

Rev. Archpriest Sahag Vertanesian
(1969-1985) (1919-2005)

“Hapet” Vertanesian was born in the tent-city of Port Said, Egypt in 1919, and two weeks after birth, was able to travel and live in his native village of Haji Habibli in Musa Dagh, where his forefathers had lived for centuries. He was the tenth child of Mariam and Bedros Vertanesian, who instilled faith in him. His father died when he was one year old, and at age ten, his mother sent him to the orphanage in Kessab to be educated and to be able to make a difference in the world.

From 1935-1942 he studied at Saint James Seminary in Jerusalem, under the mentorship of renowned writer Hagop Oshagan, who encouraged him to always write. His unique voice and aptitude at music was nurtured there. Upon graduation, he worked as a secretary in the British army, and then began his compassionate devotion to his beloved Armenian nation as a teacher and choirmaster in Armenian communities in Beirut, Aleppo, Latakia and Cyprus, while being active in the ranks of the A.R.F. and Homenetmen.

In 1951 he married school teacher and scout leader, Armenouhi Katmarian, and together they raised their three daughters: Maro, Nora and Dzovig. With the encouragement of His Holiness Khoren Paroyan, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, he moved to the United States in 1963 with his family to devote himself to a life of commitment to the Lord and to his nation as a clergyman. He was ordained “Der Sahag” by Archbishop Hrant Khatchadorian, at Soorp Asdvadzadzin Church in Whitinsville, Massachusetts, serving there 1963-1965. From 1965 to 1969 he served the community of All Saints Church in Chicago, Illinois; 1969-1984, the Greater Washington D.C. community of Soorp Khatch Church in Chevy Chase, Maryland; 1985-1990, St. Gregory Church in North Andover, Massachusetts.

Der Sahag spent his lifetime serving the Armenian communities in service of the Lord. He enriched the lives of Armenians everywhere he went, providing education in history, religion, politics and culture. He was knowledgeable in many disciplines, and being adept in the Armenian language and music, in each community which he served, he taught the Armenian language and a diverse range of Armenian music to young and old, encouraging them to keep the mother tongue and their rich cultural heritage. He taught the beautiful, properly executed Sharagans to choir members and deacons; traditional and patriotic songs to the youth.

Because of his great skill in writing, he was usually assigned as secretary to the NRA conferences. He was honored to serve as a delegate from the United States to the Holy See, participating in the election of His Holiness Karekin II of the Great House of Cilicia.

He continuously educated himself and was a master writer, with his writings being published in church periodicals which he edited; the *Hairenik* daily; *Outreach*; *Panpere*; and literary publications throughout the world. He authored and published a book entitled *From Musa Dagh to Mount Arara* in 1980, commemorating the Armenian Genocide and the 40 days of his native Musa Dagh, including a tribute to

his mother. He has left many valuable written works which unfortunately did not reach publication. These works include writings on religion (including prayers); nature, politics, history, music, fiction and non-fiction.

Der Sahag is known for his unassuming role as a peacemaker, always encouraging people to put aside their differences to work together for the good of the Armenian church and nation; he encouraged a God-loving people; and gave hope to all. He would always exclaim, "God bless the Armenian people AND God bless America!"

His last requiem service was on April 24, 2005 in Springfield, Mass., commemorating the Armenian Genocide of 1915.

Der Sahag was a modest man and never looked for monetary riches or anything in return for his deeds; he lived the humble life granted him by the Lord. He was blessed with a peaceful death on December 23, 2005 and was buried with honor, ceremony being presided over by Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan, in the presence of a dozen of his brothers in faith, who sent him off in a magnificent ceremony. Those who knew him shall remember him. His final services were at St. Gregory the Illuminator Church in Indian Orchard Massachusetts where he had spent his retirement writing and enjoying his family and God's given gifts, coming out of retirement when needed as a Der Hayr.