



*From our charter:
In His Shoes was created
in response to acts of
Genocide perpetrated
against the Armenian
nation in 1915. We believe
those who have suffered
evil have a unique
responsibility to take
action against injustice to
others. Our actions are
based on Jesus Christ's
principles of love,
compassion and repaying
evil with good as
expressed in Armenian
Orthodoxy.
As tensions flare in the
world and as the quest for
peace needs to be
resolved, it is essential to
find new metaphors to
answer violence. In His
Shoes is a unique
organization because it
transcends ethnic and
religious differences and
focuses on the only thread
common to the human
condition: suffering. In
contrast to the political
and military response to
violence, In His Shoes
challenges people to find
the terms which define us
as a human race, namely
understanding and
compassion.
Through its projects and
programs, In His Shoes
brings diverse people on
the world stage into a
common room with models
for peaceful living. At the
very least, In His Shoes
sponsors programs which
promote understanding
among a variety of groups.
On the extreme side, the
highest ideals of peace
and harmony are
stimulated.*

Walking In His Shoes

A Year-end report from Fr. Vazken

31 December 2021

Dear Friend and Supporter,

I come to you with best wishes for health and happiness in the New Year.

As donors and supporters of the In His Shoes mission, I'd like to present to you a brief overview of our activities over the last couple of years, where we have *walked* in the shoes of others and the direction of our steps forward.

While COVID-19 dominated the news over the past two years, racial unrest and political disputes became the fare for local and national news. And the 44-day War in Artsakh added to our unique plight as Armenians. In His Shoes has always tried to add our voice, as Armenian Christians, to the international dialog about humanity and peace, but now the barbaric acts committed against the Armenian people have left us with tears in our eyes and commitment in our hearts to aid and assist our hurting brothers and sisters.

In His Shoes operates as a mission of the Western Diocese and within the purview of the Primate, Archbishop Hovnan Derderian. His Eminence has given us a wide-range of opportunities to operate the workings of the Ministry through the Western Diocese. He is a hands-on leader, who shares his time and energy to insure we reach our goals.

On-going programs of In His Shoes

"Rain or Shine" these programs are consistently produced throughout the year:

Monthly "*Madaghi*" feeding of the homeless population in local homeless shelters. We work with a few different shelters but primarily Ascencia in Glendale. Each meal is sponsored by a donor, prepared/produced by our team of volunteers for 40 to 60 people, and is offered to the families with a prayer for wellbeing. In His Shoes was awarded "Chef of the Year" status by Ascencia. Anush Avejic heads and organizes this program for the ministry.

Educational programs promoting social consciousness via the Armenian Church

- ◇ **Martin Luther King Jr. Retreat**, annually in January. An opportunity to explore Rev. King's writings about justice, change and peace through the Gospel of Christ. The three-day event was turned into an online event because of the quarantine conditions this past year; however, this change worked to our advantage as it opened the door for a larger audience that followed and participated virtually.
- ◇ The "**Next Step with Fr. Vazken**" is a podcast which is produced every Thursday. Here the teachings of the Armenian Church are applied to the daily events that trouble our world. From the Pandemic to fear, from George Floyd to intolerance, the Next Step tackles issues that bring an orthodox Christian perspective through the Armenian Church. Now in its 14th year of broadcast, it is available on Apple Podcast app, Stitcher, Blubrry, the In His Shoes website or on most podcatchers. The shows are produced by Suzie Shatarevyan.

Educational programs (on-going) continued....

- ◇ **“Questions in Faith” class sessions** – every Monday evening. We moved to Zoom/on-line sessions, which in turn has allowed for an international following, with participants from as far away as Australia, and groups that watch the recorded sessions. Here, we take a realistic and practical look at Scripture. As the name of the program implies, participants are encouraged to question issues of faith and beliefs to better grow spiritually.
- ◇ **Library of Educational videos** on YouTube “Armodoxy” Channel – An archive for videos produced under the banner AC101, AC202, In Step with Christ, Armenian Christianity, sermons and lectures. These are available free of charge and open to the public. [@InHisShoes](#) and [@Armodoxy](#)
- ◇ **The Armodoxy Blog** – selected writings in one blog, exploring ancient orthodoxy, today. This is also a repository for personal reflections, including the text of some sermons. armodoxy.blogspot.com
- ◇ **Reclaim Conference** – annual event, now in its 6th year of production. The Reclaim conference takes place at the Western Diocese headquarters in Burbank. The 2021 event went completely online with presentations made from throughout the world. A conference of this scale is a major undertaking and we’ve been very fortunate to have a remarkable team of volunteers who bring it all together. The topic for 2021: Reclaiming Faith in a post-Pandemic World. The entire conference is archived on the In His Shoes YouTube Channel [Playlist=Reclaim 2021](#)
- ◇ Providing information and resources to non-Armenian and non-Armenian Church groups by way of lectures. educational events and op-ed writings are organized on an as-requested basis.

