



Culture
Heritage
History
Language

Armenian Cultural Organization of Minnesota
Established 1980

MinneHyeLites

No. 157 Spring 2020



Hosted by: *John Parker-Der Boghossian*

**Friday,
April 24, 2020
at 6 PM**

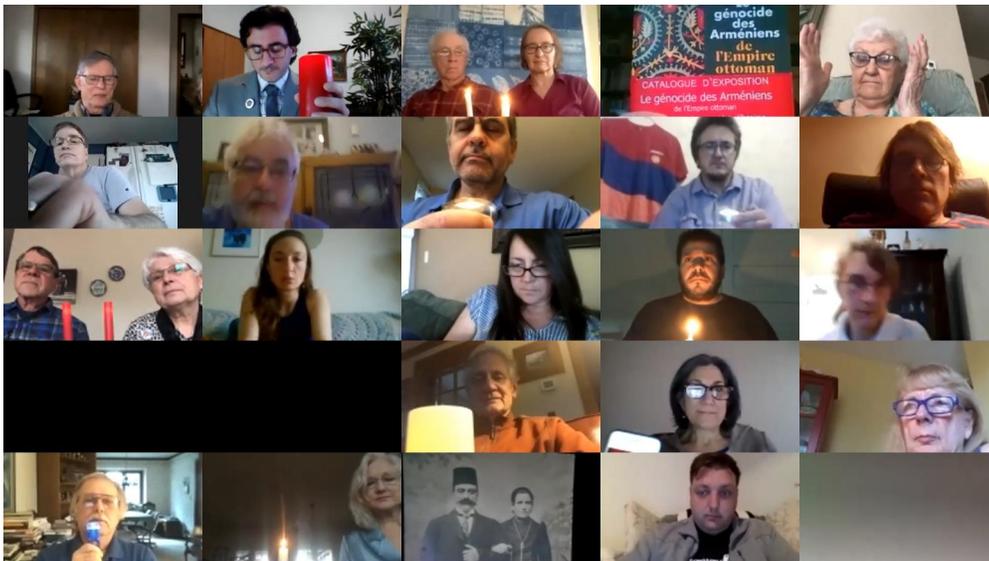


Keynote Speaker:
Professor Joachim Savelsberg



Poetry Reading:
Andrea Johnson

ACOM 2020 105TH GENOCIDE COMMEMORATION A VIRTUAL GATHERING



A moment of silence and reflection

A video of the
Gathering has
been posted on
our website:

mnarmenians.org



ACOM 2020 - CALENDAR OF EVENTS - Jan.—Aug.

Questions, Suggestions, email: jpderboghossian@gmail.com
or call ACOM President, John at: 231-313-1612

Events Cancelled due to CIVID-19 are shown with a ~~strikeout~~ line through the event

