









A JOURNEY OF SERVICE AND FRIENDSHIP

The Ecumenical works of the Armenian Church, the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin,
during the Pontificate of His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians



CONTENTS

	THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA AND THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH	8
	THE RELATIONS OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH WITH SISTER CHURCHES.....	22
	THE ARMENIAN CHURCH WITHIN THE LIFE OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES.....	38
	ARMENIA ROUND TABLE OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (ART)	50
	THE YOUTH MOVEMENT IN THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH AND ITS RELATION TO ECUMENISM.	56
	THE ARMENIAN CHURCH AND OTHER RELIGIONS INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE.....	60
	THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC HOLY CHURCH IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	68
	REALIZED ECUMENISM	80
	ARMENIA: NOTES OF AN ECUMENICAL JOURNEY	84
	ANNEXES	89

Preface

The Holy Apostolic Armenian Church, during her 2000 years of existence, has always been involved in inter-church, inter-religious and inter-governmental relationships, representing the Armenian Christian faithful with honor and devotion. Ecumenical relationships and cooperation have always been a part of the mission of the Armenian Church. Our history reflects diverse types of dialogues and fellowships, driven by the conditions and environment facing the Armenian people and nation.

Archbishop Malachia Ormanian, a great scholar of the Armenian Church, reflected at the beginning of the 20th century that the Armenian Church, “full of the spirit of tolerance” and driven by Christ’s love and commandments, has always upheld positive relationships with Christian Churches, striving to jointly contend with the challenges of the modern world while remaining faithful to Her sacred values and holy traditions.

During the Pontificate of His Holiness Karekin II, the ecumenical activities of the Armenian Church have increased and strengthened, while educating and enlightening the faithful on her ecumenical works. In his first encyclical issued on February 5, 2000 His Holiness stated: “We shall continue to actively participate in Inter-church life, faithful to the preservation of peace throughout the entire world, and to cooperation among peoples with brotherly love, according to the traditions of our Church. Uniting our efforts with sister Christian Churches in the face of a variety of challenges of these times, we shall conscientiously implement the holy mission of providing meaning to human life with the light of spirituality, for the sake of the victory of the good and universal happiness through the embodiment of Christian principles”.

The official periodicals published by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, in the Armenian language, provide core information about the ecumenical relationships and various dialogues of the Armenian Church, keeping the faithful judiciously informed about the activities and progress of the Church. With this book, we wish to share in other languages, the contributions of the Armenian Church to the collaboration efforts in the ecumenical sphere.

Through articles and photos the book gives a brief reflection on several important areas of ecumenism in the Armenian Church, starting with an overview of the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian Church; the relationships of the Armenian Church with Sister Churches, ecumenical organizations, inter-church and inter-religious relations; International Relations; and the youth of the Armenian Church and their unique participation in the ecumenical movement. Also included are the activities of the “Armenia Round Table Charitable Foundation” of the World Council of Churches (WCC), which operates from the grounds of the Mothers See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

We are pleased to present this book to our reader, which was generated by the efforts of members of Brotherhood of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and lay persons, who are engaged in ecumenical works at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

Along with the contributors to this book, we express our gratitude and faithful devotion to His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians for His blessings to undertake the work. We thank also Archbishop Yeznik Petrossian, General Secretary of the Inter-Church Relations Department of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, for his support and blessings, Fr. Per Pedersen from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark and Mr. Alexander Belopopsky the former Europe Secretary the WCC, whom respectively wrote two articles sharing their impressions on realized ecumenism within the Armenian Church.

Appreciation is extended to the Armenia Round Table of the WCC and Dr. Karen Nazarian for his generosity in financing this project as well as to Mrs. Paula Devejian for her critical approach, comments and labors in making the text presentable for English readers.

We are most grateful to all of the people who helped generate this publication through their research, writings, articles, photos, assistance and advice.

Very Rev. Archimandrite Hovakim Manukyan

Inter-Church Relations Department

Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin



THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA AND THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH

The Republic of Armenia is situated in the southern Caucasus region and occupies 29,800 square kilometers. It borders Georgia in the north, Turkey in the west, Azerbaijan in the east and southeast, and Iran in the south. Armenia is a mountainous country with fast-running rivers and alpine valleys. Of her 3,057,000 residents (according to the census of 2002) 96% of the population is Armenian, about 2% is Yezidi, and the remainder includes Russians, Jews, Syrians, Greeks, and Kurds. Armenia is divided into 10 regions as well as the capital city of Yerevan, which has regional status and is inhabited by 1.1 million residents.

Armenia is an industrial-agrarian country. The main natural resources are gold, copper, molybdenum, zinc, and bauxite. In addition to the capital of Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor, Abovian, Hrazdan, and Vagharshapat are also large cities. In Armenia there are two international airports (Yerevan and Gyumri). Forests cover 13% of the country's territory, and the road system extends 760 kilometers while the length of the railways is 12,100 kilometers. The governing system of Armenia consists of the president and the parliament. The former acts as head of state, who is elected to a five year term for no more than two consecutive terms. The legislative power belongs to the one-chamber Parliament, which has 131 deputies, 90 of whom are determined by quota sample and the remainder by popular vote. The executive power is carried out by the government, which is composed of the prime minister and his cabinet, as well as administrations attached to the government. Judicial power is employed by the three-fold court system, which includes a Constitutional Court that regulates the adherence of laws to the acting constitution. Armenia is a secular democratic country whose political system aims at consolidating the bases of democracy and civil society.

Armenia is a member of the Council of Europe, United Nations, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Commonwealth of Independent States, Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, Black Sea Economic Cooperation and other international organizations. Armenia has security arrangements with a number of countries, as well as with being a member of NATO's Individual Partnership Action Plans, and the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Armenian industry includes mining, metal manufacturing, chemical and device-manufacturing industries, power engineering, communication enterprises, food, textiles, glass production and processing.

Agriculture in the country includes alpine cattle breeding, gardening, and vegetable growing. Many famous scientists consider Armenia as a centuries-old cultivated territory of wheat, barley and grapes; the Latin term for apricot — Armeniaca — suggests a long preeminence of one of the country's tastiest fruits.

Armenia is a country of ancient civilization. The oldest human traces here date back 500,000 years. During the past two centuries, archeologists of the world have studied and continue to study the remnants of the civilizations of Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages.

The ancient state of Armenia was the kingdom of Urartu (Van), which lasted from about the 9th to the 6th centuries B.C. In 782 B.C. Yerevan was founded; the Museum of Natural History currently preserves the stone evidence. Many localities founded during that era are large cities and villages today. The first recorded mentions of Armenia by that name were in the 6th century B.C. in the Behistun multi-lingual inscription of King Darius I (Dareh) of the Achemenian Persian Empire and in a Babylonian map that has been traced back to the 5th century.

The kingdom of Armenia reached the height of its power in the 1st century B.C., during the reign of King Tigran II the Great, when the empire occupied the territory from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean. Around the middle of the 1st century B.C., Armenia became an object of discord between Old Rome and the Parthian state.

In 301 A.D. Christianity became the state religion of Armenia. In 405 Vardapet Mesrop Mashtots created the Armenian alphabet, which is still in use today. Beginning with the 5th century, Armenian literature and art flourished and magnificent examples have been preserved up to the present.

In 387 Armenia was completely divided between Rome and Sassanid Persia. In 428 the Armenian dynasty of Arshakounies ceased to exist. Armenia remained under the yoke of foreign invaders until the end of the 9th century.



From the 9th to the 11th centuries, Armenian statehood underwent resurgence, and several Armenian kingdoms were established. However, with the collapse of the capital city of Ani in 1045, the independent Armenian state ceased to exist on her native land.

From 1071-1375, Armenians settled north-east of the Mediterranean and established the independent kingdom of Cilicia, maintaining close relations with the Crusaders who came to the East. It later fell, under the attacks of Egyptian Mamelukes. Following this defeat, Armenia existed under the yoke of Ottoman Turks and the Persians, and during the 19th century it fell again to the reign of the Russian empire.

On May 28, 1918 Armenia, along with Georgia and Azerbaijan, regained their independence. But two years later, on November 20, 1920, the Soviet Army entered Armenia and declared the country a part of the Soviet Socialist Republic. Until December 1991, Armenia was a Soviet republic. On September 21, 1991, as a result of pan-national voting, the official independence of the Republic of Armenia was proclaimed. The current government of the Republic of Armenia involves many political parties—74 of them at present. There are more than 3,000 non-governmental organizations.

The majority of Armenians lives outside the national borders. Armenian communities have existed worldwide since the Middle Ages. In 1915 the governors of the Ottoman Empire, using the opportunity of a chaotic situation during World War I, systematically attacked the population of western Armenia; 1.5 million men, women, and children were killed during the Armenian Genocide. Those who survived found shelter in different countries around the world, forming the present-day Armenian Diaspora.

Aram Safaryan

Candidate of Philological Sciences, Docent of International Relations Chair
Yerevan State University, Republic of Armenia

ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH

We are the living body of Christ, the Christian Church of the Armenian people, the entire world-wide community of the Armenian nation.

Founded in the first century by two of the Apostles of Jesus Christ, Saints Thaddeus and Bartholomew, we are one of the five ancient Oriental Orthodox churches. At the beginning of the fourth century, Armenia became the first nation in the world to declare Christianity as state religion through the work of our patron saint, St. Gregory the Illuminator, and the decree of King Trdat III. As one of the oldest autocephalous national Christian churches, for more than 1,700 years we have steadfastly and devotedly followed Our Lord Jesus Christ, His teachings, the teachings of His Holy Apostles, Our Sacred Church Traditions, and the teachings of our graceful Saints and Church fathers.

zilvered to the Saints” and as defined by the first three Ecumenical councils of Nicaea in 325 A.D, of Constantinople in 381 and of Ephesus in 431.

Our Church is Holy, because our Lord Jesus Christ made her Holy. The Armenian Church has produced many saints. Many of her members have been martyred for the sake of Jesus Christ. The first known Armenian saint and martyr is Saint Sandought, the virgin daughter of King Sanatrouk.

Our Church is Universal, because she shares in the universality of the great Church of Christ, and she herself has continued to exist in spite of very great hardships throughout the centuries.

Our Church is Apostolic, because it was founded directly by two of the twelve apostles, Saints Thaddeus and Bartholomew who ordained the first Armenian bishops.

Our Church is Orthodox, because it has the true faith of Christ.

Current Structure

The head of the Church is Jesus Christ. The Supreme Spiritual and Administrative leader of the Armenian Church is His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, who is the worldwide spiritual leader of the Nation, for Armenians both in Armenia and dispersed throughout the world. He is Chief Shepherd and Pontiff to 9,000,000 Armenian faithful. The spiritual and administrative headquarters of the Armenian Church, the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, located in the monastery of Etchmiadzin, city of Vagharshapat, Republic of Armenia, was established in 301 AD and seventeen centuries later continues to guide our devoted nation and people on the luminous paths of fulfilling the primary mission of our Church - leading people to God.

The Armenian Church has changed and developed to meet the needs of the faithful over her 1700 year history. Administratively, great care has been taken to be inclusive of a wide cross-section of the faithful. Both clergy and lay are involved in today’s administrative structure of the Church. Led by His Holiness, Karekin II, the spiritual and administrative work of the Armenian Church is carried out in the Republic of Armenia in the areas of Religion, Preparation of Clergy, Christian Education, Construction of new Churches, Social Services, and Ecumenical activities. Underneath this administrative structure are the hierarchal Sees:

- The Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia located in Antelias, Lebanon, is a regional See with current jurisdiction of the Dioceses of Lebanon, Syria and Cyprus currently led by His Holiness Catholicos Aram I.
- The Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem which has jurisdiction over all of the Holy Lands and the Diocese of Jordan, led by His Beatitude Patriarch Torgom Manoogian.



- The Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople and All of Turkey, which has jurisdiction in the modern day Republic of Turkey led by His Beatitude Patriarch Mesrob Mutafian.

The three historic aforementioned hierarchal sees administer to the Dioceses under their jurisdiction as they see fit, however, the supremacy of the Catholicosate of All Armenians in all spiritual matters remains pre-eminent.

In addition to the responsibilities of overseeing their respective Dioceses, each hierarchical See, including the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, has a Monastic Brotherhood.

Regionally, each area of the world where the Armenian Church and faithful are located has Dioceses, which are led by a Primate from the Diocesan Headquarters. Each Diocese is made up of Parishes and communities.

The spiritual and administrative bodies representing the authority of the Armenian Church are the following:

The National Ecclesiastical Assembly is the supreme legislative body presided over by the Catholicos of All Armenians. The members of the National Ecclesiastical Assembly are elected by the individual Diocesan Assemblies. The National Ecclesiastical Assembly elects the Catholicos of All Armenians.

The Council of Bishops is an administrative-deliberative body presided over by the Catholicos of All Armenians. It makes suggestions on the dogmatic and canonical issues to be discussed as agenda items during the National Ecclesiastical Assembly.

The Supreme Spiritual Council is the highest executive body of the Armenian Church and is presided over by the Catholicos of All Armenians. The members of the Council can be elected by the National Ecclesiastical Assembly or appointed by the Catholicos of All Armenians. The Catholicos of All Armenians, His Holiness Gevorg V. Soorenian established the Supreme Spiritual Council on January 1, 1924.

