

A Thriving Armenian Community in the Hellenic Europe

Athens, June 2010: The words on the memorial dedicated to Rev. Krikor Demirjian's 55 years of service in the Armenian Evangelical Church in Kokkinia, Greece, caught my attention as soon as I set foot in the premises. The inscription described the dedicated life of the visually impaired Rev. Demirjian as the clergy who "lived and worked with Christ's love, the spirit of St. Mesrob's Armenian alphabet, and the legacy of the victims of the Armenian genocide".



Indeed, the Armenian Evangelical Church in Kokkinia, established in 1924, is a demonstration of the achievements of an Armenian community that had just survived the first genocide perpetrated in the 20th century. Unrelenting faith, vision, and perseverance in the face of countless calamities also served to found the Armenian Evangelical School in 1928 on the same premises. The School still renders its educational, social, and religious services to the Armenian community in Greece. Presently, the School has 38 students at the Kindergarten level.

As I preached during the service on Sunday, June 13, 2010, I could see the legacy of the forefathers' dreams and aspirations on the faces of the congregation. The ministry has multiplied and intensified under the leadership of its pastor, Rev. Vicken Cholokian, a devoted, inspiring servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has made the Armenian Evangelical Church, the Armenian Evangelical community, and the Armenian Evangelical School living testimonies of the unremitting continuation of the Armenian heritage through the celebration of its culture, Christian identity, national pride, and dedicated service.



After the 1920s, the Armenians in Greece counted 70,000 to 80,000 survivors who had fled from Cilicia, Smyrna, Constantinople and other regions of Asia Minor. Today, immigration to North America has diminished the Armenian population of Greece. The number now counts roughly

10,000. According to unofficial records, there are also around 25,000 or more from Armenia. Around 2000 Armenians from the Middle East may be added to the total number.

As I visited with the religious leaders, Ambassador of Armenia to Greece and Cyprus, and editors of the daily *Azad Or* and the weekly *Nor Ashkhar* I was convinced that it was the same powerful, undefeated, and unbeatable Armenian spirit that operated in each and every leader and institution. The Armenian community is alive and kicking through the preservation of its language, Christian faith, and unique culture.



At the same time, though, the Armenian diaspora in Greece, like other diaspora communities worldwide, faces the ever-increasing challenges of globalization, mounting number of mixed marriages, and growing pressures of integration. Fortunately, the latter are met head-on by enthusiastic, committed, and visionary religious leaders, political parties, and cultural organizations that are adamant in transmitting faith and pride in everything Armenian.

The Armenian community in the Hellenic land is a vivid example of the struggles and aspirations of the Armenian community in Europe. Indeed, it is the same struggle for all Armenians in the diaspora. What really matters, though, is to maintain, foster, and transmit positive attitudes towards the Armenian faith, language, culture, identity, belongingness, and homeland to future generations of Armenians in Greece and worldwide.

Hrayr Jebejian