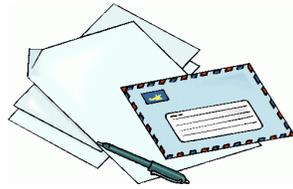


DATE	DAY	TIME	EVENT
			ACOM 2020
10-Jan	Fri	6:00 PM	GAGHANT
13-Jan	Mon	5:30 PM	Board meeting
17-Jan	Thu	7:00 PM	Book Club
10-Feb	Mon	5:30 PM	Board meeting
20-Feb	Thu	7:00 PM	Book Club
22-Feb	Sat	6:00 PM	Folksinging
22-Feb	Sat	7:00 PM	Cinema Saturday - Khatchaturian
8-Mar	Sun	1:30-4 pm	What was it like growing up Arm #13
16-Mar	Mon	5:30 PM	Board meeting
19-Mar	Thu	7:00 PM	Book Club
21-Mar	Sat	6:00 PM	Folksinging
21-Mar	Sat	7:00 PM	Cinema Saturday—Khachaturian—Gayane
13-Apr	Mon	5:30 PM	Board meeting—virtual
16-Apr	Thu	7:00 PM	Book Club—virtual
4/30, 5/1,2,3		various	Festival of Nations
11-May	Mon	5:30 PM	Board meeting—Virtual
16-May	Sat	7:00 PM	Folksinging
16-May	Sat	6:00 PM	Cinema Saturday
21-May	Thu	7:00 PM	Book Club—Virtual
8-Jun	Mon	5:30 PM	Board meeting
18-Jun	Thu	7:00 PM	Book Club
20-Jun	Sat	6:00 PM	Folksinging
20-Jun	Sat	7:00 PM	Cinema Saturday
28-Jun	Sun	3:30 to ?	ACOM Picnic (Como Park)
13-Jul	Mon	5:30 PM	Board meeting
18-Jul	Sat	6:00 PM	Folksinging
18-Jul	Sat	7:00 PM	Cinema Saturday
25-Jul	Sat	3:00 PM	ACOM Pool Party (Ericksons)
2-Aug	Sun	All day	St Mesrob Heritage Festival
10-Aug	Mon	5:30 PM	Board meeting
15-Aug	Sat	6:00 PM	Folksinging
15-Aug	Sat	7:00 PM	Cinema Saturday

ACOM WEBSITE

Remember to continue to check our website:

www.mnarmenians.org



FROM OUR MAIL BAG

THANK YOU

Hi Nairy and ACOM,

Thank you so much for the fruit and chocolate basket you sent me. Hopefully they will help me speed up my recovery! Happy to know you are thinking of me during this time.

Mitchell Erickson

SYMPATHY

Condolences to Sarah Wiersbeck and Mark Wiersbeck on the passing of their beloved sister-in-law and (paternal) aunt respectively. She died mid-February 2020 in South Dakota. Mark remembers spending a lot of time with her and the family when they were young.

SPEEDY RECOVERY

ACOM members are happy to hear that **Jim Lippert** has returned home after surgery and extends their most heartfelt wishes to Jim for a very speedy and complete recovery. God's blessings be with you, Jim!

ACOM GENOCIDE COMMEMORATION 2020

Thank you, John, Terry, and everyone on the board for putting together this year's commemoration program and for inviting me to read poetry. For me, it was an especially meaningful commemoration this year, important, in these unsettling circumstances, to come together with the Armenian community and friends of the community and recognize our bond.

Andrea Johnson

This was great. I couldn't stay for everything, but I could still pop in and out as I was able to, and was still able to watch the baby. I have received comments from folks in St. Cloud and Jamestown, ND, who said they really appreciated being able to attend like this. Some folks sent the Zoom info to relatives all around the U.S., and maybe further. I know Nairy sent it to relatives in other countries. I saw my mom's pastor in Jamestown also attended. The folks who wrote to me all hope this type of broadcast continues in the future with other programming. I just received more kudos from Seattle. It was truly appreciated, and many are awaiting the recording's posting. A great success, I'd say!!

Cynthia Erickson

I thought it was a fantastic presentation. Thank you to all your hard work on this!

Mark Wiersbeck

Thank you to all who worked so hard to pull this off....historical event for ACOM! Remember that we had 37 to 38 computers logged in to view....behind each computer may have been more than one person...

Patty Kardashian

Thanks to all that made the tribute possible. Touching and informative.

Tom Keljik

Congratulations to all organizers and participants who have put together such an amazing program, despite the disappointment of the cancellation of the event due to the COVID-19. Thanks again for including us as part of this virtual event. I will keep this site and other attachments as they hold great poems and also the lyrics to the song (Ambits Gorav).

Suzy Basmadjian

Australia



After COVID-19

Before COVID-19

On a more entertaining note:

Check out this Website for "Social Distancing" that features our own **Robert Bell** and his Hot Swing Combo

<https://www.socialdistancingfestival.com/featured>

A link to the Album Music is here:

<https://www.bellrobert.com/music/>

WHAT WAS IT LIKE BEING GROWING UP ARMENIAN IN ... 13th

MARTIN AZARIAN – March 2020



I was born in 1962 in Providence, RI, but grew up in Warwick, Rhode Island, moving there in 1968. I attended Warwick Veterans' High School, then Hofstra University in New York, and then Brooklyn Law School in New York. After graduating from Brooklyn Law School and married, my wife Donna and I moved to Manhattan and remained there until 1993 when we moved to Minnesota, first to Edina and then

Eden Prairie.

