



LONG TERM FAITH PLAN of Armenia Inter-Church Charitable Round Table Foundation and Partners



ARMENIAN CHURCH

“Nature is the primordial reality which should permanently be taken care of. It is meant to serve the welfare of man, which is the crown of nature, and man is entitled to reasonably use the Nature’s gifts. We welcome the attention of environmental organizations and their initiatives towards environmental problems.”

His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians.

The origins of Christianity in Armenia are lost in legend. The Christianization in Armenia began with the work of Apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew, from the 1st century AD and was boosted in the early 4th century AD by Saint Gregory the Illuminator, who converted the Armenian king (301 AD) and spread the gospel message. A more complex process than the old accounts portray, Armenia’s adoption of Christianity was, nevertheless, a momentous chapter in the country’s history. The conversion of Armenia to Christianity was probably the most crucial step in its history. It turned Armenia sharply away from its pagan past and stamped it for centuries with an intrinsic character as clear to the native population as to those outside its borders, who identified Armenia almost at once as the first state to adopt Christianity. The faith survived centuries of oppression by conquerors and the lack of a national homeland, had given our people

education, culture and our identity, kept the nation together.

During the soviet era Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC) was deprived of its all assets, including church buildings, many of them dating back to early middle ages, as well as economic structures, forests, land plots, etc. Before the establishment of Soviet power in 1920, there were nearly 1,500 churches in the territory of the Russian Empire (Eastern Armenia being part of it), concentrated for the most part in Armenia. Like all religious groups in the Soviet Union, the Armenian Church suffered greatly, particularly hard hit in the 1930s. By 1941 out of the eight internal dioceses (those within the Soviet Union), in practice none remained, only three churches conducting worship services in Armenia, and three more in the territory of the Soviet Union. Not only was the Church institutionally close to extinction, the Soviet era had almost wiped out popular connection with the Church and religious ritual. The soviet state forbids religious instruction of young people, no church schools existed, and it was extremely difficult to obtain a Bible.

To eliminate Christianity from the hearts of Armenians turned to be not so easy. “Christianity is completely intertwined with the history of our nation. Somehow, it’s in our blood and bones”- said Archbishop Nerses Bozabalian. Diminished during the early Soviet period, the Church revived again in the second half of the twentieth century, after World War II and nowadays under independent Armenia.



ARMENIA ROUND TABLE FOUNDATION

Armenia Inter-Church Charitable Round Table Foundation (ART) is an ecumenical organization uniting Armenian Apostolic, Armenian Catholic and Armenian Evangelic Churches with a commitment to work together for alleviation of multiple problems in Armenia, including social, economic and environmental. As Armenians we adapt to various cultural settings, while preserving and celebrating our heritage. This is also reflected in the ecumenical outlook of the Armenian Church and her flock. An Armenian Church father likens the diversity of the Churches to a bouquet of flowers: while each flower has its own scent and beauty, together they represent pleasant harmony.

Our Long term faith plan (LTFP) is developed with a commitment to follow the vision, mission and values of ART.

OUR VISION

Inspired by the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ and Christian social teaching, Armenia Inter-Church Charitable Round Table Foundation strives to promote a peaceful and just society that respects all of God's creation, practices Christian values in word and deed, and ensures a dignified life for the vulnerable, with equal rights and opportunities for all.

OUR MISSION

ART mission is to contribute to poverty reduction, strengthen civil society, promote regional peace building and reconciliation, enable a fair and value base society through diaconal and development interventions in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

OUR VALUES

ART attaches importance to Christian fundamental values, vigorous expression of love, faith and hope. Based on the biblical belief that people are made in the image and likeness of God and should be treated equally, ART in its activities is adhering to the following guiding principles:



- Promote human rights and fundamental freedoms
- Care for the needs of vulnerable groups of the society
- Protect environment
- Maintain accountability, transparency and participation, mutual trust, impartiality and consistency,
- Achieve high efficiency and impact of the activities
- Evaluate continuously the quality of the provided services, results achieved and impact, and where needed, introduce necessary changes
- Encourage team work and cooperation.

ART and Partners' experience and activities are described below as elements in Key Areas of our faith plan. Future plans are presented as well, though in the end of 2025 needs assessment will be carried out in order to understand the new possible directions of work and accordingly revise and develop a new activity plan beyond 2025, based on ART good experience and needs of the people and the country. All the activities will involve ART partner Dioceses, NGOs and communities.

THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT

“...we join our efforts in safeguarding the creation and call upon the whole mankind to take care of the nature the way our Heavenly Father takes care of His flock...We believe that the whole universe and the various beings existing in it, as well as life were created and loved by Lord God....During daily service we also pray “for seasonable weather, gentle rains and abundance of fruit” (Book of Hours, Etchmiadzin, 1999, p. 399). And during the orders of “Andastan (Blessing of the four directions of the world), Djrornnek (Blessing of the water), Khaghoghornnek (Blessing of the grapes) established as a result of the reforms realized by Holy Fathers, the Armenian clergymen blessed the land, its fruits, the fields, the plants and their roots, the churches and the dwelling places together with the four directions of the world (Book of Hours, Etchmiadzin, 1999, p.268).

Bishop Hovakim Manukyan.

“However, man does not understand correctly his role and place in the universe. Man began to exploit nature and use it incorrectly. Man has been plunging more and more into sin and has been increasingly distorting the surrounding environment created by God. He uses incorrect economic, political and military policies and he uses hypocritical and irresponsible approaches. The result was that man spoils the earth, the water and the air and makes them unusable. He causes the reduction of biodiversity of fauna and flora and he puts irreplaceable mineral resources at risk to exhaustion... He should not wait until nature takes revenge but he should seek and find a way to reconciliation. Man should return to his vocation and be a clever guardian and toiler for the whole creation... Our God is eternal and his care towards the whole creation and man applies to all times. So man should respect the rights of both our present and future kinsmen and all creatures. He should use natural resources with awe and justice. In all possible ways man should not exploit and damage Mother Nature...Man should nourish... feelings of love and care toward “God’s Creation. ...There is only one way to God and it is adorned with the virtues of humbleness, abstinence, charity, patience and love. That way is Christ.”

Father Minas Martirosyan

AREAS OF OUR FAITH PLAN

Jeremiah 2:7

“I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable.”

FAITH-CONSISTENT USE OF ASSETS EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Experience 1997-2022

After the collapse of the Soviet Union some of the former church property was reclaimed, mainly Churches and Monasteries. Currently the Church owns a number of buildings throughout Armenia, which serve as centres for provision of various services to local communities, including spiritual, social and educational.

ART works with nine partner centres under the auspice of AAC dioceses in urban and rural communities. Church assets, i.e. buildings used for Sunday schools and children art centres, step by step were transformed into **social and educational centres**, as the need of such institutions were much required in small towns and rural communities in particular. The centres are active in provision of

out of school classes, as well as training of adults with an aim they gain skills to make their own living. Social services for the families are implemented by professional social workers, psychosocial support during emergencies is provided by trained clergy. The work here focuses on assistance to vulnerable families, women and active youth.

Informal education has always been in the centre of ART and partners' work, especially in Church owned social-educational centres. Classes are selected based on needs assessment in the location of each centre, so we see a variety of activities ranging from theater, dance and singing classes to computer literacy, languages, dressmaking and hairdressing. Art and vocational classes have become means for professional orientation and for starting own small businesses. One of the results



of educational activities is creation of youth groups involved in environmental protection activities in their towns and villages through information sharing on environmental problems, waste management classes, flash mobs etc.

Future plans 2023-2025 and beyond

Poverty and unemployment remain high in Armenia, causing migration and multiple economic and social problems. Prerequisites will be created for economic development of young men and women by building a solid basis for future business activities, awareness raising in business and environmental problems, on how to do business which with no harm to man and environment.

The work in social educational centres towards economic and livelihood improvement in local communities and support to graduates of educational courses for income generation will continue. Capacities of social centres to deliver support services will be strengthened, leading to improved sustainability and inclusive growth of local communities. It is believed that education will empower people, raise their self-esteem and confidence for gaining control over their lives and seeking solutions for livelihood improvements. The vulnerable people will be supported to obtain professional supplementary education and be assisted in internship, networking with local businesses for employment opportunities, assistance with self-employment and starting small businesses.



Using church assets will ensure informal education for youth and adults, which promotes new knowledge, encourages taking ownership on their progress and ensures that they are equipped to manage actively in the future.

Goal: utilization of church assets guarantees training for youth and economic well-being in the communities, which supports environmental justice.

Objectives

1. To ensure continued education for youth in the regions of Armenia in the social-educational centres to create pre-requisites for economic uplift of youth
2. To create pre-requisites to ensure economic uplift and sustainability of centre activities
3. Youth organizations as leaders in environmental protection in their communities.

