

Remarks for Diocesan Assembly, 2017

Your Eminence, Reverend Clergy, Diocesan Delegates, PC Chairs, Congressman Bilirakis, and other Honored Guests.

My first thanks go to the organizing committee of this 115th Diocesan Assembly, and our gracious hosts, Der Hovnan and the parishioners of St. Hagop Armenian Church. There is certainly something to be said about Southern hospitality; as your guests, we are grateful to experience it. As a young parish, your rapid evolution and charitable ministries, both in Armenia and the Middle East, and right at home in St. Petersburg, are inspiring. I applaud your decision to share 10 % of your profits from this Assembly to the Fund for Armenian Relief which has guided my own involvements in Armenia.

I thank the Diocesan Council for this quite unexpected honor. To join the august company of previous Armenian church members of the year, some of whom I introduced at Diocesan Assemblies, brings home that I have a long way to go to live up to their transformative efforts, so I guess I have my work cut out for me.

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While these awards single out individuals, we are nothing without each other. A team effort is distinguished by anonymity - when it is not evident who accomplished what aspect of a successful project. All of us in this room are part of the same team; we are responsible to those who elected us and entrusted us to craft policy and chart the course of the Armenian Church in the 21st century - whatever our constraints. These assemblies help us identify our shared purpose and renew our resolve to work together to achieve it. Without our visionary Diocesan staff, our initiatives would be fewer; I thank *them* for creating innovative pathways to promote our shared mission.

I am happy to share this moment with Father Diran Bohajian and fellow St. Leon parishioners. My gateway to governance in the church was through service in our vibrant parish.

The significance of being the first woman to be individually named as *Armenian Church Member of the Year* is not lost on me and it should be acknowledged. The Gospels tell the story of the moral genius of Jesus - his lessons of charity, redemption, and love. In our families and parishes,

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women have taught those lessons, lived them, and value them. Our leadership style leans towards collaboration and inclusion. I am proud of all of our women in lay leadership positions and am certain that women will continue to be positive change agents.

My role models have been both men and women: In my time on Diocesan Council and after, I watched His Eminence Archbishop Khajag Barsamian and former Chair of the Diocesan Council Oscar Tatosian and learned from them. I admire Dr. Sam Mikaelian's leadership and interpersonal skills. Strong women have preceded me on Council - Janet Mardigian particularly whose vision on behalf of this Diocese and of the people of Armenia through the contributions of the Mardigian Family Foundation have the power to transform a generation.

Faith is a mystery, both to those who have it and those who don't. It is also one of the most powerful forces in the world— aesthetically, politically, morally, and personally. I would urge us to work on gaining the deeper spiritual meanings of our doctrines, scriptures, and rituals. When we baptize our children, we pray for “Faith, Hope and Love.” Faith makes all things possi-

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ble; Hope makes all things work; Love makes all things beautiful. These beliefs bring us peace on a personal level and, by extension, to the world around.

I can't imagine a better gift to share by the way we live our lives and the way we interact in our church communities and elsewhere. There is no better legacy for us to leave.