annual report and discussed during our February 2024 church assembly meeting.

Moving on in my analysis and abstraction of the child’s question “Why do you go to church so much?” - from its concrete form to my assessment of its derivatives, and now progressing to an ethereal level - allow me to delve even deeper and expand on answering the question beyond its surface as I free associate a bit on the outcomes realized in-the-flesh and vicariously through regular church attendance:

. . . maintaining a spiritual connection to our departed . . . maintaining an emotional and psychological bond to our Armenian homeland, Artsakh, the middle east and other places from which our forefathers came and in which our brethren remain in peril today . . . a very humble appreciation for the antiquity and truly unique place both the Armenian culture and Armenian Christian religion hold in the history of humanity . . . the privilege of being an Armenian Christian, and sense of responsibility this bears, including the duty to perpetuate the gifts we have inherited to those who will succeed us . . . observing the youth at St. Hagop – from the little ones in Sunday school to the young adult groups – embrace their heritage and religion, and contribute to its perpetuation . . . the church family relationships we establish, hold dear, and build over the years. . . feeling part of the vital Armenian diaspora essential to the present and future of all Armenians . . .

Badarak reinforces a very deep bond to our ancestry, culture, families, and, of course, faith. Catastrophic events that have confronted our people over the millennia and persist to date doubtless also inspire our ongoing faith and perseverance.

In sum, the simple answer to the youngster’s question, far beyond my response, is participating in Badarak is the most important thing I do on a week-to-week basis. My reflection on the inquiry has caused me to many times re-think my answer. In retrospect, I think I would respond to the unexpected question the same way I answered it: Without God we are nothing.

Perhaps it is best that the child’s question took me by surprise, and I uttered the response I did. I could have elaborated on all the above and, doubtless, it would have been lost – if not rejected – by one not yet ready to process all I so eagerly want to share. I don’t know if my simple answer to the question registered in any meaningful way. Time and more nurturance of Christian ideals will tell.

So, in closing, I thank this young person for posing the provocative question that led to my stream of thought and pray the Holy Spirit will inspire his faith development. May he also one day have the privilege of answering the question “Why do you go to church so much?”

**Michael Shahnasarian, Ph.D.**

Parish Council Chairman



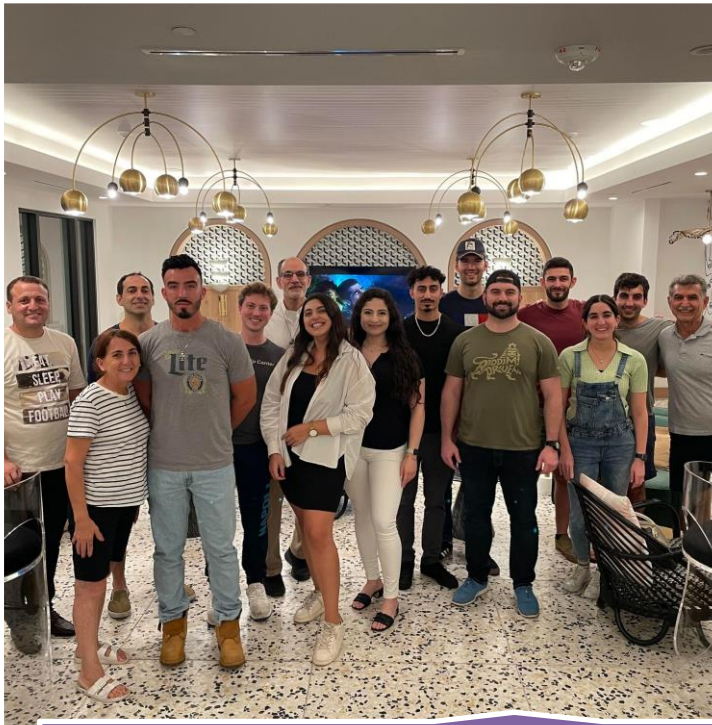
Photos from an Active Fall & Winter Season at St. Hagop



