WILL YOUR COMMUNITY BE AROUND IN 50 YEARS?

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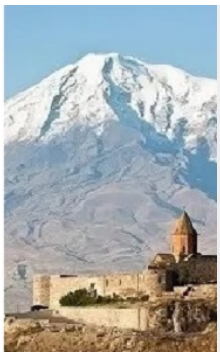

Category: Editorials

By Serop Stepanian, Toronto, 30 August 2022

In the past few hundred years, we have seen Armenian diasporic communities rise and fall--from Southeast Asia to Eastern Europe. Once prosperous communities in India, Bangladesh, Singapore, etc. have vanished or almost vanished. Likewise in Eastern Europe. In recent decades, we have witnessed the decline of the once-healthy Armenian communities of Egypt, Iraq, and Iran while in Lebanon, Syria, and Greece we struggle. There are only 1,000 Armenians left in Jerusalem. There are more than 400,000 Armenians in France and about 110,000 in Argentina. It's a sad fact that the majority of the Armenians in these two countries are irrevocably assimilated.

How about your community? How strong is it? Will it be around in fifty years or follow the sad procession of vanishing Armenian communities? The below questionnaire--admittedly non-scientific--can help you check the health of your community and its potential for survival. It might also impel you--we hope--to be active in community affairs. After all, by participating in your community affairs, you would be contributing to the preservation of your and your family's identity.

1. Does your community have at least one church?
2. Is the church well attended?
3. Is the priest mostly a baptism/wedding/funeral functionary or a patriotic-spiritual pillar?
4. Are the political parties active? (hold meetings, lobby with the government, recruit members, etc.)
5. Do the political parties cooperate or do they compete?
6. Is there an Armenian school?
7. Are there Armenian publications and TV programs?
8. Does the community organize regular political and cultural events?
9. What's the percentage of marriages with non-Armenians?
10. Does the community organize Genocide commemorations/demonstrations?
11. How well is youth represented in community organizations?
12. Is there an active program to encourage young people become involved in community organizations?
13. Are there annual picnics? Are they well attended?
14. Is there a Scout movement?
15. Is there an athletic club (football, basketball, volleyball)?
16. Are there drama groups and folk dancing groups, and a chorus?
17. Does the community have close ties to Armenia (Group tours, raising money, etc.)?
18. Are there divisions among Armenians who have come from different countries?
19. Are there a significant number of high-profile Armenians who are known to non-Armenians?
20. Are there a significant number of Armenian professionals (physicians, dentists, pharmacists, lawyers, architects, and engineers) in your community?
21. Are there large Armenian-owned enterprises (factories, service providers) in your community?

22. Are there Armenian politicians?
23. Are there a significant number of Armenian grocery stores and restaurants?
24. Is there a Little Armenia in your town?
25. Does your community organize an annual "Armenian Weekend" festivities which are also attended by non-Armenians?

So, what do you think? Will your community be around in fifty years or will you read on the Internet that your church has been sold because the dying community could no longer support it?

Comments



Dikran Bakerjian – 2022-09-15 05:35:23
Thank you for your conscious attention. I am a Jerusalemite Armenian in the Armenian Quarter. A well known family Bakerjian, we are local kaghkasy going back to 245 years.The severe Israeli and Palestinian conflict have a huge impact on us. In the 1960s our population was close to 6000, today we are less than a 1000..Unfortunately our church here, has facilitated our immigration. The corruption within their system, their irresponsibility, and not extending any aid to the community. Today we are facing a severe condition; the church is selling our ancestral land to unhealthy parties.The Patriarch and the state holder Baret Erizian are criminals; we oppose their theft. Our community is weak and not caring..The church simply wants us OUT. Where are they putting the money WHO KNOWS. We are in serious problems and ask help from all Armenians to raise their voice and demand our foul Patriarch Nourhan Manougian and Baret Erizian to step down or we lose all our rights here. Than you Dikran Bakerjian



Ara A. Jeknavorian – 2022-09-13 11:59:02
Excellent discussion. There is no question in my mind that the Armenian diaspora is on a time clock for full or near full assimilation. It is just a matter a how many generations. Many indicators are prevalent that show smaller numbers in essentially all aspects of Armenian life in the Diaspora. Is there a way to change this inevitable destiny? I sadly cannot propose one, but can share a reflection by the deceased pastor of Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church in Chelmsford, Massachusetts. The Very Ghevont Samoorian moved the former Lowell, MA parish to Chelmsford in 1978, where he directed the construction of a beautiful Armenian Church modeled after the Cathedral of Ani. When construction was finally completed, he remarked, " 400 years from now (2378) a wrecking ball will show up at the church to make way for some new housing development, and maybe when the wrecking ball operator sees the church, he will have second thoughts and let the church stand for some emotional - spiritual reason."