My father's family hails from Palu, historic Armenia. My grandmother fled in 1915 when she was only eight years old. The route she took to escape remains unclear but fled to Syria then to Beirut, Lebanon, then Marseille, France. In 1922 she attempted to travel to America. The ship's captain attempted to dock in the United States but was not permitted to do so. Instead, the ship docked in Cuba; with the captain having promised to take the passengers to the United States in a few days. Unbeknownst to the passengers, the ship left and never returned stranding the passengers in Cuba. With no real choice, she settled in Cuba where there was a sizeable Armenian community. While in Cuba she married my grandfather, Sarkis Azarian, whom I never met. He passed away in 1940. My father and my two aunts were born there. In 1946, my father came to the United States and ultimately settled in Providence, RI, but he would travel between the United States and Cuba until the revolution. He was very fond of the Cuban people and the Cuban culture and would often return to Cuba, but ultimately the family emigrated to the United States, settling in Rhode Island.

My paternal grandmother did not talk much about Palu since she was very young, only eight years old, when she fled the country. Actually, there are many survivors from Palu who settled in RI and Southeastern Massachusetts. They had occasional reunions, one of which took place in Narragansett, RI, where my family would spend summers. I am told the reunions were filled with talk about fond interests such as food and culture. As my immediate family did not live in Armenia, except for my grandmother, there was not much talk of Armenia. But that is not to say there were no strong connections to Armenian history or culture. There were, but these connections were of food, culture and especially the church which was the center of Armenian culture in Rhode Island.

It is important to remember that unlike Minnesota, Rhode Island is a very small state, about the size of Hennepin County. Nothing is far away in Rhode Island. For a long time now, the church of Sts. Sahag & Mesrob, located in Providence has been the hub, the center for

Armenian life for those living in Rhode Island and South-eastern Massachusetts. I remember the services were always in Armenian, but a few years ago, the church changed the liturgy to half Armenian and half English. The church is very recognizable from afar with its traditional Armenian cupula, large Armenian flag and tall Armenian cross atop the cupula, bathed in blue light at night. It is said the airline pilots, at night, use it as a landmark before landing at T.F. Greene airport, Rhode Island's airport. At the time I lived in Rhode Island, I did not regularly attend services as it was totally in Armenian and my parents wanted us to become American so speaking languages other than English was discouraged. I did try Armenian Sunday school; but decided that was not for me. This, I think was a mistake but what did I know being so young? That does not mean I wasn't involved with the church. During those years, Armenia was part of the USSR so people who attended church felt it was all that represented the culture and the country for them. I felt that too, attending church festivals now and then.

I did not grow up speaking Armenian, our parents wanted us to assimilate into the American culture. However, if they wanted to speak about something they did not want us to know about, they spoke Spanish to each other. This worked until I studied Spanish in high school!

I did not attend Armenian schools. Before attending a private college and law school, I attended public grade school, junior high, and high school where there may have been five or six Armenians in high school, two of which became my friends. Interestingly enough, on some occasions when my friends and I went out, we Armenians outnumbered my non-Armenian high school friends. This did not happen very often, but it's probably the only time I can remember Armenians outnumbering others. I then went to Hofstra University where I met Donna, my wife. After obtaining my Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science, I attended Brooklyn Law School.