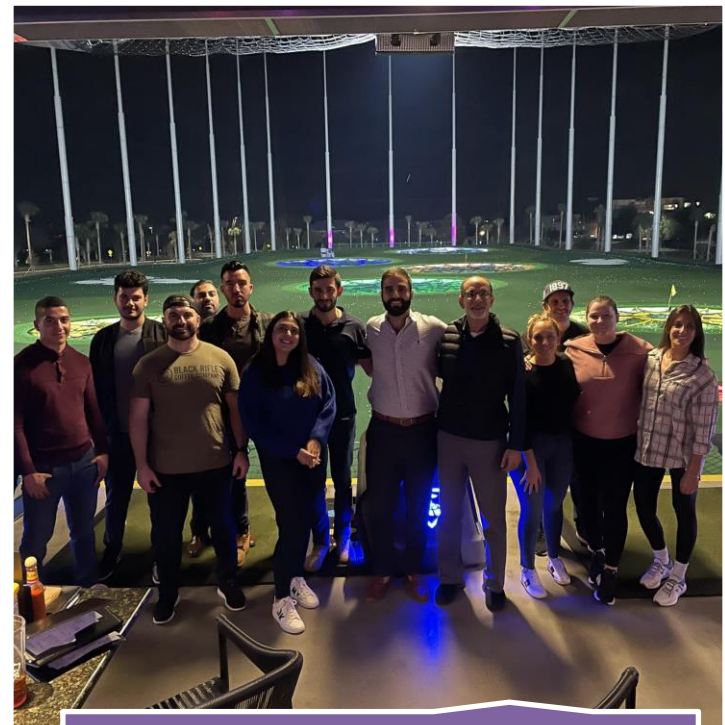
16th Anniversary Fellowship



Ghapama Fellowship



Young Pros October Meeting



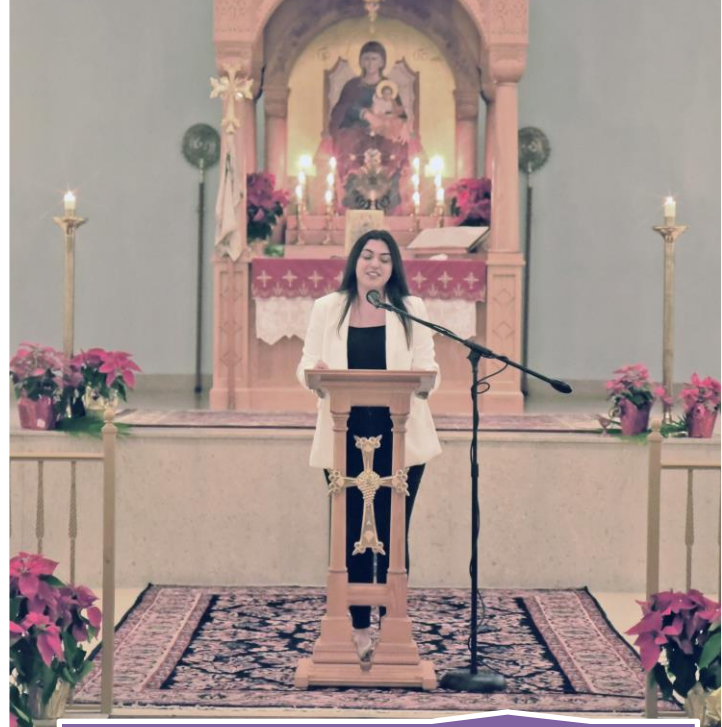
Young Pros December Meeting



**Photos from an Active Fall & Winter Season at St. Hagop!**



Women's Guild Bake Sale



Advent Candlelight Service



Sunday School Artsakh Project



Christmas Fellowship With Santa

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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, appears in 3 parts in our newsletters:

### Part II:

#### A long drive

It's a 200-mile drive from Yerevan to Stepanavan. The car is a 30+ year old Toyota of unknown pedigree, a cracked windshield, split vinyl seats, a natural gas fuel tank in the trunk (something ubiquitous in Armenia but something I've never seen before), boasting 400,000 kilometers on the odometer. The engine sounds like it has two working cylinders. The back seat has a CPR manikin as well as ½ of the medical supplies I brought with me from the US.

We leave the dust bowl of Yerevan, the capital city, with all the cacophony, chaos, construction cranes, and industry you would expect from any such city in the world. The constant reminder of Ararat dominates the eastern horizon like the sunrise scene from Lawrence of Arabia. We leave the snow caps behind as we drive into the interior of Armenia.

At first, a gentle undulating panorama of patchwork fields of wheat and surrounding snowcapped mountains, gives way to Lake Sevan. Past the first tunnel we enter densely wooded Dilijan. Switch back roads selling roasted corn flank the pot holed highway at every one hundred yards. After three hours the road opens to more densely wooded mountains and finally the plains and the ravines and mountains of Stepanavan. Mountains can be seen everywhere in Armenia. It is June. Almost all the mountains are snowcapped. We talk about many, many things. ...of cabbages and kings.