The Diocesan Assembly is the highest legislative (canonical) body of each Diocese and is headed by the Primate of the Diocese. The Diocesan

delegates (representatives of each parish community) elect the delegates to the National Ecclesiastical Assembly, the members of the Diocesan Council as well as discuss and decide on administrative issues within the Diocese such as committees, budgets, building, etc. In some Dioceses, the Diocesan Assembly elects the Primate of the Diocese.

The Diocesan Council is the highest executive body of a diocese, presided over by the Primate of the Diocese. It regulates the inner administrative activity of the Diocese under the direction of the Primate. The Diocesan Assembly elects members of the Diocesan Council.

The Monastic Brotherhood is comprised of the celibate clergy of the monastery who are led by the Abbot. At present, there are four brotherhoods in the Armenian Church - the brotherhood of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, the brotherhood of St. James at the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, brotherhood of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople and the brotherhood of the Catholicosate of Great House of Cilicia. Each Armenian celibate priest becomes a member of the brotherhood in which he has studied and ordained in or under the jurisdiction of which he has served. The brotherhood makes decisions concerning the inner affairs of the monastery. Each brotherhood elects two delegates who take part in the National Ecclesiastical Assembly.

The Priest Assembly is the general assembly of the community presided over by the priest. The Parish Assembly elects or appoints the members of the Parish Council and the representatives or delegates to the Diocesan Assembly.

The Parish Council is the executive-administrative body of the community. It is presided over by the priest of the community who takes up the inner administrative affairs of the parish and is engaged in the realization of its administrative and financial activities. Members of the Parish Council are elected or appointed at a “Parish Assembly”.

Editorial Board

Website of the Armenian Church, Catholicosate of All Armenians
www.armenianchurch.org



THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA AND THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH (ILLUSTRATIONS)



▲ His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians with the members of the Supreme Spiritual Council, left to His Holiness is Mr. Tigran Torosyan, President of the Parliament of Armenia, Veharan – residence of the Catholicos.



▲ Feast of the Lord's Presentation to the Temple, 14 February, 2007. His Holiness lights candles in the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin (303) and at the conclusion of the service, the priest lights a candle from the Holy Altar, and distributes the flame to all present. With great care, the faithful take the lit candles home to their families.



▲ Ordination of priests in the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin.



▲ Ordination of priests in the Cathedral of St. Gregory Illuminator Cathedral in Yerevan.



▲ Ordination of bishops in the Cathedral of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. In the Armenian Church tradition only the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians has the right to ordain bishops. Ordinations are usually conducted in Holy Etchmiadzin. All the bishops of the Armenian Church are members of the Brotherhood of Holy Etchmiadzin.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians addresses his message to the seminarians, Gevorgian Theological Seminary, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.



▲ Consecration of St. Gregory of Narek Church in Vanadzor by His Holiness Karekin II, October 10, 2005.



▲ Catholicos gives his blessings to the children, region of Tavush.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II pays a visit to and blesses the handicap children of the orphanage of Kharberd in Yerevan.



▲ Blessing of the Grapes, Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, August, 2004.

His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians presided during the solemn Liturgy, as thousands of faithful pilgrims from throughout Armenia and the Diaspora prayed and worshipped together, offering their thanks and praise to God for this blessed day.

Following the Divine Liturgy, the Pontifical procession headed by His Holiness, led the faithful to the Open Altar of Sts. Trdat and Ashkhen on the grounds of the Mother See, to offer the Service of the Blessing of the Grapes. His Holiness Karekin II, assisted by the bishops and members of the Brotherhood of Holy Etchmiadzin, offered prayers up to Heaven for the fruit of the vine, asking God to bless the harvest and protect the farmers, vineyards and all lands where Armenians live and work. At the conclusion of the Blessing of the Grapes service, the blessed grapes were distributed to the faithful.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II blesses a newly married couple, region of Armavir.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II with Armenian youth in Argentina, May 2004.

▶ The Feast of Holy Nativity in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. In the evening of January 5, the headquarters of the Armenian Church celebrates a solemn Candlelight Divine Liturgy in the Mother Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin. With the participation of thousands of faithful, the good news is proclaimed:

“Christ is Born and Revealed, Blessed is the Revelation of Christ!” On January 6, His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians celebrates Divine Liturgy in the Cathedral of Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin on the occasion of the Holy Nativity and Theophany of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

On this day, the Armenian Church also offers a special Blessing of the Waters Service to celebrate the Baptism of Christ, which was the commencement of His earthly ministry.





▲ His Holiness visits the Diocese of Tavush. Meeting with the children of the orphanage.



▲ His Holiness pays a pontifical visit to the northern regions of Armenia.



▲ Inauguration of the museum of Arshil Gorky in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. Arshil Gorky was an American painter of Armenian origin, who rescued from Genocide. His Holiness Karekin II along with Mr. Sarkis and Mrs. Ruth Bedevians, benefactors of the Armenian Church.





THE RELATIONS OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH WITH SISTER CHURCHES

The Armenian Church has been loyal to the message of Christ, “And there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (John 10:16), both during the course of centuries and now. She continues to seek ways to reintegrate alienated parts of the Church—Christ’s mysterious body—and to regain the fervently desired unity. Today more than ever before, Christian churches need to face various challenges of society together, and unanimously raise their voices for the benefit and defense of suffering humanity. The spirit of intolerance, the language of debate, and the status quo of dividing dominion between Churches should be left in the past. However, we unfortunately must acknowledge that until today, the churches have been unable to regain the precious medication for healing the wounds of Christ’s body — visible unity.

It is surprising that even today one can find various literary works, personal viewpoints of clergymen and theologians, and — most painful of all — official standpoints of some churches, which not only fail to conform to the ideology and vision of the ecumenical movement, but explicitly contradict them.

The Armenian Church, guided by the Holy Spirit and directed by the Catholicos of All Armenians, has never faltered in her ecumenical relationships with other churches. Regardless of the challenges or oppressions faced; she has never gone astray from this God-pleasing mission. The Armenian Church has always promoted and prioritized the process of dialogue among churches. She has aimed at fostering knowledge of each other and establishing the fellowship that comes with it; as well as expanding the extent of our cooperation in the world, which is a true expression of Christian love and compassion.

During the recent pontificates of Catholicos Vasken I and Karekin I of blessed memory, the Armenian Church participated in local and international conferences, assemblies and ecumenical prayers, closely cooperating with the World Council of Churches, Conference of European Churches and other church institutions. The Armenian Church has participated in every initiative aimed at establishing peace in the world and bringing churches together.

In this regard, the approach towards sister churches adopted by His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, is an exact continuation of that of his predecessors. The only difference is that today the Armenian Church, fully enjoying the possibilities provided by an independent Armenia while reaping the benefits of modern technology, has considerably increased her activities within the ecumenical sphere. One indicator of this activity is that numerous Armenian clergymen are advancing their theological studies at institutes of higher learning around the world.

Inter-church relations, particularly mutual visits and common prayers of church leaders, are of great importance. Ascending to the throne of St. Gregory the Illuminator on November 4, 1999, His Holiness Karekin II began his dynamic ecumenical activity in the 2000 jubilee year of Christ’s Nativity and Theophany.

His Holiness Karekin II paid his first official ecumenical visit from February 29 to March 3, 2000, traveling Moscow, Russia to meet with his spiritual brother His Holiness Alexy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.

Upon the invitation of His Holiness Ilia II, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church, His Holiness Karekin II visited Georgia from May 9-11, 2000, where the two Pontiffs signed a common declaration which reflects the shared concerns of the two Churches: “Our churches today face the same difficulties and anxieties in overcoming the consequences of 70 atheistic years, in opposing the invasion of foreign sects and in taking care of and guiding our faithful to a spiritual renewal”.

From September 17-21 of the same year, His Holiness Karekin II visited Bucharest to meet with His Holiness Teoctist I, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church. During his short visit, His Holiness Karekin II also visited the Romanian Dioceses of Râmnic and Argeș. Romanian President Emil Constantinescu presented his country’s highest reward, the Order of the Star of Romania, to the Catholicos of All Armenians in appreciation of His Holiness’ fruitful pontifical activities and of the good reputation and praiseworthy merits of the Armenian community in Romania.

From October 12-18, 2000, His Holiness paid an official visit to Egypt at the invitation of His Holiness Shenouda III, Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Patriarch of the See of St. Mark. In the welcoming speech he gave at St. Mark Church, he noted, “We believe in the power of fraternal love binding our Sister Churches together, and today We have come to pray together so that the creative and God-given love may embrace all the churches based on the rock of our faith and become the incentive for their union.” During the course of the visit, on October 16, His Holiness Shenouda III and His Holiness Karekin II signed a common declaration.

Immediately after leaving Egypt, the Catholicos of All Armenians paid official visit Ethiopia for three days at the invitation of His Holiness Abuna Paulos, Patriarch of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Orthodox Church. In Holy Trinity Cathedral, the spiritual center of the Ethiopian Church, His Holiness Karekin II stated: “For the whole Christendom the year 2000 of Christ’s Theophany is a joyous occasion for expressing our union and renewing spiritual life, and We extend glory and praise to Heaven that God has granted Us this grace to pay a fraternal visit to Ethiopia today”.

From November 8-11, 2000 His Holiness Karekin II was accompanied by high ranking clergy of the Armenian Church on a visit to the Vatican to meet His Holiness John Paul II, Pope of the Roman Catholic Church. The meeting was marked both by the signing of a common declaration and by the presentation of relics of St. Gregory the Illuminator, the patron saint of the Armenian Church, from the Roman Catholic Church to the Armenian Church. They were then brought to Armenia and placed in the Mother Cathedral of Yerevan that bears the saint’s name.

2000 was followed by another exceptional year, in regards to the abundance of events both for the ecumenical movement and for the entire Armenian Church. The whole Armenian nation, in the Republic, Artsakh and world-wide celebrated the 1700th anniversary of Armenia’s adoption of Christianity as the state religion in 2001. On this joyous occasion, representatives of different Churches and religious organizations came to share the happiness of the Armenian Church and her faithful.

The many attendees included: His Holiness John Paul II, Bishop of Rome, Pope of the Roman Catholic Church; His All Holiness Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople; His Holiness Alexy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia; His Holiness Baselios Mar Thoma Matthews II, Catholicos of the East And Malankara Metropolitan; His Beatitude Petros VII, Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa; His Holiness Teoctist I, Archbishop of Bucharest, Metropolitan of Ungro-Wallachia, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church; His Grace George Carrey, Archbishop of Canterbury, Head of the Anglican Church, Rev. Dr. Konrad Raiser, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches.

For the same occasion, His Holiness John Paul II, Pope of Rome visited Holy Etchmiadzin for the first time from September 25-27, 2001. In his speech at St. Gregory the Illuminator Mother Cathedral in Yerevan the Holy Father reflected on the relations binding the two Churches: “There is a real and intimate unity between the Catholic Church and the Church of Armenia since both preserve apostolic succession and have valid sacraments, particularly Baptism and the Eucharist. Our awareness of this must inspire us to work even harder to strengthen our ecumenical dialogue”. Remarkably, during this visit the two Pontiffs signed a second common declaration on September 27. It states, “Here at Holy Etchmiadzin we renew our solemn commitment to pray and work to hasten the day of communion among all the members of Christ’s faithful flock.”

His Holiness Pope John Paul II, accompanied by His Holiness Karekin II, visited the Tsitsernakaberd Genocide Memorial to pay tribute to the thousands of innocent victims of the Armenian Genocide of 1915.

From November 3-5, 2001 the jubilee year of the 1700th anniversary celebrations was concluded with a visit to Armenia and the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin of His All Holiness Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople.

The year of 2002 was also fruitful in the ecumenical realm. From June 25-29, 2002, at the invitation of His Beatitude Maxim II, Head of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and Metropolitan of Sofia, and the Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians paid official visit Sofia, Bulgaria.

The same year, from August 17-20, His Eminence Archbishop Jukka Paarma, Head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland paid his first official visit to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

From October 18-23, 2002 His Holiness Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East visited Armenia and the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

The year of 2003 was distinctive due to the visits of Pontiffs of two churches. From May 2-5 His Holiness Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria, Patriarch of the See of St. Mark visited Holy Etchmiadzin. During the visit, a second common declaration was signed between the heads of the two churches, which states, “We commit ourselves to promote in more visible and tangible ways the close cooperation of our respective churches of the family of oriental orthodox churches, in our involvement in the Ecumenical movement on local, regional and world levels.”

From May 7-9, 2003 His Holiness Ilia II, Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church visited Armenia, continuing the centuries-long relationship between the two churches.

In response to the official invitation of His Eminence Archbishop Jukka Paarma, Head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, His Holiness Karekin II visited the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland from June 2-6, 2004. During the visit His Holiness Karekin II also had a chance to become closely acquainted with the activities of the Bible Society of Finland and the Finnish Center for Orthodox and Eastern European studies.