- 1. To ensure continued education for youth in the regions of Armenia in the social-educational centres to create pre-requisites for economic uplift of youth**

Church assets, mainly buildings will serve as



educational and consultancy centres for youth and adults. The stress will be put on informal education and vocational training with an aim to foster active participation of people in the labor market of Armenia, promote entrepreneurship with no negative effects on man and environment. In short, to create a business to serve also for environmental and spiritual purposes. For years businesses irresponsibly focus on short-term profits while turning a blind eye to the destructive human, environmental and economic impacts of their companies, etc. The aim of the economic activities stated in the frames of our LTFP is tackling both economic growth and climate change issues. Putting skills and determination together, it is possible to solve some of the economic and environmental challenges we face in our communities. Today is a good time to launch “green business”, as high demand is driving an expansion of the market for environmentally friendly products and services.

These new small businesses will be naturally values-driven and motivated by the desire to achieve also social goals rather than solely accumulate profit. An eco-friendly business, or “green business” is one that demonstrates a commitment to an environmentally sustainable future. Green businesses strive to have a positive impact on the environment and their community. Economic development is viewed as geared to increasing capacity and technical know-how through vocational and business training, helping start-ups function productively, increasing access to lending institutions and (new) markets



This work will have the following steps:

- (1) training in environmental issues;**
- (2) how to start own business.**

- (1) Trainings with an aim to give knowledge and ability to drive environmental and economic recovery efforts will be organized. Youth will become aware of burning environmental problems globally, extrapolated to their community needs. People will be prepared for the consequences of global warming, which we are already experiencing.

Waste management and energy efficiency are serious problems in Armenia, and stress will be put on topics like the harmful impact of waste on air, water, human health; renewable energy (solar in particular) and energy efficiency. Adaptation to





climate change will be conducted as well as critical for agriculture now. So youth will understand and get knowledge and skills to be ready to live in this new and ever-changing situation.

Moreover, we will see change in daily lives: the more environmentally sustainable we are at home and personally, the more surrounding people repeat the same. These values will be transferred to the communities, including business and industries.

(2) Creation of small businesses and start-ups will be encouraged through trainings and small grants. Though small businesses may have only a few employees, as a whole they could provide large number of jobs. It is worth mentioning that job creation from start-ups is less volatile in economic downturns. At the same time such enterprises more easily will likely produce goods that are environmentally friendly. They seek to achieve environmental and social benefits as well. Moreover, currently demand is driving an expansion of the market for environmentally friendly products and services. They will produce and sell useful household items, souvenirs and bijouterie from collected



and sorted waste. Financial literacy with a focus on entrepreneurial skills will be accessible for them, so they start profitable activities which are not harmful (plastic reuse, plastic refusal, etc).

2. To create pre-requisites to ensure economic uplift and sustainability of centre activities

Nine centres will continue their education and social activities, expanding the number of beneficiaries using grants, donations etc. At the same time means will be explored to harness own funds from various activities: establishing paid classes, start-ups, small businesses, other revenue bringing activities, such as rental of premises, consultancy services, etc. Already started master classes to community members and tourists, both paid, will continue and expand.

Faith-based investors will be importantly considered as partners in values-driven actions.

Revenues from income generation activities will be used to continue and expand the social and educational work in the dioceses and centres.





At least three centres out of nine will use hybrid business models with two arms: profit and not-for-profit. Profit part is represented by a small business, while social-educational centre is implementing vocational training projects. E.g. “Telik” small enterprise created in the frames of training projects implemented at Ijevan centre, produces and sells handmade carpets, batik scarves, decorated sacks, etc. Whereas Ijevan centre implementing its projects: educations, social, spiritual and environmental.

While improving their access to economic infrastructures, business planning and access to credits, the centres will create various revenue generating ventures, thus encourage and facilitate business activities of centre beneficiaries.

3. Youth organizations as leaders in environmental protection in their communities

This area tackles the creation of youth groups for organizing community recreational, environmental and cultural activities. Youth groups, now pioneers of preservation of community traditions and cultural values, already with knowledge on



social and environmental issues received at educational centres under the auspice of Church, will serve as an engine for youth environmental activities and actions in their towns, villages, regions.

Environmental problems will be presented through organization of events, discussions, flash mobs, exhibitions of pictures and photos depicting environmental problems. “Know your community” actions will result in identification of social and environmental problems existing in their own community and how to mitigate and/or adapt to them. Trainings and discussions on climate change, presently a major threat to sustainable development, realization of human rights and existence of life on our planet, will result in new ideas how to mitigate and adapt to it. Moreover, adaptation programmes will be developed, including through linking humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and development at community level. These activities will bring new members and a wide range of partners to collaborate for environmental actions.