#### The surgery that no one talks about

Before she formed Traveling Doctors, Armine traveled the world rendering medical aid in remote and often war-torn countries. She spent time in Kenya, war torn Sudan, and Syria. In Syria she headed the medical team that supported a demining operation for the Russians. Wherever there is a need, she will be there. A month ago, she gave a TED talk. A remarkable pedigree for someone so young. My nickname for her is moog, mouse because of her height. She is passionate, fiery, opinionated, and one of the most giving people I have met on the planet.

We have a lot to talk about, strategic planning for Traveling Doctors and her own future. As a gynecologist, her forte is women's health. Yes, sex does exist in Armenia. But outside of marriage it is "amot", shameful. One of the biggest money makers for private physicians in the Middle East and Africa is hymen reconstruction. Armenia is part of that market. That and rhinoplasty (nose jobs), she adds disparagingly. She is livid that cultural and societal norms still overwhelmingly dominate the almost nonexistent conversation of human sexuality. "We are so backwards," she says. And it's always the women who suffer the most, she adds.

#### Stepanavan

The Stepanavan is an "upgrade" from the regional village facilities I've seen in the past. It sits at the distal end of the Yerevan – Tbilisi highway. The town, established in the 4th century, is named after Stepan Shaumian, a 1923 Bolshevik. It boasts 15,000 residents and is famous for its proximity to the remains of the famed 11th century Lori Fortress. Few buildings are taller than two stories high. This small town boasts an amazing number of statues, all dating from the Soviet era. A few yards away is a rotary circle with traffic signs no one observes. Several stores selling everything from farm equipment to apricots line either side.

The pace of life is exceedingly slow. Men of all ages collect on street corners, smoke cigarettes, and engage in conversation. With little or no work, they eventually retreat to a central park bench or table and drink. At first, I thought they were playing tavloo or chess, but no, there are no boards. Vodka is everywhere.

My housing is a block away from the old Russian Row, 200 years old homes that housed the Czars' Cossack commanders, part of a multi century old Russian military presence in this village. Politically the town has repeatedly changed hands between the Turks, the Russians, and the Armenians. The inward and outward fabric of society has remained resiliently constant.

My accommodation is arranged through a friend in America who used to live in this town. The house used to be a B&B. Sturdy, it is luxurious by local standards. Inside is reminiscent of 1920's Victorian with thick antique furniture. My bed has a quilt bedspread stuffed with pamback, cotton. I haven't seen this since my grandparents' home years ago. If not for the odors from the pig farmer next door and the overflowing septic system, it smells like my grandparents' home. There is a bathtub and toilet, but the tub wall is 3 ½ foot high. I would have to step over that using a ladder to enter for a shower. There is not a safety/grab bar in sight. Hell, I haven't been able to lift my foot more than a few inches off the ground since my knee replacements 20 years ago. There is no sink. Comically, when I get up from the toilet, it travels with me. I know my vor (rear end) is big, but I didn't think it was that big.

If I fall here in Armenia, the operative word is "medivac". I can't afford to break anymore bones even in the name of friendship. My multilingual hostess is so wonderfully hospitable. She is gracious even knowing that I must find alternate lodgings for the remainder of my stay. It also means I am taking money away from her, probably monies that she had already counted on. Plates of fruit and desserts pour out of her kitchen. Please, she says, take some honey. You won't find anything else like this anywhere, she assures me. She is right. They have nothing compared to us. They give everything.

## **Poly-clinic**

The facility is post '88 earthquake new, built by a donation from Los Angeles based Friends of Armenia. The walls of this clinic are plum, the floors are basically whole and there are real windows that open and close. The ubiquitous smell of cow, chicken, and pig manure (yes you can tell the difference) waifs through every street.

My assigned translator, Ruzanna, is a delight. She is engaging and personal. Her English could use some work. During our first patient encounters, I discovered she skips a lot of what I say, not out of ignorance but out of embarrassment. In my professional practice, my patient contacts are defined by humor. Sometimes because of my 35 years of emergency medicine, it is dark humor. I also tend to hug my patients when they leave the office. That is a shock for these people.