From June 10-18 His Holiness Karekin II visited the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland at the invitation of Rt. Rev. Dr. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury of the Anglican Church. During the visit His Holiness Karekin II also met with Her Majesty Elizabeth II, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In September 22-26, 2007, Rt. Rev. Dr. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury of the Anglican Church visited Armenia, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin as the official guest of His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians. During His official visit to the Mother

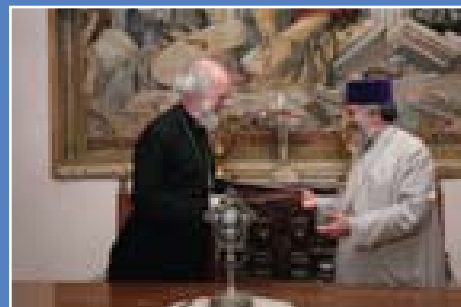
See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Rt. Rev. Dr. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury paid a tribute to the victims of the Armenian Genocide visiting Tsitsernakaberd, museum of the Armenian Genocide. At the end of the ecumenical visit as a sign of fraternal relationships between two Churches the heads of the Armenian and Anglican Churches signed a communiqué.

On the May 25, 2006 on the Feast of Ascension, His Eminence Leo Makkonen, Archbishop of Karelia and All Finland, Head of the Orthodox Church of Finland visited the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin at the invitation of His Holiness Karekin II. During the trip, he learned of the cultural heritage, educational institutions, diocesan organizations, and youth centers of the Armenian Church.

Summarizing the ecumenical activities of His Holiness Karekin II, it is evident that the past seven years have truly been a period of tangible progress, with increased communication and cooperation with Sister Churches, highlighted by many summits and theological dialogues. In regard to inter-church relations His Holiness has adopted as his motto the words of the psalmist: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Psalm 133:1). The achievements and fellowship between the Armenian Church with Sister Churches accomplished over the course of the last seven years give us hope that with the help and blessing of the Almighty the next seven years will be even more fruitful for the sake of the One, Holy, Universal and Apostolic Church.

Very Rev. Gevork Saroyan

Sevan Vazgenian Theological Seminary



THE RELATIONS OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH WITH SISTER CHURCHES (ILLUSTRATIONS)



▲ His Holiness Karekin II and His Holiness Alexy II, Head of the Russian Orthodox Church, consecration of St. Gregory the Illuminator Cathedral in Yerevan dedicated to the 1700th anniversary of proclaiming Christianity as the state religion in Armenia, September 23, 2001. During the consecration service the following Church heads were present:

1. His Holiness Alexy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia
2. His Holiness Baselios Mar Thoma Matthews II, Catholicos of the East And Malankara Metropolitan
3. His Beatitude Petros VII, Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa
4. His Holiness Teoctist I, Archbishop of Bucharest, Metropolitan of Ungro-Wallachia, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church
5. His Grace George Carrey, Archbishop of Canterbury, Head of the Anglican Church



▲ Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Catholicossate of All Armenians, His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians and His Holiness Pope John Paul II, Bishop of Rome sign agreement of cooperation, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, during the visit of the Pope of Rome to Armenia, September 26, 2001.



▲ Representatives of the Canadian Council of Churches along with His Holiness are participating in the Divine Liturgy in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. The Armenian Church also is a member of different national councils of churches through her dioceses. The representatives of the Canadian Council of Churches came to Armenia in August 2005.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II, His Holiness Shenouda III, from the left Bishop Paren Avetikyan, Metropolitan Anba Bihsoy of Damiette, from the right Bishop Angelos, Archbishop Yeznik Petrossian, Sevan Seminary, during the visit of Pope Shenouda III to Armenia, 2-5 May, 2003.



▲ Heads of the Armenian and Coptic Churches sign an agreement of cooperation, Veharan – residence of the Catholicos. They also reaffirmed their unity in faith, May 4, 2003.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II, His All Holiness Bartholomew I and His Beatitude Mesrop II, Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, Phanar, Istanbul. In June 20-27, 2006, upon the invitation of His All Holiness Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, His Holiness Karekin II visited Turkey. This was the first visit of His Holiness to Turkey. During the visit His Holiness also brought his encouragement to the Armenian community in Istanbul as well as urged the Turkish authorities to recognize the Armenian Genocide of 1915.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians and His Holiness Teoctist I, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, Romania, September 2000.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II and His Beatitude Maxim, Head of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. On June 25-29, 2002 His Holiness Karekin II paid a pontifical visit to the Armenian Diocese of Bulgaria, as well as an ecumenical visit to the Head of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.



▲ Heads of the Armenian and Ethiopian Churches during the official audience with the faithful, Addis Abeba, 2000.



▲ His All Holiness Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, address their messages to the Armenian faithful. Archbishop Hovnan Derderian is translating the messages of the Church leaders, Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin, November 2001.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II , Catholicos of All Armenians and Most Rev. Dr. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury signing the communique' between Anglican and Armenian Churches, September 25, 200.



▲ Most Rev. Dr. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury planted a tree at Genocide Memorial, September 24, 2007.



▲ Delegates of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in Lambeth, England, 2001, during the preparatory meeting of the Theological dialogue with the Anglican Church. The first meeting of the representatives of the Anglican and Oriental Orthodox Churches took place in Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia, on November 5-10, 2002.



▲ Heads of the Armenian Apostolic and Georgian Orthodox Churches at the “Zvartnots” International Airport, Yerevan, May 7-9, 2003. The relationships between the Armenian Apostolic and Georgian Orthodox Churches are of historical importance. They come as early as from the 4th century. The Armenians and Georgians live and create together as two brother nations for long centuries. During the first year of his pontificate, His Holiness Karekin II visited Georgia in May 2000. On May 7-9, 2003 His Holiness Ilia II visited Armenia upon the invitation of His Holiness Karekin II for strengthening the cooperation and mutual relationship.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians and Archbishop Leo of Karelia and All Finland, Geghard Monastery. Archbishop Leo visited Armenia on 25-29 May, 2006 upon the invitation of His Holiness Karekin II as an expression of fraternal love and gratitude. This was the first time that the Orthodox Archbishop of Finland visited Armenia. The relationships between these two Churches were established in 2004, when Archbishop Leo received His Holiness in his Diocese during His Holiness' visit to Finland.



▲ April 24, 2005, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, after the solemn Liturgy in the Cathedral requiem service was held for the victims of the Armenian Genocide, His Holiness Karekin II, along with the representatives of Sister Churches and the clergy of the Armenian Church. The picture was taken in front of the monument of the Armenian Genocide in Holy Etchmiadzin.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, His Beatitude Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Beatitude Archbishop





THE ARMENIAN CHURCH WITHIN THE LIFE OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES

Dialogues and cooperation were prevalent in the history of churches during the 20th century. A series of ecumenical organizations were founded, primarily aimed at fostering relations among Churches. The World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC) are two of the most notable among these groups.

For almost half a century the Armenian Church has been a member of the WCC. In 1962 during the Soviet regime, the Armenian Church, along with other Orthodox Churches from the Soviet Union, became members of the WCC. The inclusion of these Orthodox Churches made the WCC a truly “universal movement”. There were initiatives to organize theological conferences and mutual visits, study histories of churches, and undertake joint charitable projects.

Although the Soviet Authorities carried out anti-church and anti-religious policies with great intolerance towards the Church, the representatives still partook in the organization of and participation in theological conferences and mutual visits, historical studies of churches, and charitable projects. The Armenian Church entered bilateral and multilateral dialogues with different Churches and Christian organizations, such as with the Eastern Orthodox, Anglican and Reform Churches. In 1965 His Holiness Vasken I, of blessed memory, issued to the Armenian faithful the first encyclical on Christian Unity.

The General Secretaries of the WCC, Vissert Hooft, Dr. K. Blake and Emilio Castro visited Armenia, the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin in 1959, 1967 and 1972; and after the independence of Armenia Dr. Konrad Raiser visited Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin in 1996 and 2000 Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobin in 2007 to learn more about the Armenian Church and her historical mission, as well as to seek avenues to strengthen the relationships between the Armenian Church and the WCC. The Catholicos of the Armenian Church also paid mutual visits to the WCC Geneva headquarters. In 1967 His Holiness Vasken I paid a visit, and in 1996, His Holiness Karekin I of blessed memory traveled to Geneva, both with the same purpose of learning about the life and activities of this prominent organization of Christian Churches – examining the concerns and vision of the organization as well as bringing their blessings and fraternal wishes.

In addition to visitations the WCC has supported Armenians by voicing concern and funding projects and charitable works during times of hardship. They have expressed their solidarity and support of important Armenian causes and issues. At the 6th General Assembly in Vancouver in 1983, the WCC called for world attention of the “tragic massacres of one-and-a-half million Armenians in Turkey and the deportation of another half million from their historic homeland” during the Armenian Genocide at the beginning of the 20th century. They appealed to their member churches and to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to take the issue under consideration and pursue the matter in the appropriate context, seeking public recognition, “in order that they do not continue to engender violent acts of retribution, and that through remembering the history of the Armenian people other peoples might be spared a similar fate.”

At the WCC 7th General Assembly in 1991 at Canberra, Australia, in response to the “discrimination, intimidation and violence” being perpetrated against the Armenian people of Nagorno Karabakh, the Central Committee expressed its concern about the “worsening situation in Nagorno Karabakh” calling attention to the situation to churches, public and governments. They called upon all member churches to “continue to be faithful in prayer for the Armenian people as well as all people in the region as they strive for both justice and peace.”

The relations between the Armenian Church and the WCC have flourished during the Pontificate of His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians. Emphasis has been placed on building on the work of his predecessors.

Cooperation and collaboration with the WCC is of central importance to His Holiness. In 2001, during the jubilee year celebrating the 1700th anniversary of the proclamation of Christianity as the state religion in Armenia, His Holiness Karekin II visited Geneva, Switzerland and the headquarters of the WCC to personally familiarize himself with the works and activities of all facets of the organization.

One of the first actions upon his return was to increase the ecumenical roles of members of the Brotherhood of the Mother See of Holy Etch-



miadzin. Members' involvement has included participation in WCC events and conferences; as well as various educational, social and even political projects.

Also during this period, priests and deacons of the Brotherhood continued in their ecumenical education with study at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Geneva, increasing their knowledge of ecumenical issues and familiarizing themselves with the customs and traditions of other churches while imparting to others the faith and beliefs of the Armenian Church.

Dialogues were increased, and from April 13-16, 2005 the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin hosted the Steering Committee of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC, where theologians from Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant Churches came to take part in the discussions.

In September 2007 Executive Committee of the WCC held its annual meeting in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin for the first time in the history.

The Armenian Church most recently continued their participation in the WCC attending the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in May 2005 in Athens, Greece, and the 9th General Assembly in February 2006 in Porto Alegre, Brazil with a delegation of 14 representatives. His Eminence Archbishop Vicken Aykazian and Mrs. Paula Devezian were elected as representatives of the Armenian Church on the WCC Central Committee. Archbishop Vicken was also elected to serve on the WCC Executive Committee. Further representing the Armenian Church, His Grace Bishop Nathan Hovhannisyan serves on the Faith and Order Commission and Miss Tsovinar Ghazaryan serves on the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs. As a young theologian from the Armenian Church father Shahe Ananian was also included in the "Faith and Order" commission's youth body.

The Armenian Church is also a member of the Conference of European Churches. During the Pontificate of His Holiness Karekin II, relations with this ecumenical organization have further developed. From

June 25 to July 2, 2003, an Armenian Church delegation participated in the 12th General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches in Trondheim, Norway. At this assembly, His Eminence Archbishop Yeznik Petrossian was elected as a member of the CEC Central Committee. The same year, Rev. Fr. Hovakim Manukyan and Mrs. Paula Devezian joined the CEC "Church and Society" Commission and "Peace, Security and Reconciliation" working groups respectively. In 2007 from June 14-19, the annual meeting of Church and Society Commission of the CEC was held in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. 35 Commission members from different Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant Churches participated in the meeting to discuss issues related to intercultural dialogue, and while in Armenia, to study the link between religion and culture and discuss the churches' contribution to intercultural dialogue.

The CEC has worked closely with the Armenian Church, lending their voice and support on important Armenian causes. In June 1991, at the invitation of His Holiness Vasken I, a joint delegation from the CEC and WCC traveled to Nagorno Karabakh to learn more about the situation and suggest ways in which they could help. In letters sent out in November 1991, the General Secretary of the CEC Mr. Jean Fischer, and General Secretary of the WCC, Mr. Emilio Castro, jointly appealed to President Boris Yeltsin of the Russian Federation and to President Nazarbajev of Azerbaijan to "achieve the removal of the economic blockade imposed in Armenia" and "resolve peacefully the Nagorno Karabakh conflict respecting the legitimate rights of all peoples concerned". In April of 2005, the CEC Presidium joined the WCC in inviting all its member churches "to make April 24 a Day of Memory of the Armenian Genocide and to consider further appropriate actions related to the 90 years Commemoration of the Armenian Genocide". The CEC urged member churches to play an important role in offering a platform for encounter and in supporting projects towards reconciliation. They further urged the Turkish government to initiate a process of reconciliation between the Turkish and the Armenian peoples, in which the "recognition of guilt and the proclamation of the truth need to be integral elements."