One of my fondest memories growing up was every Saturday morning, I would get in the car with my brother and sister and my dad would drive us to my grandmother's home to visit, and she would talk to us in Armenian as her English was poor. We understood nearly nothing she said but she made the best chicken and pilaf there! I have the fondest memories of visiting with my grandparents. Except maybe at my Aunt Maria's home, you could not get a better meal anywhere else: the pakhlava, the chicken pilaf, the lamb, beuregs, cheuregs and tabouleh. If a recipe, especially pilaf, called for a stick of butter, my grandmother would add a stick and a half. The more the better! I remember enjoying the beuregs, buttered phyllo dough filled with three types of cheeses and parsley as dessert which was odd as beuregs are not sweet, but salty.

After my grandmother and step-grandfather passed away we would celebrate the holidays at my Aunt Maria and Uncle Leo's home. That home in many ways was the center of my family's life. It always seemed like a mansion to me. I remember the table filled with delicious foods and

(Continued on page 5)

desserts. How my aunt was able to prepare so much delicious food was amazing to me.

Food was the central part of every family gathering. It was always a party getting together whether at my grandparents or elsewhere. By the way, my family always made pilaf with egg noodles, never with orzo!

For school lunches, I remember on many occasions taking shish kebab sandwiches and stuffed green peppers with me. Yet, I was envious of American kids and the lunches they brought along, although looking back on it, I had the better deal!

Growing up in RI, I never felt put down. In a community overwhelmingly Irish and Italian, with 80-85% Catholic, I felt rather unique. The Catholics had many churches in Rhode Island. A church on every corner it seemed to me and the Catholic children would go to catechism after school. I did not have this. The Armenians had no catechism and only one church that was very special to us. Although I attend Holy Family Catholic Church today with my family, my faith is still Armenian Apostolic.

When I moved to New York to attend Hofstra University there were a few Armenians; but almost every student was either Jewish or Italian Roman Catholic. Some of the students, especially the Jewish students, knew about the Armenian Genocide, although for the Jewish students, the Holocaust was understandably much more prominent in their minds.

When I got to New York, it was a culture shock for me to learn how few knew about Armenia. There was only one Armenian church, St. Vartan's in New York City and no other church nearer to my university. But, when people would ask me about my ethnic heritage or about Armenia, I would talk about the fact that Noah landed in Armenia, we are the first nation to adopt Christianity and that two of Christ's apostles traveled to Armenia. Thankfully, today, the New England states and in many other states, the public schools are required by law to teach about the Armenian Genocide. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, this was not yet firmly established.

When Donna and I first started dating, I went to her home to meet her grandparents. For this occasion, I remember her grandmother quite vividly. We were sitting down at the kitchen table. She was a presence to be dealt with! She was a very kind woman who spoke with a thick Italian accent, and she asked me out of the blue: "so, do your people celebrate Christmas?" I looked at her, and for a moment was unsure how to answer that question, but when I said "yes, we do!", she smiled and said, "good!" She was pleased with me and that gave me the opportunity to talk about Armenia.

ALARICA HASSETT – March 2020



I was born in St. Paul, MN, in a small hospital – Divine Redeemer – that no longer exists. I lived with my family in NE Minneapolis in a duplex where my mom, my dad, my sister and I lived, and my maternal grandparents lived in the lower level of our duplex. My paternal grandmother lived across the alley from us so we were all very close. After my

parents divorced and my grandparents passed away, my mom and Terry got married in 1996 and we moved to Roseville. Have been living there since then.

Both sets of my maternal grandparents came from Dikranagerd (now Diarbekir) in historic SW Armenia and both emigrated to Egypt before the 1915 genocide, probably because of all the massacres that had happened in late 1800s. My great-grandfather Kerbadjian left 3 years before the 1915 genocide because he worked for a sultan who warned him of upcoming trouble and urged him to take his family and leave. My grandmother was born in Armenia but my grandfather was born in Alexandria, Egypt.

I do know that the historic region of Dikranagerd went through reconstruction a few years ago thanks to the Kurdish mayor at the time who wanted to help the Armenians. Unfortunately, many areas were destroyed over and over again.