When I see an 85-year-old lady with knee pains and a belly that is bigger than mine, I say “when is the baby due?” Ruzanna skips that part. I know enough Armenian to tell the difference in what she is saying. When an elderly farm woman comes in with sore hands from milking cows asking for advice, I say, “you need to find a rich husband.” It takes some time, encouragement, and occasional chastising, but Ruzanna finally breaks down her formal barriers and begins to have some fun with our encounters.

The patients always leave with a cascade of ‘thank you’s’ and ‘what can I pay you?’ I answer a “bacheeg”, a kiss. Medicine is an art, a privilege of touching another human being on multiple levels. There is no difference in this profession between America, Armenia, or anywhere else in the world for that matter.

The patients are mostly hearty farmers...big people with massive hands and bulging muscles from living a lifestyle I can only image. They have made their way from much smaller outlying villages, leaving their fields and barns on this “pilgrimage” to see me. These people have walked miles to get to see the American doctor. The lack of personal hygiene is ubiquitous. I cannot be disparaging. This is not “The lives of the rich and famous” but reality for most human beings on the planet. I am lucky by an accident of birth to be an American, not from any divine intervention or my innate genius. We, in America, all are.

Most of the patients I see this week have no access to the accoutrements of 21st century life we take for granted in America. There are no sewers. Every home has a septic system or, more likely, an outhouse. Natural gas is supplied by pipes that haphazardly criss-cross above every street, along every sidewalk, along every home but only in the city, not in the villages.

Medically I am prepared for almost every scenario. Mentally I am not. Blood pressures are routinely at catastrophic levels. I stop asking whether they have taken their medications because the answer is always the same. “I only take it when my readings are high.”

“How often do you check,” I ask. They shrug their shoulders and smile. Everyone has “sav”, pain, everywhere. I even come to the point of not ask what the problem is but ask “koon sava oour eh?” Where is your pain?

Good old Tylenol and Motrin are a gift from God, not because these patients have never heard of those specific medications but because I am carrying enough from America to hand to them. Everyone has back and knee pain. I stop ordering x rays and MRI's because it is impossible. The nearest machine is in Spitak, Dilijan, or Gyumri 2 hours away and you have to pay cash. Anything besides basic primary health care in Armenia is fee for service. There is no insurance for these patients. A knee replacement at \$8,000 (1/10th the price of similar surgery in America) in Yerevan is close to 10 years income.

I have been seeing an average of 50 registered patients a day, and that does not count the nurses and doctors who come in for themselves and their family members for consultation. They are happy to see the American doctor. I discovered they are unable to fill my prescriptions, not because they are lazy or cheap, but because the cost of \$5 or \$10 US is incomprehensible in their daily lives. My recommendations for minor surgical procedures are vetoed based on old wife's tales. “If you cut off a mole it will become a cancer.” Hey, didn't my mother say the same thing?

Day number 2 and my pain shots become famous. Pain management is my specialty in America. Day number 3 the clinic nurses and doctors stood in line to learn my technique. This time I was prepared by having my instructional pamphlets translated into Armenian, jokes and all. Day number 4, I am out of most medication and supplies. There are two days to go before I leave. If I cannibalize the supplies I have brought for my next village, Tsovagyukh, for Stepanavan, then the number of people I am able to help is cut in half.

We are teaching CPR here as well. We start by showing the 2022 video of Armenian producer, Armen Grigoryan, dying in a Yerevan court room because no one knew CPR. That video is on YouTube. Check it out. The classroom is filled with 30+ nurses and doctors. Unfortunately, all we have today is one iPad with a 12-inch viewing screen for the entire room. I am afraid the CPR training will not go very far. I need to take a breath and reset my PTSD. I had some recent CPR drama of my own, constantly reminding me of the fragility of life.

## **Moving my Stepanavan apartment**

I move apartments on the second day. My new apartment resides in a compound of buildings that have been in the same family for 5 generations. Fruit trees, peonies and a rose garden are surrounded by a metal fence. A black and white herding dog roams freely. The dog constantly escapes Houdini-like from the yard to drink from one of the ubiquitous street water fountains by comically standing on his hind legs.



Armine (a different Armine) and George were the hosts. No one speaks English. “This house has been in my family for 200 years”, George says proudly. I now have a toilet, a shower hose in the center of the bathroom that drained into a hole in the middle of the floor and a sink, and I was good to go. After a very long day in the clinic, I came to my unit and collapsed.