Two programs which have been well received by the community and are now annual events:

- ◇ **Toy Drive** – annually at Christmas, for children of domestic violence locally and children of the displaced families of the Artsakh War now in Armenia. Collected in memory of Yvette Hakopian, a victim of domestic violence, the toy drive is in its 15th year of collections. We now partner with Stock California, a toy store in Glendale, making participation easy with online shopping. The Toy Drive has brought a bit of holiday cheer to thousands of children.
- ◇ **Children’s Memorial Service**, annually on the second Sunday in December. Named after and in memory of Cathia Hamparian, the Children’s Memorial has assisted hundreds of parents, relatives and friends, grieving the loss of a child, with support and compassion. This is now our 25th year of commemoration.

2020+ Challenges and Responses

The challenges presented to us by the pandemic and the War are manifold. In His Shoes takes a holistic approach to answering those challenges, understanding both the physical body and the spiritual soul in need of nurturing and healing. To this end, here are some of the areas on which we have focused our effort.

- ◇ Assistance to those suffering the effects of COVID-19 pandemic – We were the recipients of a one-time grant by the Gertmenian Family Foundation to assist families facing economic hardships. The money was used to aid local families in the Burbank and Glendale areas.
- ◇ **Domestic Violence Awareness** - the YWCA and the Glendale Commission of the Status of Women awarded me the 2nd Annual “Purple Tie” Awards, a recognition honoring men who are working to end domestic violence in the community. This award recognizes our work in supporting victims and survivors of domestic violence and building a culture committed to ending domestic violence. We are honored by this recognition and even more that the Armenian Church in general and our Diocese in particular are highlighted as a place of compassionate care and healing.
- ◇ **7 invitations to prayer** – a virtual series of prayers for those struggling with the anxieties, fears, disasters, and diseases caused by the pandemic. These were broadcast via the Diocesan website and Facebook page daily. The series began with prayers and services offered by priests, and then moved on to prayers from young families, women, children and deacons of the church. Prayers were offered for health-care workers, the sick, the suffering, the bereaved, the unemployed, the anxious. The response to this series was tremendous and it evolved into regular prayers and messages that are now a feature of our Diocesan productions. The prayers and services are archived on the Diocesan Facebook page.



- ◇ **Humanitarian Assistance to Armenia and Refugees of the War.** During and after the War in Artsakh our highest priorities became providing humanitarian aid. Fortunately we were working through the structure of the Western Diocese and its vast resources to collect and mobilize help. We organized collections of medical and humanitarian supplies, engaged in efforts and programs to rebuild lives in the large-scale. The Western Diocese has recently published itemized accounts of all assistance rendered as well as programs of continuing aid.
- ◇ **Medical Supplies:** A large number of medical supplies and rehab equipment was secured from MedWish through the Armenian American Medical Society's **Operation HOPE with** the participation of other groups and many individuals. We were able to provide funds to transport these donated items via a 53 foot truck to transportation services that landed the supplies in Armenia & Artsakh. We were honored to work closely in this collaboration.
- ◇ **Refugees in Armenia:** iAct and its founder, Gabriel Stauring, have had a very close and tight relationship with In His Shoes since 2005. We have worked together on many projects in Darfur and the Congo impacting refugees of war and genocide. We have initiated and successfully impacted international forums on the topic of genocide through our work. This year, iAct was invited to Armenia to work with refugees in the aftermath of the War. In His Shoes provided funds for this vital work. The iAct team, headed by Gabriel and his wife Katie Jay traveled to and worked in Goris, Armenia during July and August. Tragically, on their arrival back to the United States they were involved in a fatal auto accident. Ironically, they dodged bullets in Sudan, avoided deadly diseases in the refugee camps in Chad, but lost their lives on the streets of Los Angeles. I was honored to officiate at their celebration of life to a grieving worldwide community. Their loss is felt, and they and their inspiring love for humanity will be missed.
- ◇ **Dr. Ani Babayan continuing education in Moscow.** This is a unique opportunity to give a young and talented doctor a chance at bettering her skills, but even more, we hope it will open the doors and opportunities for others. (See story in inset) When Dr. Tejjirian spoke to me about this talent doctor and the opportunity before us, I saw it as a small gesture which will have large and long-term impact on Armenia and the plight of women in health care.
- ◇ **Sasnashen Youth Center:** The village of Sasnashen is near the city of Talin in Armenia. We became involved with this village because of a tragedy which occurred in 1958 when a C-130 US Airforce plane on a reconnaissance mission was shot down. Sixty years later, I was called by the Prop Wash Gang of the US Airforce to share insight on Armenia and in particular Sasnashen. Thanks to our Primate's support, I was able to

