



**CATHOLIC
HOME
MISSIONS**

Rich Faith of an Ancient Culture



Bishop Mouradian celebrates Mass at Our Lady of Nareg Parish on Easter.

By Beth Griffin

“**B**eing Armenian and being Christian are like two wings of the same bird. The bird can’t fly with only one wing,” says Bishop Mikael Antoine Mouradian, leader of the Armenian Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg.

“My first priority is to keep my people in the Catholic faith with the growing challenges in the United States and Canada. Second is to keep them as Armenians, because for us, to be Christian and to be Armenian is one thing. We can’t imagine an Armenian who is not Christian,” he says. The Christian faith is inextricably intertwined with Armenian culture and national identity because Armenia has been a Christian country for more than 1,700 years.

Bishop Mouradian’s diocese serves the entire Armenian Catholic population of 45,000 in the two countries. It receives grant support from Catholic Home Missions.

Waves of Immigration Build a Church

Armenia sits at the intersection of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. In 301 AD, it was the first sovereign nation to accept Christianity as a state religion. Christianity was suppressed in Armenia for more than 600 years under the Ottoman authority. More recently, Armenia gained its sovereignty after the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1991. “Being Christian kept us Armenian,” Bishop Mouradian says. Since the faith was widely adopted early in the modern history of Armenia it became deeply rooted in cultural identity.

Armenian Catholics began arriving in the United States in the late nineteenth century, following the first in a heart-breaking series of massacres and genocides in their homeland. They settled on the East Coast and asked Patriarch Stepan-Bedros X Azarian to send a priest from Armenia to serve them. Bishop Mouradian says the first wave of Armenian immigrants concluded with survivors of the 1915 genocide that killed more than 1.5 million people. A second wave of immigrants came after the Second World War, and the most recent wave began after imperiled minority Christians fled civil wars in the 1970s in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Iran. Because of the Armenian diaspora, today’s Armenian Catholic immigrants generally arrive in North America after a generation or two in the Middle East. As a result, newcomers may speak Arabic, French, English, and/or Armenian.

The Armenian Catholic Church is one of twenty-three Eastern Catholic Churches that

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Neighbors

WINTER 2017

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA

FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I recently moved to Alaska to serve as archbishop of Anchorage. Moving

so far from the mainland was an adjustment, especially regarding the change in the amount of daylight. Throughout winter, our daylight is short here, as brief as 6 hours! The night is very long.

For many people, winter can be hard. The lack of sunlight and the colder weather can remind us of the darkness in our world. But just as the season of winter turns to hopeful spring, we know that the gloom of our world is transformed by Christ.

In this issue, you will read about our Armenian Catholic brothers and sisters. They have darkness in their past and continue to face challenges, but the light of Christ shines brightly in their diocese. Take a look in this issue at how they strengthen their faith and share the bright light of hope.

For the Armenian Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg, and for so many dioceses in the United States, sharing this hope is possible because of your support to the Catholic Home Missions Appeal. Your generosity means so much.

Thank you for your support! Let us continue to pray for one another as we share the light of Christ.

In the Heart of Christ,

Most Reverend Paul D. Etienne, DD, STL
Archbishop of Anchorage

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Third-graders from the Armenian Sisters Academy gather with their teachers after celebrating their First Holy Communion.

enjoy the same dignity, rights, and obligations as the Latin Church and is in full communion with the Holy Father. Eastern Catholic Churches have distinctive liturgical and legal systems that reflect the national or ethnic character of their region of origin. For example, the Armenian Catholic liturgy is celebrated in the Old Armenian language.

St. John Paul II created the Armenian Catholic Exarchate in 1981 to organize the parishes under a single geographic diocese. The eparchy was established in 2005 as the number of parishioners grew. Eparchies in the Eastern Churches are akin to dioceses in the Latin Church. The Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg is headquartered in Glendale, California. Its eight parishes and three missions are located in California, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Michigan, Quebec, and Ontario. The largest parish is in Glendale, with 1,800 families. The smallest is in Detroit and the fastest growing is in Montreal, where Syrian immigrants arrive in large numbers.

Armenian Catholics are “a minority within a minority,” according to Bishop Mouradian. “We are all part of the Armenian nation, but we’re spread all over the world because of the genocides,” he says. “Armenians are a minority in every country where they are; Catholics are about 10 percent of all Armenians, so we are a minority among minorities.”

Because of their small numbers and the close connection among Armenian Christians, Bishop Mouradian says Armenian Catholic parishes welcome

non-Catholic Armenian Christians to attend services. “Whoever comes is welcome. We bring the Good News to everybody, but we do not proselytize other denominations; we just assist with their spiritual needs,” he explains.

Huge Diocese, Small Staff, Dynamic Community

Bishop Mouradian is the only full-time employee of the eparchy. From his base in Glendale, he travels by plane, train, and automobile to minister to his people spread across eight million square miles. His predecessor was ill for seven years before he retired. Because of this, some of the parishioners had never met an Armenian Catholic bishop before Bishop Mouradian was installed in 2011 and toured his new diocese.

Bishop Mouradian, a Lebanese native, recalls, “I had never been to the United States and my English wasn’t too good. Everything was new!”