Outside I heard voices that, refreshingly, didn’t seem to be complaining of anything. There is a lot of scratching and meowing at the door. Several cats, one dog and a family in their 30’s are vacationing with their chain-smoking nonstop-coughing grandfather. The poor man has all the hallmarks of lung cancer. They came for the air and the pine trees. Apparently, there is a magic curative elixir made from pinecones that this region is famous for.

They grilled some meats, made long wreaths of some unknown herb that they will take home, and basically have a good time laughing and singing. Sit, they said, pointing to tree stump stools. Out comes brandy. George, the owner, joined in with a bottle of pomegranate wine. You will like this, he assures me. The conversation in Russian and Eastern Armenian was basically incomprehensible. But the booze, the ambience (reminding me of Crosby stills and Nash’s “Our House”) leaves me satisfied at a primal level. I never realized how therapeutic this would be for me.

There is a constant coming and going of people in this house. “When you cry, your soul gets lighter”, I am told. The zers, the old ones, amaze me. I see them hanging laundry to dry. Out of nowhere they move their torso’s and wave their arms to unheard music as if they were Armenian dancing. They sing. They hum. Some of the melodies I remember are from my grandparents, the original genocide survivors, generation. I try to understand these people because I am one of them. I am part of that tribe. We share more than we are different.

## Reality

They are not ignorant. They are poor. They all have genetic ties to Mother Russia as betrayed by their complexion and first names. It is June. They wear their best 75-year-old wool, often handmade Soviet clothes even though it is summer and 80 degrees. Everyone has thick muscular hands. The women dress in mostly black, signifying the loss of husbands, sons, grandchildren. Most of these families have no indoor plumbing. These patients have pride. They are also aware of the differences between rich Americans and themselves. It’s easy for me to advise weight loss (one pound of weight loss is five pounds on the knee I remind everyone) but I cannot say, I have no right to say, ‘you need to bathe’.

I exam everyone who walks into the room. To have a doctor actually touch them is not what they expect. Is their back pain from lifting a cow or will I see the telltale rash of shingles. In one week, I see three women with breast cancer. They know it, too, but there is nothing they can do. Nothing.

Sometimes I see fear and sadness in their faces. Many realize there isn’t any medicine I can give them to cure what they really need. My initial optimism and ambition have given way to the disheartening realization that resources or money will always be the biggest challenge.

The que is long. Patients have arrived an hour before we open the doors. The doctor from America is here! Everyone has sav (pain). Blood pressure over 200 systolic? No problem. “I take my medicine when I have a headache. I have shakar (diabetes) but I don’t eat candy often, so I am OK.”

We try to register everyone, but most come in with relatives. The line to register is too long. “Can you look at my mother, sister, aunt, grandmother?”, they say as they push past those who have waited for hours. Many come in with their spouses. The biggest age spread was 40 years between husband and wife. That was not unusual. Is it her first marriage, his second, was there money involved? Was she an old maid? And I reflect in my own American Armenian community there are still “arranged” marriages among our 1st and 2nd generation immigrants.

“Merci, doctor. Thank you. They bow repeatedly as they leave the tiny office that I’ve been assigned. Would I have any more pills?

“I am sorry, but I have no more.” Their faces betray their disappointment, but they are resigned to this life. They are stoic.

“No problem,” I say. “Here is a prescription. It is only a few Armenian drams at the local pharmacy.” I give them a trigger shot to help their pains. It is my specialty.

When the day is done, I ask Ruzanna, my translator, what she thinks. Have we made a difference, I ask hopefully, looking for affirmation.

She looks at me respectfully like I am “bagass” empty headed. Of course, she doesn’t say that word. Who has a car? Who has the money? “You know,” she says, “those tests are not free. These people do not have transportation never mind the ability to afford your fancy X-Rays.”

“Then why do they come?” I asked dejectedly.

“Because you are from America. Because you care about them when no one else in the world, even their own government, doesn’t.”

# AN EVENING OF MODERN ARMENIAN MUSIC



FEATURING

**LAV ELI ACOUSTIC DUO**  
WITH AARON STAYMAN

CELEBRATING

**FR. HOVNAN'S 50TH**

MEZZE | BEER/WINE | DESSERTS

WITH SPECIAL MUSICAL GUESTS  
FROM ST. HAGOP & BEYOND...