As Armenia is an active member of the Council of Europe (CoE) and working in close collaboration with the European Union (EU), the Armenian Church lends her voice to the issues facing the churches of Europe. The CEC, with its offices in Geneva, Strasbourg and Brussels, works closely with major European organizations, such as the EU and the CoE, to address and act on the many concerns facing church in Europe. Their primary goal of "promoting the unity of the church and presenting a common Christian witness to the people and institutions of Europe" is an important mission and vision that is shared by the Armenian Church.

By becoming a member of these organizations, the Armenian Church helps contribute to the development of the ecumenical movement and brings to life one of the important aspects of its vision, namely, cooperation between churches and representatives of Christian denominations on the way to Christian unity.

The Armenian Church continues theological dialogues, reciprocal visits as well as is ready to act and assist brethren and sisters in need of care, love and solidarity. Promoting these relationships is a focus and the doors of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin are open to receive delegations from sister Churches, ecumenical organizations.

Very Rev. Archimandrite Hovakim Manukyan

Inter-Church Relations Department

Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin



THE ARMENIAN CHURCH WITHIN THE LIFE OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES (ILLUSTRATIONS)



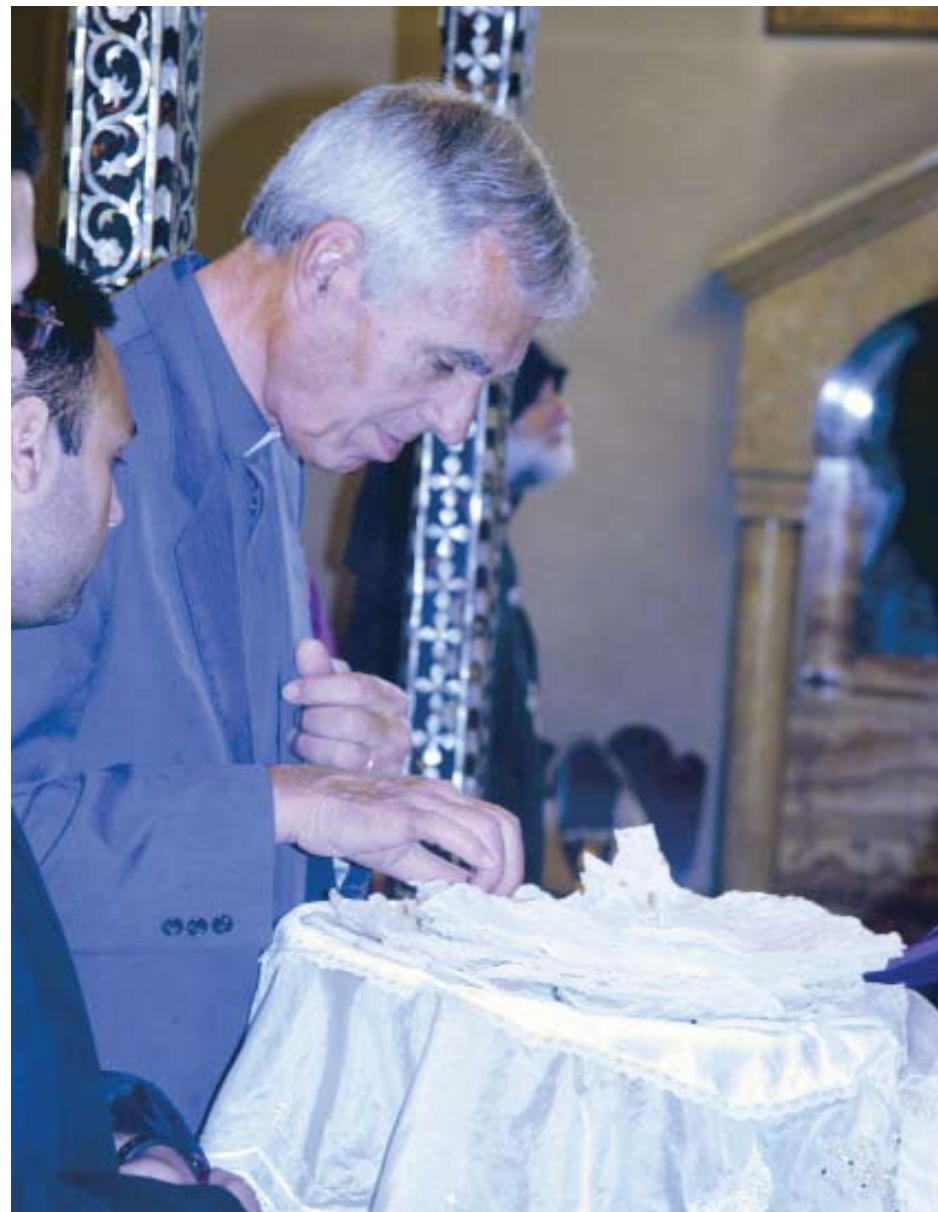
▲ September 23, 2007, Divine Liturgy at the Cathedral of Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, General Secretary of WCC, Rev. Dr. Walter Altman, moderator of the Central Committee of WCC.



▲ Picture of the head of the Armenian Church His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, with the Members of the Steering Committee of the Special Commission on the Orthodox Participation in the WCC, Pontifical Residence, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Catholicosate of All Armenians, 12-16 April 2005. Left to his Holiness is Bishop Koppe from EKD and right – Metropolitan Genadios of Sasima.



▲ Delegation of the Armenian Apostolic church, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, to the 9th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Porto Alegre, Brasil, 14-23 February 2006.



▶ Rec. Dr. Konrad Raiser, former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches during the Divine Liturgy in the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin, June 3, 2007.



▲ Yona Metzger, Chief Rabbi of Israel visited Tsitsernakaberd in November 2005 and says a prayer that usually Jewish people are chanting on January 27, day of Holocaust.

▶ 90th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide in Tsitsernakaberd.
Genocide Memorial, with the representatives of Sister Churches and ecumenical organizations, April 24, 2005. Representatives of more than 20 churches were present. In Holy Etchmiadzin during the Solemn Liturgy the representatives of sister churches had made speeches, condemning the Genocide and expressing their solidarity with Armenians worldwide. Not only the World Council of Churches, but also the Conference of the European Churches and other ecumenical Councils of Churches have recognized the Armenian Genocide and have held requiem services in their member Churches. On April 24, the General Secretaries of WCC and CEC have made statements and press releases on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. The President of the Conference of European Churches Rev. Dr. Jean Arnold de Clermont was present.
Any Church and inter-religious delegation that comes to Armenia and the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin visits Tsitsernakaberd and pays tribute to the memory of the Genocide victims.



◀ The official opening ceremony of the Habitat for Humanity new program “His Holiness Karekin II Build Project”, on September 4th, 2006, Marriott Hotel Armenia, Yerevan. His Holiness Karekin II spoke to the gathered crowd, extending his blessings to the participants and encouraging them to support this charitable initiative. Armenian Church acts ecumenically also with other faith-based international organizations. Habitat for Humanity is among them.

The Armenian Church and Habitat for Humanity announced a partnership to combat poverty housing in Armenia and worldwide during the Jimmy Carter Work Project in Detroit in 2005. To formalize this new partnership, on April 20, 2006, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Armenian Church and Habitat for Humanity initiating a new program entitled the “His Holiness Karekin II Build Project”. The formal signing ceremony was held in the Pontifical Residence of the Mother See.

The memorandum outlined the cooperation between Habitat for Humanity International and the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin for the purpose of building homes for needy families and those living in poverty housing. According to the agreement, Habitat will organize and implement an annual building event in Armenia. With the blessings and under the auspices of His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, approximately 100 new houses are planned to be built in the coming three years. At least 37 new homes will be built during the first phase in each regions of the Republic of Armenia - one house representing each diocese of the Armenian Church throughout the world.

Joint cooperation between the Armenian Church and Habitat-Armenia began in 2001, when parish teams of Armenians from the United States came to Armenia to work on building projects. Then in June of 2005, His Holiness Karekin II traveled to Michigan and worked alongside President Jimmy Carter and Mr. Richard Manoogian, Chairman of the MASCO Corporation, in the Habitat sponsored “Jimmy Carter Work Project” in Detroit

Following the signing of the Memorandum, Armenian priests conducted a “Home blessing” service in the town of Gavar, near a half-built dwelling. Located in the Gegharkounik region, construction projects were not initiated for many years in Gavar.

The direct participation of the Catholicos of All Armenians became a source of inspiration to the volunteers of this project. His Holiness was personally involved in the work; he surveyed the structure, and checked the quality and reliability of the construction.



▲ 6th Assembly of the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN), Flamslaat, Sweden, September 27-October 1, 2006, Rev. Fr. Mkrtich Proshyan, Dean of the Sevan Vaskenian Seminary participated in this Assembly representing the Armenian Apostolic Church.



▲ Blessing of the River Nidelvan with Armenian Myron by His Eminence Archbishop Vosskan Kalpakian, Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Greece, 1 July, 2003, Trondheim, Norway. This is a unique event and reminds us of the Medieval times when during baptisms and especially the feasts of Theophany rivers were blessed by Holy Myron. In the Armenian tradition the Holy Myron is blessed by the Catholicos of All Armenians in every seven years in the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin.



▲ Armenian rite morning prayer led by the Armenian delegation, 12th General Assembly in Trondheim, Norway, June 25-July 2, 2003. The delegation composed of 6 people was led by Archbishop Yeznik Petrossian, who was elected a member of the CEC Central Committee.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II with Giovanni Guaita (a Roman Catholic scholar, living in Moscow and studying history of the Orthodox Churches, author of many books about the Armenian Church) in the reception of His Holiness.



ARMENIA ROUND TABLE OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (ART)

ART Background

The Armenia Inter-Church Charitable Round Table Foundation was created upon the initiative of the Armenian Church and the World Council of Churches, with participation from the Armenian Catholic and Armenian Evangelical Churches. It commenced in 1996 (with its office established in 1997) and works under the patronage of His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians. Since inception, ART has gathered together representatives from the Armenian Church, the Armenian Catholic and Evangelical Churches, local non-governmental organizations, and church-related partners who have a shared commitment of working together to address some of the fundamental social and economic problems of the country. In November 2004, ART was registered as an independent legal entity in Armenia's Ministry of Justice under the name World Council of Churches Armenia Inter-Church Charitable Round Table Foundation.

Its vision inspired by the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and Christian social teachings, ART strives to promote a peaceful and just society that respects all of God's creation, practices

Christian values in word and deed, and ensures a dignified life for the vulnerable, with equal rights and opportunities for all.

ART activities and priorities are based on the Biblical concepts of diakonia and koinonia, offering a platform where partnership can be implemented through concrete action. Annual meetings with ecumenical and implementing partners determine the directions and priorities for ART's work. These meetings are welcomed and hosted by His Holiness Karekin II. Participants of the annual meetings and events and activities organized by ART gain the opportunity to meet His Holiness and discuss strategy and specific issues with him.

Since its establishment, ART has directed its activities in diverse areas, including micro credit, education, humanitarian aid, agricultural development, church reconstruction, and social diakonia. ART's first projects focused on humanitarian issues, emergency relief, local income generation through its small loan program, spiritual uplifting by church

reconstruction, and making summer break activities available to children from socially vulnerable families. ART has gradually shifted the focus of its projects from humanitarian support to development-related activities aimed at providing lasting solutions to social and economic realities in the country as well as spiritual renewal of society.

The main priority areas of ART's work have focused on the Small Loan Fund (initiated and largely promoted by His Holiness Catholicos Karekin I of Blessed Memory), which from 1997 to 2002 supported small scale self-help initiatives for several hundred people throughout Armenia. Having seen the importance and benefits of micro credit activities, ART invited the Ecumenical Church Loan Fund (ECLOF) to Armenia in 1999, which since its establishment in Armenia has further bolstered support to small and medium business developments.

Since 1997 ART has offered and implemented more than 200 grant supported projects in the fields of social diakonia and education, agriculture and development, and capacity building. The Educational Program is aimed at developing and improving the quality of educational and social systems in Armenia. The overall goal of the Agricultural Development Program is to contribute to the viability and improvement of rural communities and reduce poverty through community development. The Capacity Building and Training Program, which started in 2004, has worked to strengthen the potential and capabilities of civil society groups and to create support networks between them. Since 2005 ART has developed two additional programs: HIV/AIDS, created to allow churches in Armenia to offer input on various aspects on the issue; and peace building, launched to promote a process of regional reconciliation at the grassroots level.

ART has pursued its goals in cooperation with the Armenian Church and local parishes, NGOs, and other partners—all of whom share the ART vision, mission and code of implementing "best practices". ART employs a hands-on approach as a working principle for cooperation. ART initiatives are financially supported by a broad range of committed ecumenical agencies that have a long-term commitment to ART's work.



ART has established a network of NGOs with which it regularly discusses issues including education, HIV/AIDS, regional reconciliation, and agriculture. Representatives from civil society groups, the Ministry of Education, and the National Institute for Education, as well as educators, parents, and teachers have been among the attendees. ART has worked with social services and education NGOs in the northern Armenian town of Vanadzor, integrating them into the network and strengthening their links to the Armenian Church.

As representatives of the Armenian Church, ART members have attended many regional and global ecumenical gatherings, including WCC and CEC Assemblies, as well as different commissions of the WCC.

