

**Hrant Dink's 11/05/06 Address
United Armenian Congregational Church, Hollywood, CA**

I would like to greet you and express my gratitude for the opportunity created to visit you and share a few moments with you.

I have to say that the Armenian Evangelical Church is not strange to me as I have grown up in its bosom in the children's nest of the Gedik Pasa Armenian Evangelical Church in Istanbul which was then administered by Mr. Hrant (Giutchig) Guzelian. At the time, the Armenian Evangelical Church and Mr. Guzelian had embarked on a mission of search and rescue of children of endangered Armenian families in Anatolia by bringing them to Istanbul, enrolling them in schools and educating them with elements of the Armenian culture. My two brothers and I were among those children as having come from Malatya we enrolled in the Gedik Pasa Armenian Evangelical Church. I was seven years old and my brothers were five and three respectively.

This witnessing is about the role of the Armenian Evangelical Church in my life and the inspiration it has left on me. It was in this church that I met many respectable ministers who of course are not strangers to you, like Rev. Sagharian, Rev. Sahagian and Rev. Bakkalian. But, in particular Rev. Bakkalian, who was such a dear grandpa for all of us. Every year he used to visit us from France, live and work with us for one month and with his special lovely style teach us the Bible. I learned a lot in the Armenian Evangelical Church which to this date I consistently apply in my life.

In the earlier years of the school, we used to go back to Anatolia in summer and forget most of what we had learned. Concerned about it Mr. (Giutchig) Guzelian wanted to establish a summer camp and avoid having to send us back to Anatolia in summer.

So we built a camp in Tuzla. It was a barren land. We took possession and as young boys living under tents every summer and by planting trees, digging foundations and raising buildings we converted the barren land into heaven.

That's where I grew up, and that's where at the age of fourteen I met my future wife who at seven and as a Kurdish Armenian was brought in from the Merdin area. We met in the Tuzla camp, we grew up there, we got married and reared our children there until we got to the eighties after 20-25 years from its creation.

One day in the early eighties, Mr. (Giutchig) Guzelian, having had difficulties with the Turkish authorities, was jailed. So the camp and the church were both orphaned. My wife and I jumped and filled in for Mr. Guzelian who was in prison, simultaneously working hard for his release. As I look upon this packed congregation in this church today I can't but wonder as I recall what we had to do to keep the church doors open and avoid its closure by the authorities. We had no minister. Every Sunday we used to go to church. We had a guard. The guard used to sit on the pews. My wife too used to sit on the pews with my three children next to her. They would become the congregation and I the preacher. I used to come up to the podium, read the Holy Scripture, preach and keep the church doors open. We did this for years. Five years to be exact. However during these years the pressure from the Turkish authorities multiplied and one day they got to us a decree which advised us the seizure of the Tuzla camp. That barren land which we had converted into heaven was being taken away after twenty-five years of use under the pretext that it was given away to us in the first place by mistake.

They took it away from us and the government, we understand, has since passed it on to other third parties. However we have not given up. We continue to fight back to regain ownership of the camp as well as other minority owned properties confiscated by the government.

During my childhood years, I have read the Bible several times, memorized numerous Psalms and won a lot of prizes at school. My wife who also has had Armenian Evangelical education is still an active member of the Istanbul Gedik Pasa Armenian Evangelical church. Today, I praise the Lord for that church, a church that has grown thanks to Rev. Krikor Agha Baloghli and is packed every Sunday. Gone are the days of the three member church. Non Armenians also attend and worship is conducted in several languages. The church is rolling forward in its mission.

Meanwhile, as Hrant Dink, I entered the political arena through the media and carry on my struggle against the authorities in Turkey to abolish the undue pressures on the minorities and especially on Armenians and restitute all our rights. And I have great hope that one day we will definitely repossess the camp that they took away from us. Definitely.

I would like to express my special gratitude and thanks, not to you directly may be, but to your evangelical fathers whom we, as children called benefactors at the time. I never forget that at every Christmas, New Year and Easter we used

to receive gifts from our benefactors in the United States and that every boy or girl had a sponsor whom they had never met. Someone from America who had adopted one of us showering us with gifts which we acknowledged by sending a written letter coupled with art work and words of gratitude from the heart.

Once again I would like to repeat those words of thanks from the heart packaged to your fathers and you who came to rescue THREE HUNDRED children from ANATOLIA, bring them to Istanbul, educate them, teach them the Armenian language, the culture, many of who with the inspiration learned from the teachings of the Holy Word remain the faithful children of the nation.

Greetings to you again and thank you for this privilege. I wish you well in all your endeavors.

Thank you.