**SAT. MARCH 2nd 7-10PM**  
**SHAHNASARIAN HALL**

SUGGESTED  
**\$30**  
DONATION

Mher Manukyan and Gor Mkhitarian, founders of one of the most popular Armenian folk-rock bands, Lav Eli, will perform an acoustic show at the Shahnasarian Hall on Saturday March 2<sup>nd</sup> from 7-10PM. Joining the duo will be multi-instrumentalist Aaron Stayman and special guest musicians from the St. Hagop community. Appetizers, drinks and dessert will be offered on this night of music-making in celebration of Fr. Hovnan's fiftieth birthday.

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## News From the St. Hagop Women's Guild

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We have come into another holiday season and are happy to see our friends from the north arrive back in town. We hope everyone is enjoying the delightful company of friends and fellow parishioners in our church hall after Badarak and the light lunch we prepare for you each and every Sunday.

An organization like the Women's Guild cannot thrive without the collaborative efforts of so many. We thank Der Hovnan for his ongoing spiritual support and Chrisanne Jensen for her administrative help. We'd like to especially acknowledge our unsung heroes.

One big thank you goes out to subdeacon Bobby Maslar, who stays late on most Sundays to take out trash and help with anything that might be too heavy for the kitchen crew to put away. Bobby serves on the altar on most Sundays and then moves over to the hall to assist with whatever is needed during coffee hour. Another hero is Teresa Haidarian, who is not just St. Hagop's resident photographer, but an invaluable member of the guild. She not only purchases all our supplies, but stays late every Sunday washing dishes and cleaning up when the rest of us may have run out of energy. We are forever grateful for you both.

Our annual Thanksgiving Bake Sale was a huge success. The ladies of the Guild spent several Saturdays prior to the sale baking Armenian goods in the Shahnasarian Hall kitchen, as well as working days in their home kitchens preparing baked goodies for you to purchase for your Thanksgiving Dinner. This year, we decided to warm up individual servings of lahmajoon for you to enjoy during coffee hour along with the other food items you purchased. We sincerely thank everyone who attended and bought our freshly baked goods; you are the reason our Bake Sale continues to be successful. The funds that we collect from this sale, as well as the monies that we collect for our Sunday coffee hour, go to support select charities in Armenia. We thank you for your support of our chosen charities.

Christmas comes but once a year, except for us Armenians. And for the members of St. Hagop, we can make the holiday celebrations go on for a month. Events committee has their special Advent dinner held annually in December and the Women's Guild has the Children's Christmas on the following Sunday. This year on Santa Sunday, some 19 excited and joyful children sat all together eating a special lunch suited for the occasion, while anxiously anticipating the arrival of a red suited laughing, jolly old man. Along with one of his elves who carried a bag of carefully chosen gifts for each child, Santa handed out presents in a festive atmosphere with parents as happy as their little ones feeling the excitement that only Christmas can bring. The crowd greeted Santa while singing the Armenian version of Santa Claus is Coming to Town. For us in the Women's Guild, this is our favorite celebration to prepare for and we were thrilled to manifest when we were presented this idea from Maro Shaldjian, one of our guild members at a meeting several years ago. Thank you Maro. But Christmas doesn't end there. We will make sure there is coffee and a light meal appropriate for the celebration on Theophany, and then we will focus on the next celebratory day.

We're always looking for new ideas on making life at our church more inviting for those in attendance. If you have any ideas on what we can do to increase participation, be like Maro, attend our meetings and be sure to let us know. We'll be happy to have you and will gladly receive your suggestion. Your idea may be the next annual event we schedule. And while you are there, consider joining the most interesting, dynamic and active group in the church. We are the Women's Guild.

Respectfully submitted,

**Lucy Calikyan & Rita Keshishian – Women's Guild Co-chairs**

**Teresa Haidarian – Women's Guild Secretary**



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## The Passing of Dr. Richard Hovannissian by Sophia Manoulian Kugeares

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St. Hagop Armenian Church community is deeply saddened by news of the passing of Dr. Richard Hovannissian, founder of Armenian History and Culture Program at UCLA, who was a dear friend of our community. In the early years of our Church, Dr. Hovannissian, visited several times between 2011 and 2017 to share his insights on current events and the history of Armenians in America.

Hasmik Baghdasaryan gave this account for the UCLA community in July 2023.

“Richard Hovannissian, a renowned scholar of Armenian history who was a UCLA faculty member for more than a half century, died on July 10. He was 90 years old.