ART Present and Future

The year 2006 saw the start of a comprehensive consultative process that reached out to a broad cross-section of constituents such as ART member churches, partner NGOs, final beneficiaries, and donor organizations. On the basis of this process, a number of valuable conclusions and ideas were set forth. They were finalized and formulated in the Strategy Paper of ART for 2007-2010, which defines strategic axes and directions for the work; the paper was adopted at the ART annual meeting in September 2006.

As a result of the collective work of its board, staff, partners, and constituency, ART will focus its activities in two main directions. Integrated community development is recognized as a key activity for social organization and mobilization, and it contributes to sustainable development in communities. Peace and reconciliation, the other priority area, is important for the promotion of discussions at the grassroots level in Armenia and thus essential for peace building—which is in turn vital for the future of the country and its economic growth. The involvement of religion in the process of peace and reconciliation is of importance for ART. From the very beginning, we felt strongly encouraged by the inspiration and support we received from His Holiness Karekin II. Under his patronage we were able to organize the initial presentation of

the peace program for foreign diplomats, as well as students at the Theological Academy, thus marking a positive start for further talks and discussion all over Armenia. With the suggestions and support of His Holiness, we came to call on participation from priests as discussion facilitators. Clergy members are better able to convey Christianity's message of peace and love, and their involvement has come to be a significant component of the program. Despite religious differences in the southern Caucasus, it encourages the ART undertaking for peace building and reconciliation discussions. By carrying out work in the two directions mentioned here, ART will continue its capacity building activities.

ART Added Value

ART is primarily a coordinating, facilitating and service providing body between local churches and NGOs and international agencies. Its partners recognize it as the organization playing the unique role of focal point for ecumenical cooperation and networking toward development work and social diaconia all over Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh. Located in the Mother See Holy Etchmiadzin and closely cooperating with members of its congregation, ART is well known to all religious people as an excellent example of the Armenian Church's development work where different stakeholders collaborate for the betterment of the country.

Dr. Karen Nazaryan

Director, WCC Armenia Round Table Inter-Church Charitable Foundation



ARMENIA ROUND TABLE OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (ART) (ILLUSTRATIONS)



▲ General Secretary of WCC, Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia and Director of the Armenia Round Table, Dr. Karen Nazaryan after meeting at Steering Committee of the Action for Churches Together- Development -a newly created global alliance for development work coordination.



▲ Dr. Karen Nazaryan, Director of the Armenian Round table and Archimandrite Hovakim Manukyan sharing their impressions to Armenian public about the WCC 9th General Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14-23 February, 2006 on the TV 2, Armenia.



▲ Meetings and discussions of future plans of the ART with participation of the Board, staff, partners and beneficiaries.



▲ Children of the Mecamor youth center at the ecological class. This ecological project named by the participants “small paradise” provide possibilities to learn and practice ‘nature friendly approach’.



THE YOUTH MOVEMENT IN THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH AND ITS RELATION TO ECUMENISM

With the end of the Communist regime in the late 1980s, a great number of young Armenians joined their country's church. That movement complimented other aspects of a veritable re-birth of the Armenian political and spiritual identity in which more than 2,000 years of Christian history became vibrant again.

By 1990, the first youth organizations and Sunday schools had already been opened. While some of them had grass-roots origins, the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin quickly took them under its auspices. The chief advocate of this effort was His Holiness Karekin II, who was then a Bishop, and the Vicar of the Araratian Pontifical Diocese. He founded many youth organizations within the Araratian Pontifical Diocese, including the Youth group (later of St. Sarkis Church), the Church Youth group of Jrvezh (later included in the Kotayk Diocese), and the Church Youth group of Etchmiadzin. He established and oversaw a number of Sunday schools and formed a workforce of knowledgeable teachers. During his years as bishop, three "Pioneer Palaces" (centers used to spread the doctrine of the communist party and atheism) were converted into Christian Youth Centers, which became warm houses of religious education and centers for sports and cultural activities. During the same period, the Vaskenian Seminary was established at Lake Sevan to become the second theological institution in the country. In later years, a theological faculty was instituted at Yerevan State University, along with a library rich in Christian and ecumenical literature. This extraordinary occasion came about through the great efforts, works and prayers of the late Archbishop Shahe Ajemian. All of the above organizations were formed in the heart of the Armenian Church for the benefit of the youth and created many links and foundations for cooperation with outside churches and organizations.

The Ecumenical relations of the Mother See in modern times began during the Pontificate of His Holiness Vazken I of blessed memory. The involvement of youth, especially the lay youth, grew immensely during the reign of His Holiness Karekin I of blessed memory. Now it is being continued and reinforced through the efforts and prayers of His Holiness Karekin II. Many young people from local youth movements

or from the Mother See have participated in various ecumenical events both in Armenia and abroad. Bishop Mikayel Ajapahyan and Archbishop Yeznik Petrosyan have had notable roles in the support and blessing of many youths at ecumenical events and gatherings. With the blessing and encouragement of Bishop Arakel Karamyan, an Armenian Church youth organization, the Church Youth group of Jrvezh, officially joined an international Christian body, the Syndesmos Fellowship of Orthodox Youth. The partnership, the first of its kind for an Armenian youth group, was formed at the General Assembly in Durres, Albania in 2003. Through the initiative of the Church Youth group of Jrvezh, the World Day of Orthodox Youth has been richly celebrated in Armenia, involving all of the active youth organizations. As a result of those conferences and group discussions, a round table was established from representatives of Armenian youth organizations and institutions. It completed numerous projects, and while it did not become an official body, it was a predecessor for a large youth movement that brought together all the youth unions of the parishes of the Araratian Pontifical Diocese.

Youths have also organized various international Christian events in Armenia, such as Lingua Franca courses, conferences with Syndesmos, and various joint projects in the parishes. It is also significant to note the constructive work of the WCC Armenia Round Table, headed by Dr. Karen Nazaryan. It has funded and supported many projects for the promotion of youth work in general. The first ever inter-denominational gathering for Armenian youths in their motherland took place in Tzaghkadzor in November 2002 and was organized by the Inter-Church Relations Department of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and WCC Armenia Round Table.

Cultural life has also been emphasized during the reign of His Holiness Karekin II, and many previously established youth choirs have been complemented with new ones. A large number of them have held concerts, tours and participated in various festivals and visited churches outside of Armenia. The amateur choir called "Saghmos" (Psalm), of Jrvezh in the Kotayk Diocese, won first prize in the international festival of Orthodox Church music in Poland in 2002.



Mass media has played a large role in informing youth of church initiatives. The Armenian Church's national television station, "Shoghakat TV", currently broadcasts spiritual and educational programs, many of them targeted at young people. The Church also sends information and programs to various television companies and radio stations. Yerevan National Radio broadcasts special discussions several times per week. Most media activities are organized by young members of the Church.

Another media initiative is an on-line e-mail project called "Questions to the Priest," which provides answers to anyone who writes in with an inquiry. Additionally, weekly meetings are organized by the Youth Group of the Araratian Pontifical Diocese on topics that are interesting or perplexing to youths, with participation from prominent representatives of the clergy or laity from both the Armenian Church and the ecumenical world.

Many other lectures, discussions, film screenings and similar events are continuously organized by various youth movements and organizations of the Church, which always concern important and germane topics as ecumenical dialogue, inter-faith dialogue, and Christianity's relation to globalization. There have also been discussions on international documents such as the "Charta Oecumenica" and the draft constitution of the European Union.

The exchange of young clergy is highly refreshing in respect to their educational experience. Young people have been sent to study at famous educational centers of sister churches and the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey. Also, youth from the laity have represented the faith and traditions of the Armenian Church at conferences, seminars, courses, and events organized by various church youth and international Christian organizations throughout the world. Since 1999, young people have been sent as stewards to help prepare and hold large ecumenical gatherings; and participants always find meaning in such events. The first steward sent from the Mother See to the WCC Central Committee meeting in 1999 has said she will never forget her most inspiring moment: during her work for a worship committee, a white marble cross-stone carving (khatchkar) was brought to her for encouragement while she

stood alone before the whole gathering with a guitar to make a special presentation. The cross-stone had been donated to the WCC by His Holiness Vasken I and was located on the central worship table of the great chapel of the Ecumenical Center of Geneva. An Armenian cross-stone contains an eternity symbol - a blossom which always gives hope of resurrection, the buds of which symbolize ongoing renewal—renewal of soul, renewal of the Armenian Church, and renewal of youth.

Ms. Lilit Sargsyan

Youth Union of Jrvezh, Armenian Church Diocese of Kotayk



▲ His Holiness Karekin II with representatives of Syndesmos meeting, Pontifical Residence, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Catholicosate of All Armenians, 22-27 September, 2005



▲ His Holiness Karekin II and Archbishop Leo of Finland in the Youth center of Nork, Yerevan, May 2006.



THE ARMENIAN CHURCH AND OTHER RELIGIONS INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

“Indeed, an important role is entrusted to us, religious leaders and servants that are called to disseminate spiritual values in the life of our nations so that the good will and mutual confidence could be fruitful in our relations.”

Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians

As in the 20th century, the start of the new millennium was a period of dialogues between different religions and cultures. They have been driven by the search for mutual understanding with the end being a consolidation of peace in the world and in the life of nations, and establishing moral values common to all mankind.

The Armenian Church participates in inter-religious dialogues, and its leaders are committed participants and advocates of such discourse. As Armenia is located in a nation surrounded by Islamic countries, and as there are many Armenian communities located in regions with other religions and confessions, the Catholicosate of All Armenians and its spiritual head carry a great responsibility in their role towards establishing relations based on coexistence with other religions and mutual respect.

Since the Catholicossal election in 1999, His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians has actively participated in inter-religious dialogues throughout the world.

In 2000, the first year of the Catholicos’ pontificate, His Holiness Karekin II participated in the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders that was organized by the United Nations. Roughly 3,500 religious leaders and delegations representing the entire spiritual mosaic of the world participated in this unique meeting. His Holiness’ presentation, entitled “Towards Forgiveness and Reconciliation,” outlined the spirit of dialogue that the Armenian Church had adopted: “Though there are differences among our faiths, we all, as Church heads, believe in the importance and significance of love and sympathy as prerequisites to gain forgiveness and reconciliation. This path is not easy at all. He, who seeks reconciliation, should love truth

and justice and respect deeply the rights of individuals and nations.”

With this vision of truth and justice the Catholicos of All Armenians also continues the efforts of preceding Armenian Catholicos who since 1988, have made efforts towards peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. For this purpose His Holiness Alexy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia facilitated a meeting between His Holiness Karekin II and Sheikh ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade, the spiritual leader of the Muslims of the Caucasus. The meeting focused on consolidating peace in the region and on inter-religious tolerance. At the end of the session, His Holiness Alexy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, His Holiness Ilia II, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, and Sheikh ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade, as Chairman of the Caucasian Muslims Office, issued a joint statement. It attributed dialogue between Christians and Muslims in the region as the reason that international disagreements have not escalated into wide-range conflicts between members of the two religions. The second Inter-religious Peacemaking Forum of the CIS Religious Leaders, in 2004, also bolstered peace and confirmed traditional spiritual values among nations. His Holiness Karekin II took part in this forum and became a member of the Inter-religious Council of CIS countries that was instituted during the meeting.

A significant experience for inter-religious relations of the Armenian Church was the participation by His Holiness Karekin II in an ecumenical meeting for peace called “The Courage to Forge a Spiritual Humanism of Peace”. Organized by the community of Sant’Egidio, the forums and discussions took place from September 11-13, 2005 in Lyon, France. His Holiness addressed his message to the participants of the meeting during the solemn Eucharistic celebration of inauguration; participated as a panelist on the topics: John Paul II’s Spiritual Legacy: the Spirit of Assisi and Christian Martyrdom in the 20th Century: A Testament of Faith and Unity; and presided over the ecumenical prayer during the closing ceremony.

In March 2006 His Holiness Karekin II participated in the International Meeting of Religious Leaders in Moscow prior to the annual G-8



Summit. Religious leaders and representatives of Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist and Hindu communities from 49 countries took part in the session. His Holiness’ delivered an address, called “Freedom of Religion and Respect towards People of Other Religions,” during the Second Session of World and Traditional Religions’ Leaders reflecting on current issues pertaining to religious life.

The Armenian Church is guided in her inter-religious relations by the apostolic message, “Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers” (Heb. 13:1-2). During his Pontifical visits to foreign countries, His Holiness Karekin II endeavors to hold informal meetings with leaders of other religions. During his visit to Egypt in 2000 His Holiness met Sheikh Mohamed Sayyed Tantawi, Grand Imam of Al Azhar, at his residence. His Holiness also met with the Mufti of the Republic of Egypt.

Visits by leaders of other religions to Armenia also illustrate the extent of inter-religious dialogues and tolerance advocated in recent years. In 2005, Yona Metzger, Chief Rabbi of Israel, visited the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin for the first time at the invitation of His Holiness Karekin II. In May 2005 the Catholicos of All Armenians, making a Pontifical pilgrimage to Jerusalem along with 80 pilgrims, stated, “This visit will be the beginning of a new dialogue between two religions and nations.” Metzger’s visit was widely followed with great interest by the Armenian public. Escorted by His Holiness, Rabbi Metzger and his entourage met with Armenian Prime Minister Andranik Margarian, visited the Tsitsernakaberd Genocide Memorial, and laid a wreath in memory of the Genocide victims of 1915.