He was determined to establish a central office for the diocese, closest to the largest number of parishioners, and to make personal contact with each parish in the diocese. The headquarters was relocated from New York to California.

While his small cadre of diocesan clergy met once a year, the bishop found that parishioners did not see themselves as part of a larger church community. He extended membership in his advisory council, the Armenian Catholic General Association, to representative lay leaders from each parish. Their interactions at annual summer meetings inspired programs and widespread communication efforts. “The laity was astonished to find there were other active Armenian Catholic communities,” Bishop Mouradian says.

Young adult groups throughout the diocese developed a website and email database and are now connected through a Facebook page. Catholic Home Missions supports the eparchy’s youth and young adult ministry, religious education, evangelization, and

DID YOU KNOW?

lay ministry training programs.

Local parishes have liturgy, devotions, sacramental preparation, religious instruction, and youth and social outreach. They concentrate on caring for the spiritual and material needs of the people in their community. The diocese focuses its ministries on families and tries to tailor them to reflect the rich and diverse background of its members. “We’ve had five generations since the 1915 genocide and some groups have been here longer than others. It’s a challenge to understand and respond to the different places and situations people have experienced,” Bishop Mouradian says.

“At St. Gregory the Illuminator Cathedral, for example, we celebrate the liturgy in classical Armenian, but use Modern Armenian and English in an instructive dialogue within the service,” he explains.



Bishop Mouradian washes the feet of children at a Holy Thursday Mass.

Do You Believe in Miracles?

The eparchy has half as many seminarians as active priests. There are ten priests and five men studying for ordination. “I love working with vocations. It’s the seed that grows the church,” Bishop Mouradian says.

He describes naysayers warning him he would have a hard time

finding vocations in the United States and responds with faith. “Do you believe in miracles? The Lord said, ‘Ask and you will be given.’ I prayed for vocations and I ask at each parish I visit.”

Seminarians study at the Armenian Pontifical College in Rome, where the bishop was formerly the rector. The eparchy uses Catholic Home Missions funds to support its seminarians.

The Armenian Catholic Church is an expression of the universality of the Catholic Church, Bishop Mouradian says. “There is both unity and diversity in the Church. When Roman Catholics imagine the Middle East, they may think all Arabs are Muslim, which is not the case. Those who don’t have contact with Armenian Catholics don’t know we exist.”

“We bring the Word of God to the faithful, but in an Armenian way,” he says.

Catholic Home Missions supports the efforts of the Armenian Catholic Church to keep its people close to the intertwined faith and culture. “Yeghisheh, an Armenian historian of the fifth century, said we didn’t accept the Christian faith as clothing we can change, but as skin on our bodies. It’s attached, and we can’t change it,” Bishop Mouradian says.

“I couldn’t do what I do as the bishop without the help of Catholic Home Missions,” he says. “Every parish runs on a limited budget and they are not able to help the diocese. I’m blessed to be a member of the USCCB and grateful to my brother bishops who help me grow in my faith and at the same time help my faithful people grow, too.”

Looking beyond the immediate challenges, Bishop Mouradian is hopeful for the future. “As long as there are Armenian Catholic churches, missions, and schools in the US, I am sure the community will continue to grow. As a bishop, I have the hope our Lord gave us: ‘I will be with you until the end of time.’”

- The Armenian Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg covers 8,000,000 square miles and encompasses all of the United States and Canada.
- The eparchy has eight parishes and three missions, served by ten active priests, two permanent deacons, and nine women religious. It operates four elementary schools and one high school.
- Worldwide, there are approximately 800,000 Armenian Catholics. The Armenian Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg includes 45,000 parishioners.
- Our Lady of Nareg is a portrait of the Blessed Mother believed to have been touched to her face. The portrait was brought to Armenia by the Apostle Bartholomew in 49 AD.



A family meets with Bishop Mouradian after Mass at Sacred Heart Parish, Little Falls, NJ.



Bishop Mouradian joins the leaders of the Armenian community in Los Angeles for the March for Justice on the 100th year commemoration of the Armenian Genocide.



Strengthening the Church at Home

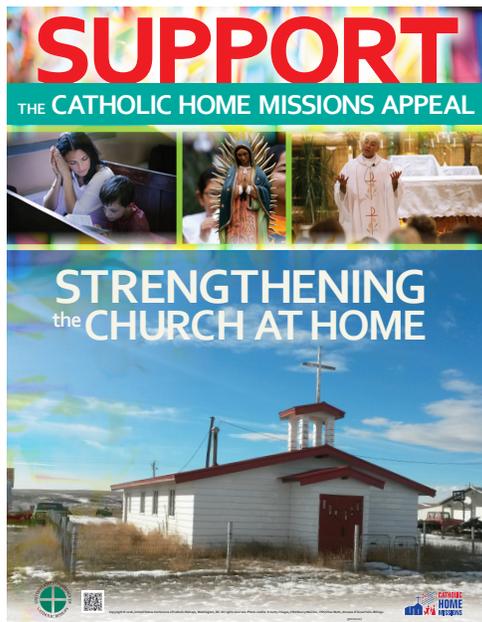
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difference for the Armenian
Catholic community!



Your generosity to the Catholic Home Missions Appeal supports essential ministries in poor dioceses across the United States and its territories.

THANK YOU for being part of our efforts to strengthen the Church at home.

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