



A PASTORAL JOURNEY - BRINGING FAITH HOME  
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## Pontifical Visit Media Advisory

His Holiness Karekin II  
Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All  
Armenians

Pontifical Visit of the  
Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern)  
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Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate

Pontifical Visit  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**29 October 2007**

### His Holiness Visits His Flock in St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota

**St. Paul, MN** – His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, included a stop to the Twin Cities during his 18-city Pontifical Visit. His Holiness Karekin II is the first Catholicos of All Armenians to visit Minnesota.

On Thursday October 25, His Holiness arrived at Holman Field/Million Air Terminal in St. Paul, Minnesota and was welcomed on the tarmac by two children in colorful Armenian dress who presented His Holiness Karekin II with the traditional bread and salt upon his arrival in St. Paul.

Later that evening, His Holiness was welcomed to St. Paul with a *Hrashapar* Service (a thanksgiving service of welcoming) with over 300 members of the congregation held at St. Sahag Armenian Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. The current visiting priest is Reverend Father Sahak Kaishian who was joined by two other former visiting priest of the parish, the Very Reverend Father Aren Jebejian and Reverend Father Yeprem Kelegian. Church leaders were also invited, including Coadjutor Archbishop John C. Nienstedt of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis as well as other Catholic Church clergy. There were also priests from the Greek Orthodox Church, Russian Orthodox Church and the Eritrean Orthodox Church, as well as from the Episcopalian and Congregationalist Churches.

During the *Hrashapar* service, a special consecration ceremony of the marble baptismal font took place. The consecration is an interpretation of the ordinary becoming extraordinary. This was interpreted by washing the font firstly with water to represent the ordinary, and secondly with wine to represent the extraordinary. Symbols of purity were then added to the water and the holiness was sacrificed in the wine as a symbol of the blood of Christ. The clergy then sang the hymn "Amen Halleluiah" with the choir for the consecration to take place. Once the font was prepared in this way, His Holiness consecrated it with Holy *Muron* or Holy Chrism in the sign of the cross. The baptismal font was covered with a priest's alb (or white robe), the priest's *porourar* or stole and also with his belt. As the hymn was sung, the vestments were placed over the baptismal font then clergy moved to the center of the chancel for the last blessing – which was the prayer of the cross. His Holiness presented a chalice from Holy Etchmiadzin to Father Sahak. Finally, *Hayr Mer* or the Lord's Prayer was sung followed by the procession out of St. Sahag Church, during which His Holiness blessed the flock.

St. Sahag Armenian Church is the only Armenian sanctuary in Minnesota, Iowa, and the Dakotas, and was consecrated on September 7, 2002. The former Merriam-Lexington Presbyterian Church, a beautiful 1912 Gothic-Tudor building, is being sensitively restored and modified according to Armenian religious tradition, thanks to the kind donation by Mr. Stephen and Mrs. Chacke Scallen.

As a parish of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern), St. Sahag comprises several hundred first-through fourth-generation Armenians and friends of the community. Minnesota Armenians, who first settled in St. Paul in 1899, have been served by visiting priests for more than a century. As early as 1917, the "Armenian Rectory of St. Paul" certified the baptism of Woodrow Haig Keljik by visiting Bishop Papken Gulesserian. The 1150 Minnesotans who claim Armenian ancestry remain concentrated in the Twin Cities metro area.

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Following the *Hrashapar* service, a public reception took place in the Ararat Hall at St. Sahag Armenian Church, where His Holiness and the flock enjoyed a short program by the children from the Armenian School. Students sang the Armenian national anthem and two brothers recited “*Yegheghetsi Haygagan*” or Armenian Church - an Armenian poem by Vahan Tekeyan, then Mariam Kocharian sang.

On Friday, October 26, the University of St. Thomas conferred an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters on His Holiness, who, in turn offered his thanks and a substantive speech. Following this conferral ceremony, His Holiness bestowed the medal of St. Gregory the Illuminator on the Honorable Mr. and Mrs. Gerard Cafesjian.

This was followed by a Luncheon with the University President, Father Dennis Dease, Faculty, Staff and Clergy, Ecumenical and Civic Leaders. The host was His Excellency Archbishop Flynn of the Catholic Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. His Holiness was recognized as world leader of Christian Church as well as for his accomplishments during the last 8 years. Bridges were built between the two churches, including a prospective exchange between the University and Holy Etchmiadzin.

His Holiness received a public proclamation from the Mayor of St. Paul with a message of welcome, as well as the official letter of welcome from the Mayor of Minneapolis.

Father Sahak concluded, “This was an uplifting and moving experience for the community and I could see tears in the eyes of the faithful as they received His Holiness’ blessing. As Jesus said at the end of the gospel of Matthew, “...behold I am with you always...”, I believe that His Holiness is mirroring this by bringing blessings of Holy Etchmiadzin to the faithful of the USA. This has been a memorable experience for all who has been touched by him.”

For more information on the Pontifical Visit of His Holiness Karekin II, including supplemental media advisories and background papers, please visit: [www.pontificalvisit.org](http://www.pontificalvisit.org) and [www.armenianchurch.net](http://www.armenianchurch.net)

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