Armenian church's new world leader to visit Oakland

BY LARRY PALADINO
STAFF WRITER

The Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church's new world leader will be making Oakland County a major stop on five-week tour to the United States and Canada with a visit Jan. 19-20 to St. John's Armenian Church and Cultural Center in Southfield.

His Holiness Karekin I, consecrated last April as Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Amenians, will be making Southfield the fifth stop among seven cities in his Eastern Diocese itinerary.

He arrived Wednesday in New York and will conclude the tour Feb. 18 in Boca Raton, Fla. He will visit both the Eastern and Western dioceses, and the Canadian Diocese.

Spiritual boost: *His Holiness Karekin I, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, will make St. John's Armenian Church his Oakland County stop.*

The theme of Karekin's trip is, "A New Era — Church, Youth, Community", and he will emphasize interaction with the church's youth.

"We don't want them to lose their identity, their heritage, their values," said the Very Rev. Father Baret Yeretzian, pastor of St. John's, the largest parish in the United States with some 15,000 members.

Yeretzian said he sees the visit as an important step for Armenian youth, hopefully enabling them "to be strengthened in their faith toward their church."

"I expect a big turnout," he said, "from dignitaries, to clergy, to our own parishioners. But it's our youth that we're more concerned with. Our community has been involved heavily in the life of the Armenian church in this country."

Yeretzian said philanthropist Alex Manoogian has donated the service of his private jet, which will be flown to Boston to pick up the Supreme Patriarch and fly him to Detroit. Manoogian, the pastor said, "is the biggest philanthropist in the Armenian world."

Karekin's local itinerary begins with a brief reception at a private hangar at Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport. There will be a service at 6 p.m. at St. John's, to which leaders of many religions from all over metropolitan Detroit have been invited, plus political and other dignitaries.

At 7:30 p.m. there will be a banquet at the cultural center, then the next day's events begin with a Mass at 10 a.m. His Holiness will address Armenian children of metro Detroit at noon and at 6 p.m. deliver a special message to young Armenian adults.

Cynthia Oknaian of the parish said banquet reservations already have been made for 500 persons and that dignitaries invited included congressional representatives, mayors and others.

"We have a big group of volunteers. A committee has been working on everything," Yeretzian said.

He said the visit of the Supreme Patriarch was the equivalent for Armenians of what the 1987 visit of Pope Paul to Hamtramck and other U.S. cities meant to Roman Catholics.

There are close to 1 million Armenians in the U.S. and Canada. Of them, about 30,000 are Armenian Church members who live in Michigan.

The Armenian Church is an independent Christian church. It is not part of Eastern Orthodox churches or Eastern Rite Catholic churches, though they share many of the same beliefs.

The church traces its heritage to the middle of the first century when two of Jesus Christ's apostles, Sts. Thaddeus and Batholomew, introduced Christianity to Armenia.

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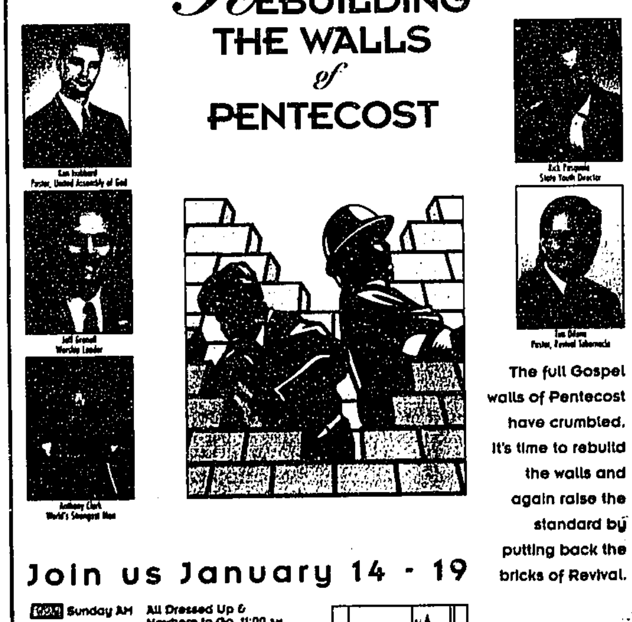

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