After attending Immaculate Conception Armenian Catholic schools where they taught French as the first language, my mom went to an all girl American high school in Cairo. The daughter of Egypt's president (Gamal Abdel Nasser) attended the same school and my mom says that she was constantly accompanied by secret service agents. Per my mom, the main reason she and her family left Egypt was at the time where non-Arabs/non-Muslims were no longer welcome and felt threatened.

I grew up with regular ACOM events in the Twin Cities, such as the Festival of Nations, and even Armenian church services (before St Sahag church came to be). Archbishop Khajag Barsamian who was only Hayr Khajag at the time, used to come regularly to the Twin Cities, and stayed with my uncle and aunt, Vahram and Vali Kardashian. He used to do the Armenian church service in "non-Armenian" churches and that would happen once or twice throughout the year.

There were no Armenian schools to attend in the Twin Cities so I went to a Catholic elementary school, Immaculate Conception, then to a Catholic High School, Totino Grace, and later on, attended the University of Minnesota from where I graduated with a degree in Fine Arts and a minor in French. I had the opportunity to attend a week plus of Armenian language lab in New York though, called ALLARC, sponsored by St. Vartan diocese, where I had the opportunity to visit with Hayr Khajag. This program was a concentrated education on Armenian culture, religion, history and art. Although I speak Western Armenian, unfortunately, I am still unable to read and write in Armenian

Even though I identify mostly as Armenian, I do not forget my German background. I attended Summer German language classes and speak German.

A side note on my mom and dad. They met at the American University in Cairo where my father was studying Islamic history and my mom was both taking courses and working part-time. My mom and her family were getting ready to leave Egypt and immigrate to the US, sponsored by my uncle Vahram Kardashian (my grandmother's brother). So my mom happened to mention to my dad – just a friend – that they were leaving to join my uncle in Minnesota and my dad said: I am from St. Paul, MN. Where are you going to? My mom answered: Minneapolis, and became totally confused as she had no idea how close the two cities were. They reconnected after they all came to the US and eventually married.

Because both my parents spoke and were very interested in languages, they decided to raise their two daughters as multi-linguists. My sister and I were to speak ONLY in French with my mom, German with my dad, Armenian with my maternal grandparents and English with my paternal grandmother. If we spoke English, we were fined 10 cents which later on became 25 cents. I did feel a little awkward not speaking English with my parents in front of my friends, and one of our teachers at Immaculate Conception school had quite a discussion with my father insisting that we should be addressed by our parents in the English language in front of others so people understood what was being said. That did not happen. Later on, both my sister and I have come to appreciate the effort our parents put into teaching us different languages and keeping the discipline and consistency necessary to keep up with different languages when everything around us was in English. Sadly, my dad passed away 7 years ago.

My mom and Terry, along with my sister and I went to Armenia quite a few years ago. We enjoyed the trip even though my sister and I understood nothing of what was being said in Armenian – we were not tuned into Eastern Armenian at all.

I always enjoyed Armenian food, especially what my maternal grandmother prepared. The dolma, the cheureg, the pakhlava – she had her own recipe for that – the chi-kuftah: raw beef with bulghour. In fact, my dad had planted a grapevine so we can use the leaves for dolma, but they did not turn out to be the right kind of grape leaves; they were too tough. We all used to go grapeleaf picking by the river, my mom would wash and freeze them. So we always had grapeleaves available when we wanted to make dolma. My dad liked Armenian food and used to make sijkh (Armenian beef jerky). He would buy the absolutely lean ground beef, mix it with spices, and hang it up in the attic to dry. I remember my friends coming over to our house to play and freaking out over the sight of meat hanging from the ceiling in the attic.....I do not eat meat now but have very good memories of my grandmother's cooking.