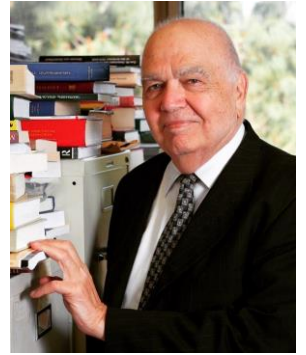
Hovannissian earned his doctorate at UCLA in 1966 and joined the history department as a full-time faculty member in modern Armenian and Near Eastern history in 1969. An illustrious researcher and educator, he made monumental contributions to the study of the history of modern Armenia and the Armenian Genocide.

In 1986, he became the first person to hold UCLA’s Armenian Educational Foundation Professor of Modern Armenian History endowed chair; the chair was later renamed in his honor.

“The whole of the Armenian studies family has suffered an irreplaceable loss and will be forever in Professor Hovannissian’s debt for the many sacrifices he made to build the scholarly foundation of modern Armenian history,” said Sebouh David Aslanian, director of the UCLA Armenian Studies Center and UCLA’s current Richard Hovannissian Professor of Modern Armenian History. “It was a truly magnificent feat, especially since he did so at a time when he was practically alone and had no shoulders to stand on.”

During each of his several visits to St Hagop and the greater Tampa Bay area, Dr. Hovannissian lent great encouragement to local Armenians in support of Armenian studies at the academic level. He gave significant support to the University of South Florida Library’s Armenian Studies collections which provides access to research materials in English, Armenian and other languages. The books, articles, photographs and other materials support researchers and educators working in the fields of American history and culture. The materials also encourage intercultural dialogue about the shared experiences of survivors of oppression and attempted annihilation. Notably, his presentation “War & Ethnic Cleansing: The Case of Armenian Smyrna/Izmir” in 2014 was eagerly received by USF students and members of the local Tampa Bay Community. The complete presentation can be accessed at the USF website, [https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/usf\\_lib\\_lectures/14/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/usf_lib_lectures/14/)

With profound sadness and a fond farewell, St. Hagop Armenian Church community remembers and offers sincere thanks and deep appreciation for the memory of Dr. Richard Hovannissian.



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## Join Us For the Most Powerful Services of the Year-Holy Week (Ավագ Շաբաթ)

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**Holy Week SCHEDULE**  
Ավագ Շաբաթ

March 24 (Palm Sunday)	10:30 AM
March 28 (Maundy Thursday)	7:00 PM
March 29 (Good Friday)	7:00 PM
March 30 (Holy Saturday)	7:00 PM
March 31 (Easter Sunday)	10:30 AM

Walk the journey of Christ in the ancient tradition of the Armenian Church, recalling Jesus' final days, His victory over death, and the redemption of humanity and the fallen world. Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday and the Opening of the Door Service on March 24<sup>th</sup> and continues with evening services which all take place at 7PM on Thursday March 28<sup>th</sup>, Friday March 29<sup>th</sup> and Saturday March 30<sup>th</sup>. The trials of Holy Week culminate in the triumph of Easter Sunday March 31<sup>st</sup>. Join us for these unique, beautiful and spiritually profound services!

# A Great Start for 2024 Pledge Stewardship!

So far, we have been blessed with 65 pledges totaling \$116,260 for stewardship 2024! Your stewardship makes a difference for our church, and also for you! We invite you to mail your pledge card or submit online, 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 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 Տէր զամէնոյն Պատրիարքսն Բն

**Stewardship Pledge Card**

**Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to St. Hagop! Those who have submitted a pledge by 12/19/23 to support St. Hagop are identified below.**