Empowering through

Dr. Ani Babayan continues studying in Moscow:

When Dr. Talar Tejjirian, MD, first approached us with the story of Dr. Ani Babayan, we knew there was an opportunity to support a young promising student, but much more, there was an opportunity to open a door for others. Yerevan State Medical University of Armenia has 16 general surgery faculty members. Dr. Ani Babayan, as the only woman surgeon has a pivotal role to play in both the education of young medical students and as an example of gender equality within and beyond the university walls. Dr. Babayan completed medical school in 2018 and has since spent her professional career honing and expanding her surgical skills while lecturing to medical students on topics such as hernias, gallbladder disease, general surgical techniques and surgical colon diseases.

“General Surgery is a highly evolving and dynamic field of medicine,” says Dr. Tejjirian, who in 2019 helped plan and executed The International Hernia Collaboration, Comprehensive Hernia and Abdominal Wall Reconstruction Course in Armenia. “With recent advances in minimally invasive techniques, it is important for surgeons to continually learn new and advanced skills to better serve patients with up-to-date operations. Unfortunately, Armenia has yet to catch up on the minimally invasive standard of care that is commonplace in the United States and Europe. To add to this difficulty, few general surgeons in Armenia have the training and skill to perform complex minimally invasive operations. Training opportunities in Armenia are few and even fewer for the handful of women surgeons.”

To help accelerate the acquisition of minimally invasive surgical skills, we are proud to support Dr. Babayan's international training opportunities. As the first of hopefully many efforts to encourage women's empowerment in Armenia, Dr. Babayan began her International Minimally Invasive General Surgery training at Moscow's S.S. Yudin Hospital with a world-recognized expert in the realm of minimally invasive hernia operations. We hope that this experience will be a springboard for Dr. Babayan and other women surgeons in Armenia to advance their skills within the context of supportive and encouraging international opportunities. In addition to improving surgical skills and patient outcomes, we wish to be supportive of women's professional skills and empowerment in Armenia.

travel to the village four times, once leading a pilgrimage, and establishing a Youth Center there. Read more by searching “Sasnashen” on our websites..

- ◇ With one of our partners, Circle of Faith, we initiated a “**Balloons for Artsakh**” campaign. We launched 1,000 balloons on Thanksgiving Day, with the names of the martyred soldiers collecting \$20,000 in donations which was used to provide humanitarian relief to the families of soldiers.
- ◇ **Peace in Armenia** t-shirt and hoodies with a message for peace were ordered and sold to provide immediate relief to Armenia in the aftermath of the War, and to educate the public about the atrocities taking place there. The attractive and eye-catching tri-color logo was produced by Soundbox Graphics and funded through In His Shoes.
- ◇ **Toys for Armenian children orphaned by the War**: Alongside our annual toy drive we collected funds to purchase toys in Armenia and distribute them to the children orphaned by the war. We worked through the Church in identifying the children and distributed mostly in the villages and to area of high refugee populations
- ◇ **Grassroots efforts** from In His Shoes members were funded – to provide relief in Armenia and medical protective gear for front-line health-care professionals. These funds were hand delivered to Armenia.
- ◇ **IGEFA**: In His Shoes has had a long-standing relationship with The Irene Gyulnazarian Educational Fund for Armenia. Once again, this year we contributed to the fund. The mission and goal of IGEFA is to support academic and cultural institutions and to help to improve the quality of higher education in Armenia, especially in the humanities and fundamental sciences. IGEFA established partnerships include American University of Armenia, Yerevan State University, Academy of Arts, Conservatory of Music, European, French and Medical Universities. Over the years, IGEFA provides scholarships and grants to students pursuing higher education, sponsors libraries and provides equipment to schools and colleges, provides faculty training, and facilitates continuing education seminars, especially notable in the areas of mental health and domestic violence. More can be learned at the website igefafund.org
- ◇ Lectures, prayer services, and forums at universities, churches, and public gatherings, to present a voice for the voiceless and share the story of the existential threat to Armenian existence. All of these have been documented and archived on our website.