Before a resident priest at St. Sahag church existed, ACOM used to invite Armenian priests to the Twin Cities

for church services. Der Sahak from Milwaukee was one of my favorite ones. He got the community together and gathered the youth for various activities. Another US born priest that I liked very much was Der Yeprem from Racine, WI. I was in Milwaukee attending a Summer Ballet Intensive when Der Yeprem came and picked me up and brought me to their home. During the course of the conversation, he asked me what I was studying at the University, and when I told him I was majoring in Art, he asked: "what does your mother think about that?" Told him my mom was fine with that. As long as I studied and got my degree, she was happy. My mom has always been very broad-minded for an Armenian. In fact, I asked her once, would she be upset if I did not marry an Armenian? Her response was: NO! I did not! and twice at that.....

As much as my time allows, I continue to be as involved as possible with Armenian activities here through ACOM. I am a paid professional ballet dancer with a company in Bloomington, where I also teach ballet. At the same time, I do medical interpreting in clinics and hospitals from French to English and vice versa. I had started that profession while I was still in college. It is challenging, rewarding and definitely keeps me up with the French language.

Below, Father Yeprem Kelegian conducted the annual worship service for the local members of the Armenian Apostolic congregation on Jan. 11 at St. John's Episcopal Church. His assistant was Bradley Erickson.



PHOTO BY PAULA KELLER

If you have in interest in Armenian dance, if you have danced in the past, or have never danced but really would like to learn and participate, this would be a good time to give it a try. All the dances are taught, and costumes provided. It is a volunteer activity and we only ask for your time commitment. Rehearsals are typically held on Sundays at 1:00 pm in Roseville. Remember: you do not need to be Armenian to become a member of the dance group, just a desire to learn and enjoy Armenian music and dance.

Note: if you wish to perform with the group, you need to purchase your own "character shoes" and be ready to wear makeup and perform without eyeglasses.

For additional information, call Naïry: 651-639-9346 or email: hyebar@yahoo.com

The Armenian Dance Ensemble has been representing Armenian Culture through Dance and Music for over 25 years. Below is our schedule so far this year.

Unfortunately, most performances cancelled so far due to Covid-19



DATE	DAY	TIME	EVENT
14-Mar	Sat	12.40 pm	Festival of Nations - preview
9-Apr	Thu	7:00 PM	Jones-Harrison Residence
4/30, 5/1, 2, 3			Festival of Nations
29-Aug	Sat	12; 1:30	MN State Fair
20-Sep	Sun	7:00 PM	Edinborough Park Amphitheater



NEWS ITEMS OF NOTE

The ACOM Book Club started just over 6 years ago. Since then we have read just over 50 books which we discussed at our meetings. The meetings have been held at St. Sahag church, at libraries, at various members' houses, and even at Mim's restaurant. We were scheduled to meet in March to discuss the book "The Gimicks" by Chris McCormick, a professor of creative writing at Mankato State University. We were planning to meet at Azad Mesrobian's house in St. Peter and were looking forward to meeting with the author. Unfortunately the Coronavirus pandemic struck. Through email (a wonderfully useful tool during a pandemic!) we decided that we really shouldn't have a meeting in March, unless ...

Zoom!

There are several computer/tablet/cell phone apps which allow you to hold meetings remotely. We, as a group, decided to try out 'Zoom' and to hold our book club meeting through the web. It was a little late to hold it at our scheduled date in March so we just delayed things a bit, held a practice session in March, and then decided to

hold a full meeting at our normal meeting time in April. It worked! We actually had more members attending the Zoom meeting than we had ever had at a regular meeting!

As a downer, though, all that we discussed was the book. At a normal book club meeting there are always many side discussions about personal family histories which relate in some fashion to the book under discussion. Our two hour scheduled meeting will tend to push past two hours until, finally, members just decide that they have to leave. Our Zoom meeting went about an hour and a quarter and then everyone just felt that it was time to quit. All that we discussed, pretty much, was the book. That was more efficient, but ... it felt different. It didn't have the same feeling of togetherness, maybe? [A link to the summary write-up is HERE](#)

Our next meeting is scheduled for May 21st at 7:00 PM. We are going to be discussing **Ruth Charchian's** book "Armenian Crisis of Identity" and, originally, we were going to be meeting at the Charchian's house. The way things look now we might meet there and, then again, we might be meeting through Zoom again. We'll see what develops.