During the same year, His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, hosted the Sheiks of 12 Ashiret Tribes of Syria who visited Armenia in the framework of events dedicated to the 90th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. Their visit was an important gesture of friendship between Armenia and the Arabic nations.

Relations between the Armenian Church and Islam were emphasized during the visit of Dr. Ahmad Bader Eddin Hassoun, Grand Mufti of the Syrian Arab Republic. The visit occurred from September 2-7, 2006 at the invitation of His Holiness Karekin and for the purpose of continued inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. During the five day visit Sheikh Ahmad Bader Eddin Hassoun visited Armenian shrines, the Blue Mosque of Yerevan, and scientific and educational institutions; he also had meetings at the Parliament and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia.

With the blessings of the Catholicos of All Armenians, clergymen of the Armenian Church from both the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and different Dioceses frequently participate in diverse international and local inter-religious meetings and conferences. Their participation advances the faithful peacemaking spirit and mission of the Armenian Church. Noteworthy gatherings include a three day international and inter-religious conference called “Peace and Tolerance, Dialogue and Mutual Understanding in South-Eastern Europe, in the Caucasus and Central Asia,” held in Istanbul in 2005; inter-religious meetings organized by the community of Sant’Egidio; and varied inter-religious meetings in Greece and other countries.

Fr. Vahram Melikyan

Director of Information Services, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin



THE ARMENIAN CHURCH AND OTHER RELIGIONS INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE (ILLUSTRATIONS)



▲ Danilov Monastery, Moscow, Russia, His Holiness Karekin II, His Holiness Alexy II, His Holiness Ilia II and Sheikh ul Islam Allahshukyur Pasha-zade, religious leaders of Armenia, Russia, Georgia and Azerbaijan after the quadrilateral meeting.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II along with the representatives of Sister Churches, Jewish and Muslim leaders.



▲ Dr. Ahmad Bader Eddin Hassoun, Grand Mufti of Syria and his entourage during the solemn Liturgy in the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin. During his visit to Armenia the Grand Mufti also visited and lectured in the Theological Faculty of Yerevan State University. He also paid his tribute to the victims of the Armenian Genocide.



▲ Sheikhs of 12 Ashiret Tribes of Syria, His Holiness Karekin II, next to His Holiness is Dr. Moukhless Pharaon, Charge d'Affaires of Syria.



▲ Dr. Ahmad Bader Eddin Hassoun, Grand Mufti of Syrian Arab Republic with His Holiness Karekin II during the reception in Veharan – residence of the Catholicos. Next to the Catholicos is Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, Apostolic Nuncio in the Trans-Caucasus.



▲ Yona Metzger, Chief Rabbi of Israel and His Holiness Karekin II along with the members of the Rabbi's delegation and the clergy of the Armenian Church.



▲ Sheikhs of 12 Ashiret Tribes of Syria visiting the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin with the representatives of the Foreign Ministry of Armenia.



THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC HOLY CHURCH IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

From the onset of her establishment the Armenian Church has always supported the Armenian state and together faced all its challenges. As the spiritual and administrative head of the Church, the Catholicos of All Armenians has always been involved in state affairs and had the most active role in international relations during the reigns of the Armenian kings.

After the collapse of Armenian statehood in 1045 and the last Armenian kingdom (Cilicia) in 1375, the Armenian Church accepted the responsibility of representing the Armenian nation governed under the occupation of foreign rulers. It assumed this role in Ottoman Turkey from 1667, in Safavid Persia from the start of the 16th century, and in Jerusalem as early as the 7th century. Foreign state officials recognized the Armenian Catholicos and Patriarchs as the only spiritual, and, in some civil cases, the only official representatives of the Armenian nation. It is well known that in those countries where vast Armenian communities had existed since the Middle Ages local governors regarded Armenian spiritual leaders as their people's representatives.

In these extraordinary conditions the Armenian clergy, led by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, had to engage in diplomacy. They had immediate and undeniable participation in the "armenization" of treaties between states both near to and far from Armenia, gaining reconciliation, establishing commercial relations and carrying out various special and delicate missions. The history of Armenia is replete with tangible examples of such activities.

The tragic events at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century in western Armenia—the Armenian Genocide—as well as World War I, dispersed the majority of Armenians all over the world. The groups comprising the present day Armenian Diaspora is the direct result of these atrocities.

In dozens of countries where the survivors of the Armenian Genocide found shelter, they built churches, schools, and institutions of culture and sports, also establishing mass media and other public organizations. Wherever the Armenians settled, they became honest and loyal citizens for host countries, contributing to the development and progress

of their new homes. However, Armenians have always remained faithful to their historical memory, keeping nostalgia for their motherland alive, especially in regard to their traditional faith and the Armenian Church. Thus, throughout the course of the 20th century, the Armenian Church—the Catholicosate of All Armenians with its hierarchical sees (the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia, the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople)—as well as many worldwide dioceses, engaged in international relations, thereby becoming a special entity in Armenia's foreign policy.

During the 16 years since Armenia gained independence, in parallel to the continuous growth of the country's international presence, the Armenian Church and especially the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin have assumed a greater role on the global stage. The Church has a great influence on modern Armenian society and this influence is becoming stronger with the gradual healing of the wounds and sufferings inflicted by the atheist Soviet regime. The State recognizes Holy Etchmiadzin as the spiritual capital of Armenia. During visits to the nation of official foreign delegations, heads of foreign states and governments pay tribute to the Catholicos of All Armenians.

His Holiness Karekin II has successfully continued the international activities of his predecessors during the eight years of his Pontificate. His undeniable services in improving the relations of the Republic of Armenia with many countries, in establishing mutual understanding, and developing fellowship among nations, have been awarded by state honors and insignias. Many heads of states and renowned politicians who have friendly relations with Armenia have been given the highest church insignias by the encyclicals of the Catholicos of All Armenians.

Meetings with leaders are usually included in the program of each visit of His Holiness Karekin II to foreign countries. These sessions are proper occasions to represent the problems that Armenia is facing today, and to discuss ways the Armenian Church can help improve bilateral relations.

From the first days of the independence of the Republic of Armenia, the conflict of Nagorno Karabakh has been the main problem in the

country's foreign policy. The Armenian Church acts in favor of realizing the right of the Armenians in the disputed region to live freely and build their own country. At the same time, the Church attaches importance to the fact that the conflict of Nagorno Karabakh is political, but never a controversy anchored in inter-religious hatred and intolerance: His Holiness Karekin II has never avoided dialogues with Sheikh ul-Islam Allahshukyur Pashazade, spiritual leader of the Muslims of Azerbaijan, regardless of who suggests them. According to evidence from international mediators and mass media, all previous phases of the leaders' dialogue have been helpful in preventing the deepening and spread of mutual hostility and hatred.

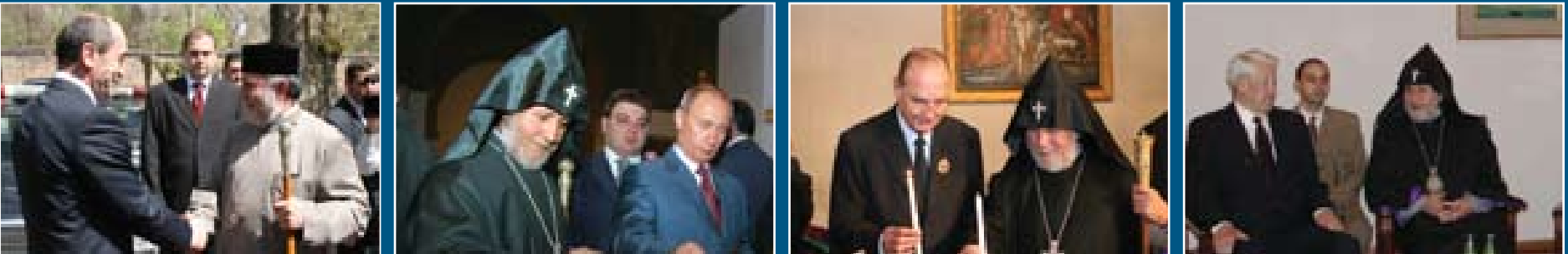
Starting in 1998, the diplomatic branch of the Armenian government has advocated a policy to increase international recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide. Since the time of the first Republic of Armenia (1918-1920), the Armenian Church has continuously worked for international condemnation of the greatest crime ever committed against the Armenian nation, using her power and influence in support of these endeavors.

In recent times, the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin has employed her resources to draw the attention of the world community to rightfully condemn the Armenian Genocide.

Cooperating with international organizations as well as foreign embassies and Diplomatic missions of countries represented in Armenia, the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin has brought attention to various social problems affecting the nation. Issues of poverty, the availability of education, ecology, and inter-religious reconciliation have been focused on.

During the course of centuries, Armenia has been a crossroads between north and south, east and west. Today the small republic continues to offer special contributions to the improving relations between its Christian and Muslim neighbors. The inter-religious dialogue with Islamic countries in the region is an essential component for deepening the diverse relations of Armenia with those nations.

Aram Safaryan
Candidate of Philological Sciences, Docent of International Relations Chair
Yerevan State University



THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC HOLY CHURCH IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (ILLUSTRATIONS)



▲ His Holiness Karekin II Receives Russian President Vladimir Putin, March 25, 2005.
His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, received Mr. Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. Greeting the first visit of the Russian President to the spiritual center of all Armenians, His Holiness reflected on the decades of cooperation and friendship between the Armenian and Russian peoples. His Holiness remarked, “This is a historical visit that will be registered in the annals of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin as a new page of the historical Armenian-Russian relations. We are pleased that this tradition of friendship continues in all areas of life filling our people with hope and faith as we face new a new era”. The Catholicos expressed his appreciation to the Russian President for attributing great importance to the role and significance of spiritual values in the course of improving the social life in Russia.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, His Excellency Jacques Chirac, President of the Republic of France lighting candles in the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin, October 1, 2006



▲ His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians and Mr. Kofi Annan, General Secretary of the United Nations Organizations, UN headquarters, August 2000, USA.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians and Her Majesty Elizabeth, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, June 11, 2004.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians and Mr. George Bush, President of the USA, May 23, 2001.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians and Mr. Boris Yeltsin, ex-president of the Russian Federation, October 2002, Veharan – residence of the Catholicos.



▲ 27 May, 2007. Mr. Arkady Ghukasyan, President of the Nagorno Karabagh Republic rewards His Holiness Karekin II with insignia of St. Gregory the Illuminator.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II Receives Prime Minister of Lebanon, April 2, 2004.
His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, received His Excellency Rafik Hariri, Prime Minister of Lebanon, and his delegation in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. His Holiness welcomed the honored guest to the worldwide headquarters of the Armenian Church, and reflected upon the friendship and warm relations which exist between Armenia and Lebanon, according great importance to the role of the Armenian community in Lebanon in the progress of that country.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II receives Mr. Leonid Kuchma, President of the Ukraine, October 11, 2002.



▲ His Beatitude Mesrob II Mutafian, Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, Mr. Robert Kocharyan, President of the Republic of Armenia, Mr. Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian National Authority, His Beatitude Torgom Manukyan, Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem; Jerusalem, January 18, 2000.



▲ His Holiness Karekin II Receives President Mohammad Khatami of the Islamic Republic of Iran, September 9, 2004.

His Holiness welcomed President Khatami, and referred to the mission of the Mother See in the life of the Armenian people: “Holy Etchmiadzin is the very soul of the Armenian individual. It is the beating heart of the Armenian body. The sons and daughters of our nation dispersed throughout the world, when making the sign of the cross, have always directed their gaze toward their spiritual home, toward Holy Etchmiadzin”.



▲ Visit of Mr. Trajan Basescu, President of Romania to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, October 5, 2006



▲ His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, receives Mr. Mikhail Saakashvili, President of Georgia, March 13, 2004.



REALIZED ECUMENISM.

The cooperation between the Church of Armenia and the Church of Denmark.

Arriving in Armenia, the first ecumenical problem I had to deal with was one of culture. While the Lutheran Church of Denmark is quite egalitarian, with the difference between bishop and pastor more a difference of function than a difference in status, the Armenian Church has stronger hierarchical features. To a Danish newcomer, therefore, His Holiness Karekin II appeared as an impressive, not to say awe inspiring, figure—considering he is Patriarch of an ancient church, and treated with the utmost reverence. Very soon, however, I realized that when discussing the present situation of Armenian Church life, His Holiness adheres to a policy of open minded straight-forwardness.

- “Now you have been here for some time and acquainted yourself with the life of our Church,” he said. “Please tell me, which problems do you see?”

- “But Your Holiness,” I replied, “I am a guest here.”

- “If you really love our Church, you have to see the problems! We must be conscious about the needs, if we want to serve the Church.”

This was His Holiness’ answer. I think I would not be mistaken to take it to be more than a casual remark—something coming close to a mission-statement. When love is the motive, realism is the fruit. Serving in love means keeping an open mind in a continuous effort to understand and meet needs.

When such a statement characterizes the atmosphere, ecumenical conversation and cooperation becomes easy and fruitful. It would be very interesting, if a Danish bishop posed the same question to an Armenian priest.

