

Bishop Hovakim Manukyan

PRIMATE'S REPORT

September 17, 2016

"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?" (Luke 15:4)

The spiritual welfare and the pursuit of the interests of our community is the primary focus of my ministry. More details about my mission and priorities can be found in a brochure entitled "Primate's Mission: Focus and Priorities", which was published last year. While reports about my activities have been published in the e-magazine of the Armenian Church, I would like to highlight a number of areas and underline their importance.

1. Parishes

My aim is to strengthen the existing parishes and reach out to the wider community. In addition to my regular visits and celebration of Badarak in the established parishes and mission parishes, since our last meeting I have visited Cornwall and celebrated the Badarak there recently. I have also visited East London where there are many Armenians, and I shall visit there again. Wherever I visit Armenians spread around the UK, they are enthusiastic and express wish to have Badaraks and the spiritual nourishment of the Armenian Church. It is not an easy task, most of the people lack Christian education and basic knowledge about Christianity, but the positive message is that they are willing to engage with the Church and want to start the process. I have also made a visit to Birmingham and had a meeting with the local Anglican Bishop. The community needs a small church where Armenians can gather every Sunday. A school will also be started soon. A contact person is working in this direction.

I should note that, in general, there is lack of manpower and volunteers in the parishes, a problem that needs to be addressed. There is a great need to inspire people to take upon various roles in the parish and develop ways to support the financial needs of the parish. One of the newly-established parishes is at the edge of dismantling because of lack of manpower. The number of the regular church-goers are less compared to the actual number of people in the community. This is a challenge for us. We need to inspire people and motivate them to engage with the parish and become active

participants in the life of the Church. As far as I am aware, so far there is no progress in increasing the membership of existing parishes. There should be regular contacts between the priests and parishioners. We also need to seek ways of organising more events to gather the people around the Church and start projects for different age groups; projects for the children between the ages of 3-5, or special visits to the elderly, services for youth, etc.

We also lack clergymen. I have asked His Holiness to send a clergyman for St. Yeghiche Church. The candidate would need to be very active and able to attend to the spiritual needs of the parish. We need a new, married priest to do pastoral work and to attend to the smaller parishes as well. The challenge is to find the right person for these positions. There are two options: they can come from Holy Etchmiadzin, or we can train deacons from our own community to be priests. I am sure there are a few potential candidates among our deacons. If they wish to become priests, they need to be married and willing to follow a special education programme in Etchmiadzin for a year to prepare for the ministry. I would like to create a fund for this purpose. We need to be able to pay a priest a proper salary, according to the standards in the UK, so that a priest could do his ministry properly and support his family. Our goal should be to raise enough funds for such an important purpose through the ACT UK.

2. Bylaws

During the year, we started the process of establishing our Diocese on a canonical foundation, by working on the Diocesan Bylaws. A working group was appointed by the Primate to finalise the text of the bylaws. The working group is composed of Fr. Shnork Bagdassarian, Keghvard Vartanian and Alan Simonian. A representative from Manchester was invited but unable to attend the meetings.

As you all are aware, this process started during the tenure of Archbishop Nathan and continued under Bishop Vahan. Since 2010, formal parishes have been established in London with their own bylaws. The working group has circulated a draft of the Diocesan bylaws to the parishes for their review and feedback.

The working group have now revised the document in light of comments from all the parishes. Today we are going to discuss this subject. I believe it is not an easy process. It is not always an easy task to do reforms. The working group has produced a good document. I have read the whole document. Overall it covers every aspect and considers the specific situation of UK and Ireland where we have Trusts. It provides

independence of parishes while at the same time showing its organic unity as a part of the Holy Apostolic Armenian Church. It is based on the principle of subsidiarity.

I have also consulted with various members of our community and representatives of all parishes. Generally, there is a will and a majority is committed to start a Diocese.

An updated version has been prepared by the working group based on the comments received from the parishes. I would suggest that we send the updated document to the parishes again and ask them to discuss it further and send their feedback. This would give the parishes a second chance to review the final version of the bylaws and endorse it through the appropriate signatures of the officers of the parish. I shall then send it to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin for ratification.

It is my hope that each parish will take responsibility for establishing the Diocese in the UK in accordance to their canonical relationship with the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church. Admittedly, this is not an easy task but I hope every parish will put their sense of long term unity of the Church above immediate local concerns. We are doing this for generations to come, not only for today. I believe the working group has produced a fine document, which I believe should satisfy the parishes with minor changes if needed. Ultimately, this is a matter of our canonical unity with one another under Holy Etchmiadzin.

While we wait for the formal establishment of the Diocese, and in the absence of a properly elected Diocesan Council, our work should continue with the establishment of an Advisory Board of the Primate or increase the number of the working group including two representatives from each major parish who will coordinate the work related to the establishment of the Diocese, and will work with the parishes to address their concerns. We also need legal and financial advisers and, I believe, we have enough talented people in the community who will assist us in this.

Admittedly, the details or the process of establishing the Diocese might not be a priority for the community, however, in my vision, the Church is both mission and structure. While I am able to pay more attention to the mission, I need your support regarding the structure. In principle, this is your document and you should build consensus around it.