Until then, stay healthy and read!

Leroy Erikson

ACOM BOARD MEMBERS 2020-21

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- Vice President:** open
- Past President:** Naïry D.
- Secretary:** Lynne G.
- Treasurer:** Naïry D.
- Members at Large:** Patty K., Kass V., Sarah E., Mark W., Annie W.
- Webmaster & Newsletter Editor:** Terry M.

Board Advisor: Tom K.

Any ACOM dues-paid member who is interested in serving on the Board is welcome to contact us:

www.mnarmenians.org

Likewise, get in touch with us if you have comments, suggestions or would like to submit an article for an upcoming ACOM Newsletter.

ACOM 2020 PAID MEMBERS

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 Aram; Connie, George
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 Arslan; Arnold
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 Azarian; Martin, Donna, Adriana
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 Baradaran-Cafesjian; Kathleen, Jaff
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 Vaubel; Kass, Carol, Jamaica P.
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 Wiersbeck; Sarah
 Ylitalo; Caroline, David & family

If you have not yet renewed your membership, and would like to do so, please use the form on the back of the Newsletter to mail your check. Let us know if you are interested in receiving a copy of the Board Member biographies. Email your request to:

hyebar@yahoo.com

ARMENIAN CULTURAL ORGANIZATION OF MINNESOTA — ACOM

MISSION STATEMENT



- 1) To provide programs and events which encourage its members to learn Armenian culture, language, history and heritage.
- 2) To provide programs of Armenian culture, language, history and heritage for the general Minnesota area.
- 3) To provide an environment which encourages participation of all Armenians, their relations and friends who have an interest in Armenian culture, regardless of religious, political or social differences, and to promote harmony among its members.
- 4) To provide periodic gatherings and meetings for the cultural furtherance of the Armenian people, their relations and friends who have an interest in Armenian culture within the general Minnesota area.

CONSTITUTION

The Armenian Cultural Organization of Minnesota (ACOM) preserves and promotes Armenian culture, language, history and heritage in Minnesota and the upper Midwest. Founded in 1980 and headquartered in St. Paul, ACOM is the oldest and largest Armenian organization in the state.

ACOM welcomes everyone, regardless of ethnic, religious, or political affiliation, who takes an interest in Armenia and Armenians. Our members include first-generation through fourth-generation Minnesota Armenians, their families, and non-Armenian friends of the community.

ACOM's numerous cultural and social events include Armenian dance parties (Gaghant), guest speakers, folk dance lessons and performances by the Armenian Dance Ensemble of Minnesota, Genocide commemorations, summer picnics, and series of Interviews of Presenters talking about their heritage. ACOM also sponsors all Armenian activities at the International Institute's Festival of Nations, a major regional folk festival held annually in St. Paul. Minnesota Armenians were founding participants in 1932; today, the Festival is ACOM's most visible public venue.

As an independent, 501 (c)3 non-profit organization, ACOM is supported primarily by membership dues and private donations. Gifts to ACOM are tax-deductible to the extent permissible by law.



ACOM MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

Valid January 1 to December 31, 2020

Name: _____

Street: _____

Phone: () - - E-Mail Address: _____

Household Membership \$35.00
Includes all members of one household

Out Of State..... \$15.00
(Newsletter Only)

Contributing..... \$100.00

Comments: _____

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Complete this form and
Return it with your check to



Nairy Digris, Treasurer
1703 Skillman Ave. W.
Roseville, MN 55113

We appreciate and count on your continued support

MinneHyeLites is emailed to all and distributed via USPS only to those who request it. This saves ACOM considerable printing and mailing costs. If you would like to receive your newsletter via email, just send your email address to hyebar@yahoo.com

1703 Skillman Avenue West

Roseville, MN 55113



We're on the Web

www.mnarmenians.org