Richard & Diana Aginian, Karen Anjoorian, John & Susan Arsenault, Grace Austin, Naira Avagyan Mangasar, Harris & Zara Babayan Boyiadzis, Bagrad & Tatiana Badalyan, Charles and Lisa Begian, Michael Boucher, Jacob Bournazian, Fr. Hovnan & Yn. Anna Demerjian, Jean-Jacques & Hasmig Demerjian, Raffi & Tanya Demerjian, Dennis & Rachael Demirjian, Kevork & Marisol Demirjian, Sason & Patricia Demirjian, Araxi Dulgeroff, Art & Adrienne Ekizian, John & Victoria Franks, Martha-Anne Garabedian, Adrienne Guendjoian, Gregory & Gina Hagopian, Teresa Haidarian, Berge & Tamar Hajian, Hayley Hovhanessian, Darren Hovsepien, Gregory & Stephanie Hovsepien, Richard & Christina Kachadurian, Dr. George & Debra Kamajian, Edward Kapreilian, Harry & Beverly Karim, Harout Keshishian, Melik Keuroghlian, Houri Kojian, Linda Light, Chau Luong, Noubar & Ann Mahdessian, Yolande Marie Miloian, Karen Minassian, Robert Mirak, Victoria Mouradian, Josph & Angela Nakashian, Mirella Ovanesian, Richard & Victoria Riley, Michael Saharian, Michael Sarafian, Tanya Sarafian, Chuck & Kathy Sarkisian, Leon & Sharon Sarkisian, Vahak & Elizabeth Sarkis, Chris & Carol Sassouni, Yates & Alexis Sayers, Stepan & Seta Serpekian, Michael & Jean Shahnasarian, Robert & Chris Shamsey, Jeff & Avaksya Sprecher, Daniel & Norma Takoushian, Paula Trice Pelosi, Denise and Matthieu van Veen, Tim & Adrienne Vartanian Milewski, Artin & Armenouch Vartoukian, Terry & Carolyn Waidley, James & Cathy Wilson, Haig & Lorraine Yaghoobian, Dr. Haig & Louise Yardumian

**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

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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 in 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
Summer 2024	April 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

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Co-Chair – Rita Keshishian  
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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**\*\*Divine Liturgy takes place every Sunday from 10:30-12:30. Sunday School takes place every Sunday at 11am. Fellowship in Shahnasarian Hall to follow immediately after service**

<b>Fri. Jan. 5<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Armenian Christmas Eve	7:00 PM
<b>Sat. Jan. 6<sup>th</sup></b>	Armenian Christmas - No Services- Church open for prayers	10AM-1PM
<b>Sun. Jan. 7<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Armenian Christmas (Observed) Blessing of the Waters-Godfather: Chuck Begian Special Armenian Christmas Fellowship	10:30 AM 12:15 PM 12:30 PM
<b>Tues. Jan. 9<sup>th</sup></b>	Parish Council Meeting	6:00-8:00 PM
<b>Sun. Jan. 14<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. Jan 21<sup>st</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. Jan. 28<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. Feb. 4<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. Feb. 11<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship-Poon Paregentan Annual Parish Assembly	10:30AM-1:30PM 12:30PM
<b>Sun. Feb. 11<sup>th</sup></b>	Super Bowl Watch Party	6:00PM
<b>Mon. Feb. 12<sup>th</sup></b>	Great Lent Begins	
<b>Tues. Feb. 13<sup>th</sup></b>	Parish Council Meeting	6:00-8:00 PM
<b>Sun. Feb. 18<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. Feb. 25<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sat. March 2<sup>nd</sup></b>	'An Evening of Modern Armenian Music' Featuring Armenian Folk Fusion Band 'Lav El' & Celebrating Fr. Hovnan's 50th	7:00-10:00 PM
<b>Sun. March 3<sup>rd</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sat. March 9<sup>th</sup></b>	Consecration of Jacksonville Armenian Church Bp. Mersop Presiding, Louise Yardumian Organist	
<b>Sun. March 10<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Tues. March 12<sup>th</sup></b>	Parish Council Meeting	6:00-8:00 PM
<b>Sat. March 16<sup>th</sup></b>	Women's Guild Spring Luncheon at St. Petersburg Yacht Club	11AM
<b>Sun. March 17<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. March 24<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy-Palm Sunday/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Thurs. March 28<sup>th</sup></b>	Washing of the Feet/Votnlva Service Vigil/Khavaroom Service	7:00 PM 8:00 PM
<b>Fri. March 29<sup>th</sup></b>	Burial Service (Good Friday)	7:00 PM
<b>Sat. March 30<sup>th</sup></b>	Easter Eve/Jragalooys Divine Liturgy	7:00 PM
<b>Sun. March 31<sup>st</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy-Easter Sunday Special Fellowship in Hall/Easter Egg Hunt	10:30AM-2:00PM
<b>Sun. April 7<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Tues. April 9<sup>th</sup></b>	Parish Council Meeting	6:00-8:00 PM
<b>Sun. April 14<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. April 21<sup>st</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship Martyrs of Armenian Genocide Service	10:30AM-1:30PM
<b>Sun. April 28<sup>th</sup></b>	Divine Liturgy/Sunday School/Fellowship	10:30AM-1:30PM

Please note that by, 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)



**St. Hagop Armenian Church**

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