My suggestion is that from now on everything should be transparent, public and if it is necessary we need to organise public debates and adopt a gradual process of merging of the Diocesan Council. We also need to set a deadline and finish this work by the beginning of the next National Ecclesiastical Assembly, which will meet in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

3. Ecumenical

I try to do ecumenical work on a local level. I have met with my Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox counterparts and regularly participate in ecumenical meetings. I have met Cardinal Nichols in the spring of this year, along with Harry Hagopian, and we have a vision of organising a presentation on Armenian-Catholic relations reflecting on the Pope's recent visit to Armenia.

On 24th November there will be the consecration of the Syrian Orthodox Church in London and His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Aphrem II Karim will be visiting London. I have extended an invitation to the Syriac Orthodox Primate, His Eminence Mar Athanasius Toma Dawod, and he is organising a date on which to invite His Holiness to the Armenian Church.

We have started the work of the forum of the Oriental Orthodox and Anglican Churches, and the next meeting will be in the Armenian Church. I have also met with the Syriac and Coptic Bishops to start the Council of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in the UK, which is due to meet in December. We will start the Oriental Orthodox and Catholic forum. I also maintain permanent contact with the Bishops Council of Kensington Churches. The objectives of these meetings are to promote ecumenical relations, to support each other in our missions.

4. Armenian Church Youth Fellowship (ACYF)

When I arrived in London there was an ACYF but it was not as active as I wanted it to be. On 10th September there was a meeting at the Vicarage with some of the youth and I have hopes that the ACYF will grow. I have chosen volunteers who will help me in working with the youth.

Spirituality and Christian education, social and cultural programmes are going to be the objectives of ACYF. It is a forum where the youth can get acquainted with the Armenian Church and their cultural heritage. There will be announcements on upcoming events very soon including Games Club, celebrating the Feast of Holy Translators and St. George, Christmas carols and some other important events.

I would also like to organise youth pilgrimages to places such as San Lazzaro and Armenia. During winter, we have a successful Christmas and Easter basket programme and a carol concert, and I would like to introduce bazaars and retreats.

If we are successful in attracting more youth to the ACYF, we can also get members interested in becoming deacons or joining the choir. I am going to try and collaborate with Armenian university student societies in the UK and abroad and hopefully get them to participate in ACYF activities.

A few deacons from Armenia have joined us, and a new deacon's training programme starts on 18th September. I'm thankful that Tigran Vorberian has volunteered to help me in teaching them church music.

5. Other Activities

I have organised some lectures, and I've worked with many community organisations, which is my duty as a Primate. In the summer I visited Armenia on the occasion of the visit of Pope Francis along with representatives of our community; Mr. & Mrs. Alan & Nicole Simonian, as well as Mr. & Mrs. Raffi & Alice Tanielian. At the beginning of August, with a group of people from the UK, we also visited the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and met with His Holiness KAREKIN II. We also had a chance to meet with the Minister of the Diaspora of Armenia and representatives of some other organizations.

In the office I work with Hrachik, Koko and Aznive, and they help partly as volunteers and partly paid by funds from ACT UK. The new website is in progress and I continue to produce weekly newsletters. We produce informative video materials with Armine Vosganian. More resources are needed in order for the Primate's Office to produce more materials and work more efficiently.

I continuously visit families, doing house blessing. This is to thank them to their commitment to the Church, to listen to their views and ideas about the Church and as well as making new friends. I also try to meet at least one individual member, elderly and vulnerable of the community every week and visit organisations.

We have published the English translation of the Lamentation of St. Gregory of Narek. Soon we will publish Armenian Bibles in cooperation with the Armenian Bible Society. Both projects were co-sponsored by Lord Darzi and family in loving memory of their late parents. The books are being distributed to university libraries, different churches, individual members of the community and to parishes.

The ASF was another major event which I am committed to continuing every year.

Ahead of us is a new year, and the Primate's Office Ladies Committee have planned a fundraiser in aid of restoration of the Tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ at the Holy Sepulchre Church in Jerusalem which will take place on 12th November at the Tara Hotel. I need funds for projects closer to home but it is our duty to give funds to aid in the restoration of the Church in Jerusalem.

I'm planning the ordination of deacons hopefully this year and will also organise a retreat for deacons in a Franciscan Monastery in southwest England.

There are a lot of projects that I want to implement but so far those that I have presented in this report are my priority, namely:

- Parishes
- Clergymen
- ACYF
- Resources (in this regard the larger parishes should support the smaller ones)

A financial report has not been included in my midterm report. The Trust will be making its own presentation that will be available to the public. This will be available by 31st December 2016.

I would also like to thank all those who helped me and are collaborating with me. Particularly I would like to thank all clergymen, Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Parishes, the Primate's Office staff, ACT UK present and former Trustees, Executive Committee members, Ladies Committee members, ASF Committee, ACYF, all donors, individuals, organisations and all those who are involved and are doing voluntary work for the church and community. My special gratitude goes to Dr. Hratch Tchilingirian, Mr. Kevhvar Vartanian and Ms. Aznive Simon for their contribution in preparing this report.

I would greatly appreciate your comments and feedback.