History

The contact between the Church of Denmark and the Armenian Church has a history of more than one hundred years. Urged to action by reports about Turkish atrocities, Mrs. Karen Jeppe arrived in Urfa in 1903. After the genocide she founded an Armenian colony in Aleppo and worked as a League of Nations commissioner, freeing Armenian women and children from Turkish harems. In 1907 another lady, Mrs. Maria Jacobsen, arrived in Turkey. During the genocide she followed the expelled Armenians to Lebanon and founded the orphanage “The Birds Nest” in Beirut.

After these brave women a continuing series of envoys followed. First they were mainly doing diakonia, but as the situation stabilized, they more and more switched to education. Since 1922, the Danish contact to the Armenian Church has mainly run through the organisation called the Danish-Armenian Mission. In 1991, the independence of the republic opened up new opportunities for contact. In 1994, Pastor Michael West and his wife Mona were sent to Armenia, and in 2004 my wife Anna-Kathrine Thunbo Pedersen and I took over.

Realization of ecumenism

Unity is the great goal of the ecumenical efforts. Big conferences, theological debates and common studies are indispensable as steps towards its realization. Estrangement and sometimes even mutual condemnations must be overcome.

As necessary as these things might be, however, they are only a first step. If the ecumenical process stops here and no further steps are taken, the common declarations are left hanging in the air as mere words awaiting their realization.

Big scale meetings find their fulfilment in small scale work. Locally in praxis in concrete efforts. It is necessarily so. High level conferences have a value in themselves, but their potential is only fully unleashed through dealing with specific tasks in the here-and-now situation of a church. The process of ecumenism reaches its goal through brotherly cooperation in work, witness and worship.



Up until now the world has not seen too many instances of such a fulfilment of ecumenism. But the fact is: This is taking place under the auspices of His Holiness Karekin II, and has been taking place for the whole time of his reign. In Armenia envoys from another church are working within the framework of the Apostolic Church, utilizing the insight and experience of their church in her service.

I see no great need to conceal, that it is a great privilege and joy for my wife and I to be a part of this history. It is something that makes one grateful and humble at the same time, and I must admit: a little proud as well.

Explanation

Uncommon occurrences always demand explanation. When asked about the reason why this example of realized ecumenism is possible, one can point to both the long history of cooperation and the close personal contact between our churches, through which mutual trust has been built up. Those are the most obvious elements of an answer.

Digging deeper down, we can point to certain dogmatic peculiarities of our two churches. The dogmatic stance of the Armenian Church is the Nicene Creed from the ecumenical meeting of the year 381. Since then, the Armenian Church has been characterized by an outspoken reluctance to dogmatize its ceremonies or the opinions of its teachers. Teaching and liturgy are understood as expositions of the truth of dogma, as something that comes after and stands under the dogma. Thus the basic outlook of the Armenian Church is ecumenical. (See Malachia Ormanian: The Church of Armenia, Montreal 2000).

The corresponding feature of the Lutheran Church, on the other side, is a similar reluctance to give the question of church order and ceremonies a decisive status for the unity of the church. "To the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments," as one of the Lutheran confessions state (Confessio Augustana 7).

Consequently, on the dogmatic level, the road between our churches is free of obstacles. For a number of years there has been a vivid exchange in both directions, which can be expected to gain even more impetus in the years to come.

Partnership agreement

In 2006 a partnership agreement was signed between the Armenian Church and the Danish Armenian Mission. Acknowledging the growing friendship between the Armenian Church and the Lutheran Church of Denmark and in consequence of the will to expand the brotherly relationship, representatives from Denmark were received by His Holiness to discuss the goals and means of future cooperation.

Highlights of the agreement include:

- A Danish theologian teaching at the theological faculty in Holy Etchmiadzin;
- Exchange of theology students (the first Armenian student has already studied in Denmark);
- Partnership in developing and running centres for education and diaconia in Armenia such as Sunday schools, camps, and social care centres; and
- Training of Armenian priests and NGO personnel at the Diaconal Academy in Denmark (until now 16 Armenian students have taken part in this program through the WCC Round Table Armenia)

Pastor Per Damgaard Pedersen

Lecturer at the Gevorkian Theological Seminary



▲ 16. October 2006. His Holiness Karekin II and the board of the Danish Armenian Mission in Holy Etchmiadzin after the ceremony of signing a partnership agreement between the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Danish Armenian Mission.

From left to right: Father Barujr, Veharan; Mrs. Ingrid Bjerre, fundraiser; Mr. Mikkel Bandak, medical student; Mrs. Hanne Froekjaer Jensen, teacher; Mr. Uffe Torm, manager of Danish Mission Council Development Department; Mr. Peder Oestermark Andreasen, Executive Director; Rev. Per Damgaard Pedersen; Rev. Jørgen Jørgensen, President of the board of the Lutheran Faculty of Theology, Denmark; His Holiness Karekin II; Rev. Holger Haldrup, President of the board of the Danish Armenian Mission; Mrs. Anna-Kathrine Thunbo Pedersen, project manager; Rev. Jørgen Sejrgaard, member of the board of the Danish Bible Institute; Mrs. Helle Sejrgaard, chief editor; Mrs. Karin Andreasen, secretary; Father Hovakim, Interchurch Department of Holy Etchmiadzin.



▲ 17. October 2006. His Grace bishop Arshak and Reverend Holger Haldrup, signing the partnership agreement between the Armenian Apostolic Church and The Danish Armenian Mission, assisted by Father Barujr and Father Hovakim.

ARMENIA: NOTES OF AN ECUMENICAL JOURNEY



Armenia. The word itself resonated with mystery when I was first invited to visit the country in early 1996. I had just taken up my functions as the Europe Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), and the general secretary had received an urgent request from the newly-elected Catholicos Karekin I to come and assist the church with its reconstruction after decades of communist oppression.

First impressions

That first journey proved not to be easy. From Geneva, we traveled to Paris and joined a busy crowd of Armenians returning to their motherland. The massive Soviet transport plane that carried us was filled with huge bundles and crates of humanitarian supplies, leaving only half the seats for the passengers. Late into the night we landed without warning. Assuming it to be our destination, I was curious to see my fellow passengers simply waiting. It turned out that we had made a forced landing in Sukhumi, as the airport in Armenia was fogbound. It was a long night, but finally we were able to complete the final leg of our journey to Yerevan. The journey proved to be a foretaste of the challenges that lay ahead of us.

In 1996 Armenia was struggling to survive. Four short years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the landlocked country was at war with its neighbor Azerbaijan, was faced with a total blockade of its border with Turkey, while Georgia to the North was struggling with civil war. The country's geographical isolation peaked when the country's needs were greatest. The result was shortages of vital necessities, especially energy, and even food was rationed. As in other times of trial, the Armenian people was turning to its one source of hope: the Church, and its leader, Catholicos Karekin I.

Legacy of the past

It was not the first time that the WCC had sought to assist this small Christian country. In December 1988, a massive earthquake hit the North of the country, devastating the cities of Spitak and Gyumri, killing thousands, and leaving tens of thousands without homes. The earthquake provoked massive international and ecumenical solidarity and assistance. But it also revealed the profound disorganization and corruption of the Soviet authorities at all levels, and perhaps accelerated the collapse of the Soviet Union. By 1996, some of the material damage of the earthquake had been repaired, but much of the population remained dependent on outside support and traumatized by the experience. Symbolically, a church has been built, with the support of WCC, above the very epicenter of the earthquake in Spitak, as a symbol of healing.

An ancient church with modern challenges

Armenia is proud to be the first officially Christian state, and today around 90% of the Armenian population claims nominal membership in the Armenian Apostolic Church. In the 1990s there were an estimated 300 functioning churches for a population of around 3 million. The Apostolic Church, despite its numerous formal adherents, is still emerging from Ottoman domination and the traumatic experience of Soviet oppression, when hundreds of priests were imprisoned or killed. The main result was a rupture in parish and monastic life, a lack of adequately trained and educated clergy, and a limited religious culture in the population. Almost by miracle, in 1995, the Church found a leader at the level of its historic challenges.

Catholicos Karekin I was an impressive man. Small in stature, with graying hair, luminous eyes, and a charismatic presence, the Catholicos was fired with an intense energy and purpose, conscious of the immense task that was his. He was faced with a double difficulty: he was a child of "Western Armenia", and was first the church leader of the community of people that found itself in Syria and Lebanon after the forced exile and genocide at the hand of the Turks in the early years of the 20th century.

In post-Soviet Armenia, the Catholicos therefore found himself speaking a different cultural language, free of Soviet influence, than his flock. Secondly, following his election as the first "Supreme Patriarch of All Armenians" in the post-communist period, he became head of a church, whose spiritual and intellectual capacities had been almost completely decimated by the years of State atheism, and without even basic infrastructure. As the Catholicos pointed out to us on our arrival, even the telephone system did not work properly, and more than one dinner in his company was spent in darkness when the generators failed. Karekin I was a profoundly ecumenical figure, and was described by the general secretary of the WCC as one of the "primary architects" of inter-church reconciliation of his time. Karekin held various leadership positions in the WCC and other ecumenical bodies before taking up his final office as head of the Armenian Church. He set the church on a resolutely ecumenical and European course. An untimely death in 1999 prevented Catholicos Karekin from realizing his plans. During his last months, throat cancer prevented this gifted orator from speaking, and we felt his moments of despair that he would be unable to complete what he had started. His successor, also named Karekin, was a younger man, born in Soviet Armenia and theologically educated in Moscow and in the West. As archbishop, Karekin II demonstrated his talents as a dynamic organizer, and opened a series of remarkable youth centers that gathered young people after school for cultural, educational and religious activities. The Catholicos is keen to modernize the church and his intimate knowledge of technology and materials, and his practical approach, has surprised more than one church architect. Following his election in 1999, Karekin II would soon prove himself an able administrator and influential personality in Armenian public life, and has strengthened ties with both the other Oriental Orthodox churches, and with the Russian Orthodox Church.



Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin

It was in Etchmiadzin, the heart of Armenian Christianity since the 4th century, that I had my first encounter with spiritual Armenia. It was a place that marked me more than any of the other remarkable monasteries in the country, and was to be the cradle of an important ecumenical child.

Like much of life in Armenia, first appearances are austere. A large, walled compound and carefully-tended gardens surround the striking, massive stone church of dark volcanic stone. It is only when the visitor dwells in the place, and contemplates the church from without, but also from within, that he is slowly filled with the spirit of the place, and the centuries of prayer, life, suffering and resurrection wash over him like waters lapping at a rock.

There are few other places in the world in which Christian liturgy has been celebrated almost without interruption for fifteen centuries. During my subsequent regular visits, I came to see the place as an oasis, where Armenians (and non-Armenians) come to feel a spiritual presence, prayer, quietness and a link with the past in a society experiencing much upheaval.

The acute needs of the church that we encountered contrasted with the external stillness of the place and seemed almost insurmountable, ranging from the shortage of church buildings for worship to the provision of basic Christian literature for the population, from the social needs of the poor, to plans for new educational and training initiatives. While some of the donors initially recognized only the social and humanitarian priorities, the Catholicos wisely insisted on keeping together the various dimensions of society, spiritual, intellectual, cultural and economic, in a context where the reflexes of community life had been undermined by the communist experience.

Practical responses

The first seeds of a practical response were found in an ecumenical setting, a “Round Table,” to which all who desired to work together for the healing and reconstruction effort were welcomed. The concept, used by the WCC in numerous countries, was new in this Eastern Europe setting, but met with a positive response. The principle was simple: local church representatives, civil society activists, donors and other actors would work together in an open and iterative way to analyze their needs and priorities and develop an action plan in which all had a stake.

Very soon, the major focus of this joint effort was defined: education, agricultural development and capacity building, later to be supplemented with HIV/AIDS prevention and peace-building. In all aspects the program gave priority to the most vulnerable sections of the society, reaching out to those who could not access more traditional aid programs. The program soon came to be recognized by the government and by UNDP as one of the most innovative and integrated aid efforts in the country.

Instead of simply funding projects, the Round Table enabled a global, holistic approach to a context, building shared interest and ownership. While some, usually the more results-oriented Westerners, expressed frustration that the methodology was slow, for the local churches and NGO leaders the careful and dialogical process built trust and mutual understanding that was a pre-condition for a long-term approach. Soon, the majority Armenian Apostolic hosts of the Round Table were joined by Catholic and Protestant church leaders, and the informal gatherings grew into structured annual programmes, eventually leading to the establishment of a full-time office in Etchmiadzin and, later, a national Foundation.



Vulnerability and hope

Numerous visits and encounters took place over the years, with cultural and intellectual personalities as well as with political leaders such as prime minister (later president) Robert Kocharian, the speaker of parliament and presidential hopeful Karen Demirchian (who was brutally assassinated in 1999) and the talented and articulate foreign minister Vartan Oskanian. These years were not to be without sadness, however, and we felt the vulnerability of the country, and experienced its painful difficulties. But we also felt that the determined, and often heroic, efforts of the Round Table staff and partners and hundreds of teachers, farmers and workers involved in the projects, were contributing in a small way to the gradual transformation of the country.