“The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor,
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed,
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”
-Jesus

Education Locally

The Primate, Abp. Hovnan, places a high priority on education. To this end we organized a weekly meeting of a group called **Bridging Generations**, targeting young adults in the 20 to 40 age group. We organized two sets of lectures for each meeting – on Armenian Church teaching and Bible knowledge. The outcome became a library of informational videos which are now being compiled for online access.

The **Deacons Council** was formed during the pandemic by Abp. Hovnan, who appointed me to lead this group. There are 300+ deacons serving in the Western Diocese. Abp. Hovnan has recognized this group of deacons as an untapped resource who can be trained to assist with hospital visitation, student chaplaincy, youth mentorship, educational and Bible Study leadership, to name only a few of the areas that are targeted. The 15-member board meets every other week to be a support to priests and to better understand ministry as beyond Sunday services. Although the Council has existed only during the pandemic, it has organized outreach programs, online educational programs, deacons training and deacon workshop classes with the Dean of St. Nersess Armenian Seminary. It produces a quarterly newsletter called, “The Deacon’s Chant.” This year, at the decision of His Eminence Abp. Hovnan, a special honor was given to Deacon Dr. Hrair Dekmejian, for his 80+ years of service to the Armenian Church, from Aleppo, to the Eastern Diocese (1950-1986) to the Western Diocese (1987-present). His story is inspirational, and it behooves anyone concerned or interested in the Armenian Church in its present form to learn more. Read a [tribute to his humble service](#) on our website.

Personal acknowledgements

I'm thankful to celebrate my priesthood in the Western Diocese. We are granted opportunities to live out a solid message of Christian love and compassion through the In His Shoes ministry. I am humbled that His Eminence named me priest of the year. He also named the "Preacher" (*Karozich*) of the Diocese, asking me to deliver a once-a-month sermon at the St. Leon Ghevondyants Armenian Cathedral, setting a tone and theme for the rest of the Diocese. I thank him for his confidence and pray to live up to his expectations.

The In His Shoes board is made up of Anoush Dekmejian, Maria Hamparian and Mardiros Dakessian. I'm honored to work with all three of them and thankful for their trust and confidence. Finally, I wish to thank all of our donors and supporters for your prayers and confidence. Together we are changing the conversation.

Last year amidst all the racial unrest in the United States I was invited to march and address the assembled audience about racism and intolerance. The march was organized in the name of Martin Luther King Jr. and was an overt call for peace. I was honored to be selected as a speaker for this event. While the march took place in Glendale, sadly, among the hundreds of participants only a handful were from the Armenian community. There, I saw a sign. Graphically, it presented this message: "**A reminder to Stop the Hate!** Asians are not a virus. Hispanics are not Illegal. Black people are not threats. Muslims are not Terrorists. Native Americans are not Savages." My wish is that we can add to this list "**Armenians are not Victims!**" We have arrived from the ashes of the Genocide - God has resurrected us from those ruins. So let us refer to ourselves as victors, and as a people who can give and help others in need.

Walking "in his shoes" is about having empathy, about feeling the pain of others, or as the Armenian expression goes, "tsav't danem" – let me take your pain. Please check out all of our work throughout the year at our website InHisShoes.org.

May God bless you always. Respectfully Submitted,



Fr. Vazken Movsesian, December 2021

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