Seta Malkhassian – 2022-09-13 07:31:36
All of the above comments are very valid points. I came to Montreal as a young girl 50 plus years ago and saw the community grow and establish schools, churches, community centers etc…having positive answers to most of the questions asked. However society is changing and so are all Armenian communities. Yes, I agree that money should be spent to find out what will make most of these young families stay Armenian. My children struggle to keep their children Armenian, regardless of sending them to Armenian school and pushing them into Armenian activities, assimilation is inevitable. Armenia's situation is no help. 50 years you say? I am not positive it will continue unless we find modern ways to encourage the young to keep our identity. I wish I could be around to see it 50 years down the road!



Tavo – 2022-09-11 17:47:36
More youth activities are needed all over the Diaspora in order for these persons to retain and grow their Armenian identity. Young Armenian Americans do not realize how active and vibrant so many communities were up to 25 to 30 years ago because they aren't old enough to remember. They don't have the slightest idea. Assimilation and moving around a lot have taken a huge toll. A lot off the fault lies with parents who don't bring their children up Armenian. Can't get volunteers to put on youth or "young professional" events (ages 13 to even 40 or so)? Churches, AYF, ACYOA, AGBU-YP and other organizations must HIRE people to organize events and revitalize organizations. Don't have the money? Get it. Don't send as much to Armenia. Come on, organizations (such as AGBU) have the money to hire people to put on events (such as AGBU-YP), The money must be raised and spent. There is no excuse. If you ask, you can raise it.



Vartan Matiossian – 2022-09-11 10:36:47
If your questionnaire is an indication of non-assimilation, then the positive answer that the Armenian community of Argentina would give to all your questions would turn the sentence about the majority assimilated into a fallacy (France would also answer "yes"). If you consider the majority in absolute numbers of the community, then any Diasporan community beyond the first generation (perhaps with the exception of Lebanon or Syria) was already assimilated.



Vartan – 2022-09-11 08:47:44
As two letter-writers have said here, the Toronto and Montreal communities, like most Armenian communities in North American, have been energized in the past 70 years by several waves of immigration from Middle Eastern countries. Now that source (Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Iran) is being depleted, what will be the future of the Armenian communities in North America? Do community leaders and their organizations have long-term plans to preserve their communities? Perhaps what's required is a conference of Armenian organizations of North America which would draw a step-by-step blueprint on how to preserve their communities. People who have, for years, been active in "Hayabahbanoum" must participate in such a conference. Their knowledge, garnered through years of experience, would be essential in drafting a "doable" preservation plan.



Simon Ghazarian – 2022-09-10 23:28:16
Montreal similar to Toronto witnessed the mass arrivals of different Armenian groups, Bolsahays who have remarkable contributions to establishing the community, Then, of course, Egyptian and Greek Armenians, and same like Toronto, Lebanese, Iranian, Iraqi and most recently Syrian Armenians who brought a new vibe and enthusiasm, however, the local Armenian schools are not able to accept their children because they lack French language. Armenian schools are not able to open "welcoming classes" to those children to teach them French due to financial shortages and these children end up registering at public schools. The community institutions should have dealt with this issue in a more proactive way, especially that the influx of Syrian Armenians in the past 7-8 years had saved all 3 Armenian schools from a shortage of students. The survival of the Armenian community in Quebec for another 50 years relies on our ability to teach our children the Armenian language and culture.



Harry Mardirossian – 2022-09-10 15:48:24
Thank you for raising fundamental issues for the next 50 years. I am a resident in Toronto for over 55 years. As an Architect, in 1977/8 I was called upon to design the new Armenian Community Centre for Toronto. One of my first questions to the Building Committee was as to the number of years this projected building was going to serve the Toronto Armenians. They had no answer. Throughout these years the most striking phenomenon has been the “Revolving Door”. In the sixties, Egyptian Armenians were the community core. This shifted to the Lebanese refugees who fled the civil war. It followed with the Iranian Revolution, Iraq War. More recently the Syrian refugees arrived who have injected all the preserved post-genocide energy of the ACC. Besides the noted groups there is a shadow group of Armenia Armenians, who are invisible and not accounted for. However the key question remains, the classic diaspora has exhausted its prospective sources of resettlement into these greener pastures. Your question about a forecast for the next 50 years? I do not see a bright future for Toronto Armenians.



Jean Eckian – 2022-09-10 08:00:24

The Armenian community in France responds positively to all your questions