More than a decade later, the Armenia Round Table still subsists, managing dozens of social-development, educational, training and other projects. Other related initiatives, notably the establishment of ECLOF, a substantial ecumenical micro-credit program, have also taken root in the country. Not least, the Round Table remains the only platform where representatives of all the main Christian churches in Armenia, both majority and minority, can meet together on a regular basis, despite differences and occasional tensions.

Much has changed since my first visit in 1996. The Apostolic Church, under the energetic and visionary leadership of Catholicos Karekin I and his successor Karekin II, has developed in remarkable ways. Churches have been built and restored, seminaries opened, and a new generation of clergy is completing training. The institutional and pastoral demands on the church are enormous, and the church is struggling to develop appropriate methodologies and instruments for its educational, missionary and spiritual tasks.

Despite the immense challenges facing the church and society, there remains a quiet determination and confidence among Armenians, eternal survivors of a turbulent history. A decade after my first visit, Armenia is no longer a mystery to me, but rather a home from home, where I know that I shall, someday, return.

Alexander Belopopsky

ANNEXES

INTER-CHURCH VISITS OF HIS HOLINESS KAREKIN II, SUPREME PATRIARCH AND CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS, 1999-2007

1. February 29, 2000 – Official visit to Moscow, Russia, upon the invitation of His Holiness Alexy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.
2. May 9, 2000 – Official visit to Tbilisi, Georgia, upon the invitation of His Holiness Ilia II, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church.
3. July 12, 2000 – Visit to St. Petersburg, Russia, to preside over the re-consecration service of St. Catherine Armenian Church. In attendance were His Holiness Alexy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, who co-presided during the consecration.
4. August 17-18, 2000 – Visit to Moscow, Russia, and His Holiness Alexy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, to participate in the dedication of an Armenian cross-stone (khatchkar), at the newly constructed Russian Orthodox Cathedral of Christ the Savior as a sign of fraternal relations between the two Churches. After the solemn dedication service the Cathedral of Christ the Savior was consecrated.
5. August 28-31, 2000 – Participated in the Millennium World Peace Summit in New York, USA, organized under the auspices of the United Nations and the World Council of Religious Leaders.
6. September 17, 2000 – Official visit to Romania upon the invitation of His Holiness Teoctist I, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church.
7. October 12, 2000 – Official visit to Egypt upon the invitation of His Holiness Shenouda III, Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Patriarch of the See of St. Mark.
8. October 19, 2000 – Official visit to Ethiopia upon the invitation of His Holiness Abuna Paulos, Patriarch of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Orthodox Church.
9. November 8, 2000 – Official visit to the Vatican to meet with His Holiness John Paul II. On this occasion, the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church presented relics of St. Gregory the Illuminator to the Armenian Church. His Holiness also participated in the opening of a symposium dedicated to the theology, liturgy and history of the Oriental Orthodox Churches.
10. November 24, 2000 – Visit to Moscow, Russia, to meet with His Holiness Alexy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia and Sheikh ul-Islam Allahshukyur Pashazade, Spiritual leader of the Muslims in Azerbaijan.
11. February 26-28, 2001 – Official visit to the headquarters of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva, upon the invitation of Rev. Dr. Konrad Raiser, General Secretary of the WCC.
12. April 21-22, 2001 – Visit to Moscow, Russia, and His Holiness Alexy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, to participate in the services and celebrations dedicated to the 1700th anniversary of Armenia's adoption of Christianity as the state religion.
13. June 25-29, 2002 – Official visit to Bulgaria upon the invitation of His Beatitude Maxim II, Head of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and Metropolitan of Sofia, and the Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.
14. November 26, 2003 – Visit to Moscow to meet with the religious leaders of Russia, Georgia and Azerbaijan.
15. March 2-4, 2004 – Participated in the Second Inter-Religious Peacemaking Forum of the CIS, held in Moscow.
16. June 2, 2004 – Official visit to Finland upon the invitation of His Eminence Archbishop Jukka Paarma, Head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

17. June 10, 2004 – Official visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland upon the invitation of His Grace Dr. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury.
18. October 16, 2004 – Presided over the service of blessing the foundation of the Holy Cross Armenian Church and Diocesan Headquarters in Moscow, Russia, attended by His Holiness Alexy II Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.
19. May 31, 2005 – Visit to Moscow, Russia, to meet with His Holiness Alexy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia to discuss the mutual relations between the Armenian and Russian Churches.
20. September 10, 2005 – Attended “The Courage to Forge a Spiritual Humanism of Peace” meeting, at a gathering of religious leaders in Lyon, France.
21. November 28, 2005 – Official visit to Vienna, Austria, upon the invitation of His Grace Alois Schwartz, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Gurk, Austria. While in Vienna, His Holiness also attended an international conference dedicated to the 1600th anniversary of the creation of the Armenian alphabet.
22. June 20-27, 2006 – Official visit to Istanbul, Turkey upon the invitation of His All Holiness Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople.
23. July 3-5, 2006 – Participated in the Forum of World Religious Leaders, held in Moscow, Russia.
24. September 12-14, 2006 – Participated in the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions II, held in Astana, Kazakhstan.

CONFERENCES IN ARMENIA

1. “Christianity and Law” – October 4-5, 2000 in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia
2. International Conference “Church, State, Society and Crisis in World Development” – February 21, 2001 in Yerevan Armenia at the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia. Organized by the International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Nations within the Framework of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy.
3. Joint meeting of the “Church and Society” and “Faith and Order” Commissions of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) – May 28-June 4, 2001, Tsaghkadzor, Armenia.
4. “In Search of the Lost Pearl” – June 1-6, 2001, Tsaghkadzor, Armenia. A meeting of the Monks of the East and West.
5. Joint International Commission on “The Anglican and Oriental Orthodox Churches on Christology” – November 5-10, 2002, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia.
6. “The Church and the Youth in the Countries of Eastern Europe and Former Soviet Union” – November 11-13, 2002, Tsaghkadzor, Armenia
7. International Conference “The Caucasian Churches and their Law” – September 8-13, 2003, Tsaghkadzor, Armenia. Organized by the Conference of the Society for the Law of the Eastern Churches.
8. Steering Committee of the “Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC” – April 13-16, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia.
9. “Green Theology” – July 21-23, 2004, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia. Seminar-consultation organized by the WCC Armenian Round Table International Charitable Foundation.



10. “The Schools of Armenian Interpretative Literature” – September 22-24, 2004, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia. Conference on organized within the framework of the celebrations dedicated to the 1600th anniversary of the creation of the Armenian alphabet.
11. “Unity in Diversity: Being Different, Being Together” – September 22- 27, 2005, Vanadzor, Armenia. Organized by “Syndesmos” Orthodox Youth Fellowship.
12. International Conference “Translation of the Bible into Armenian” – October 6, 2005, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia.
13. International Joint Commission on “Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches” – January 27 - 30, 2006, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia.
14. Meeting of the “Church and Society” Commission of the Conference of European Churches, June 14-19, 2007
15. Meeting of the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches, September 24-29, 2007

VISITS OF HEADS OF CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS

1. His Holiness John Paul II, Bishop of Rome, Pope of the Roman Catholic Church, 2001
2. His All Holiness Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, 2001
3. His Holiness Alexy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, 2001
4. His Holiness Baselios Mar Thoma Matthews II, Catholicos of the East And Malankara Metropolitan, 2001
5. His Beatitude Petros VII, Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, 2001
6. His Holiness Teoctist I, Archbishop of Bucharest, Metropolitan of Ungro-Wallachia, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 2001

7. His Grace George Carrey, Archbishop of Canterbury, Head of the Anglican Church, 2001
8. Reverend Doctor Konrad Raiser, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, 2000, 2001
9. Official visitation by His Eminence Archbishop Jukka Paarma, Head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, 2002
10. Official visitation by His Holiness Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church, 2002
11. Official visitation of His Holiness Shenouda III, Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church, 2003
12. Official visitation of Rabbi Yona Metzger, Chief Rabbi of Israel and his delegation, 2005
13. Official visitation of His Eminence Leo Makkonen, Archbishop of Karelia and All Finland, 2006
14. Dr. Ahmad Badr Eddin Hassoun, Syrian Grand Mufti Sheikh of the Syrian Arab Republic and his delegation, 2006
15. His Grace Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, 2007
16. Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, 2007

VISITS HIGH RANKING CLERGYMEN TO HOLY ETCHMIADZIN 2001

Visitations during the Jubilee celebrations dedicated to the 1700th anniversary of Armenia's adoption of Christianity as the state religion

Church Delegations

Roman Catholic Church

- His Eminence Walter Cardinal Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
- Bishop Mark Ouellet, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
- Monsignor Johan Bonny, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
- Monsignor Claudio Gugerotti

Ethiopian Tewahedo Orthodox Church

- Bishop Epiphanius, representative of the Patriarch

Orthodox Church of Greece

- Metropolitan Panteleimon of Attica

Orthodox Church of Cyprus

- Metropolitan Chrysostomos

Orthodox Church of Georgia

- Metropolitan Daniel of Sukhum and Abkhazia
- Archbishop Seraphim of Borzhom and Akhalkalak
- Bishop Theodore of Akhaltsikhe
- Greek Patriarchate of Jerusalem
- Archimandrite Theofylaktos Georgiadis

Bulgarian Orthodox Church

- Metropolitan Cyril of Varna

Serbian Orthodox Church

- Bishop Pachomije of Vranje
- Bishop Ignatije of Branicevo

Syrian Orthodox Church

- Bishop Julius Yesu Chichek

Coptic Orthodox Church

- Bishop Angaelos

Episcopalian Church of USA

- Canon John Backus

Lutheran Church of Sweden

- Bishop Jonas Jonson of Strangnas
- Reverend Christofer Lundgren

Lutheran Church of Denmark

- Bishop Erik Norman Svendsen
- Father Michael Westh

Mekhitarist Congregation

- Abbot Very Reverend Father Elia Kilaghbian

Estonian Council of Churches

- Bishop Einar Soone
- Reverend Peeter Kaldur



Evangelical Church of Germany

- Doctor Martin Tamke

Representatives of Ecumenical Organizations

World Council of Churches

- Reverend Doctor Konrad Raiser, General Secretary

Conference of European Churches

- Doctor Karsten Fledelius

2002

1. Bishop Josef Homeyer, Bishop Emeritus of Hildesheim and President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conferences of Europe, January 12
2. Rev. Dr. Miller Milloy, General Secretary of the United Bible Societies for the Middle East and European Regions, March 20
3. Ecumenical delegation consisting of nearly 120 members of the Evangelical and Catholic Churches, April 16
4. His Eminence Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington of the Roman Catholic Church, July 1
5. Representatives of the National Council of Churches and Catholic Bishops’ Conferences of the USA, August 22-25

2003

1. Ecumenical delegation of members of the Evangelical, Catholic and Armenian Churches of France, initiated by the organization “France-Armenia Protestant Solidarity”, April 23
2. Official visitation of His Holiness Ilia II, Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church, May 7-9
3. Roman Catholic delegation from the USA headed by His Eminence William Cardinal Keeler, Archbishop of Baltimore, August 27-September 2

4. His Excellency Archbishop Jean Louis Tauran, Vatican Undersecretary for Relations with States, September 21

2004

1. His Eminence Cardinal Phillip Barbarin, Archbishop of Lyon, May 27-31
2. Pilgrims from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Trent headed by Father Piero Rattini, August 4
3. Deacon Alexander Vasyutin and Dr. Sergey Govorun, associates of the Department of External Church Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church, November 24-28

2005

1. On the solemn occasion of commemorating the 90th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide a number of representatives from Sister Churches and ecumenical organizations visited the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin in April:
 - Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, Apostolic Nuncio in the Trans-Caucasus, Roman Catholic Church
 - Archbishop Seraphim Jojua, Georgian Orthodox Church
 - Archbishop Mor Malatius Malki Malki, Syrian Orthodox Church
 - Bishop Corneliu Barladeanu, Romanian Orthodox Church
 - Bishop Ioannis of Thermopylae, Orthodox Church of Greece
 - Bishop David Tustin, Anglican Church
 - Bishop Mark Yegorevsky, Deputy Head of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Vicar General of the Diocese of Moscow , Russian Orthodox Church
 - Reverend Doctor Jean Arnold de-Clermont, President of the Conference of European Churches
 - Deacon Alexander Vasyutin, Russian Orthodox Church

- Doctor Sergey Govorun, Russian Orthodox Church
2. Archbishop Frank Griswold, Head of the Episcopalian Church of the USA and his delegation, July 4-9
 3. Delegation of Canadian Church leaders; Archbishop Andrew Hutchison, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada; Archbishop Sotirios, Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Canada; Archbishop Brendan O’Brien, President for the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and Professor Doctor Richard Schneider, President of the Canadian Council of Churches, August 25-30

2006

4. Representatives of the Evangelical Church of Germany, May 27-June 3
5. Members of the Anglican and Eastern Churches Association project “Pilgrimage to biblical countries” headed by Rt. Rev. Geoffrey Rowel, Bishop of Gibraltar, September 11 - 22
6. Rev. Holger Haldrum, Head of Mission for the Danish Armenian Mission, on the occasion of a “Memorandum of Understanding” being signed between the Armenian Church and the Danish Armenian Mission, October 16.