Community Days and Town hall meetings will be organized to identify markets and jobs, prioritize the most critical intervention projects,





and work on them, conduct surveys, monitor work-in-progress and evaluate results.

Resources needed: assets (already available), financial investments (grants, cheap loans, donations, revenues from sales, funds raised through the work of small enterprises, any other possible funds).

Direct target group: 1900 people

- 650 youth and adult participants will benefit from income generation and capacity building opportunities through

supplementary vocational and capacity building activities

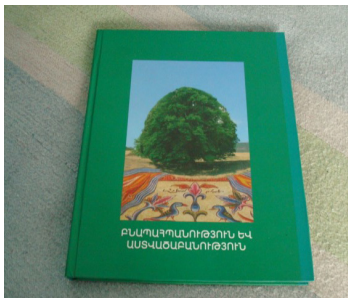
- 1100 will benefit from out-of-school education and psycho-social support
- 200 school age youth will be oriented professionally, will continue their education already chosen and tested during education at the centres.



LIFESTYLES

Experience 1997-2022

Thanks to “Green Pilgrimage” programme , the idea of Alliance of Religion and Conservation (ARC), Armenia Round Table Foundation and partners have received knowledge and information how to organise environmentally friendly pilgrimages. A number of projects were implemented using knowledge and experience of ARC. Two films related to green pilgrimage specifics were shot: “Green Hospitality” and “Transforming Waste”, demonstrated on TV channels all over Armenia. Publication of “Nature Protection and Theology” textbook covering ecology, nature protection issues with the theological part entitled “Christian Church and Man-Nature Relations” was considered an exceptional attempt in Armenia on tackling environmental problems in spiritual context.



For several years already “Machanents” centre operated in Etchmiadzin, where food is not only traditional Armenian, but met the criteria set by ARC: 70% fresh or unprocessed; 50% of locally produced; 30% organic food; 100% free-range eggs, etc. Energy saving technologies were utilized here as well.

The social-educational centres are becoming attractive places for domestic and inbound tourism. Test master classes in carpet weaving, felting and silk painting have started in social-educational centres in 2022.

Future Plans 2023-2025 and beyond

In the coming years two main directions of activities related to lifestyles for ART and partners will be waste transformation and pilgrimage.



Goal: A basis is laid for change of lifestyles on personal and communal level in order to become more environmentally sustainable

Objectives:

1. Expand waste transformation activities
2. Culturally sensitive and spiritually grounded tourism and pilgrimage minimize the adverse effects on environment and man.

1. Expand waste transformation activities

Waste is a crucial problem in Armenia. At the same time simple but innovative solutions, such as transforming waste to useful things become more and more popular among ART partners. The practice of transforming polyethylene waste, otherwise known as plastic shopping bags and other garbage have become very popular, at the same time bringing small income. After collecting, washing and drying plastic bags, bottles, old household articles, etc. nice items and souvenirs are made. Plastic and glass which do not decay over decades and centuries, so hazardous for the environment, are transformed into nice, useful and marketable things.

2. Culturally sensitive and spiritually grounded tourism and pilgrimage minimize the adverse effects on environment and man.

Tourism and pilgrimage



Armenia is considered an attractive country for tourism taken the abundance of historical monuments dating back to neolith and early middle ages, good food, safe environment, etc. The classical sightseeing trips to Armenia are popular not only among tourists, but also with the local population. Cultural tourism, mountaineering, camping, hiking and other kinds of outdoor activities are also available. It is worth mentioning that hiking trails always include churches and monasteries. Tourist numbers exceeded half a million people visiting the country every year (mostly ethnic Armenians from the Diaspora). 2019 saw a record high of over 1.9 million inbound tourists, while total population of Armenia is less than 3.0 million.

Though relatively small in size, Armenia has four UNESCO world heritage sites and four more in the UNESCO Tentative list. UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage includes musical instrument duduk and its music, symbolism and craftsmanship of khachkars (cross stones),



Armenian epic “David of Sasoun” and “lavash”, traditional Armenian bread.

The culture of pilgrimage is in the process of revival in Armenia, including more and more pilgrims from all age groups. Important to mention that religious tourism is getting an impetus as a new department of “Religious Tourism” started in 2022 in the Faculty of Theology of Yerevan State University.

Pilgrimages organized by church based social-educational centres are considered not only means for spiritual renewal, but actions to help environment through waste cleaning around churches, in the forests and gardens, improving sacred places in remote areas, ruined churches and monasteries.

As mentioned above church centres already organize master classes for tourists, both incoming and local people.

In the coming years trainings will be organized on know-how of ecotourism, hiking, pilgrimages, etc. Extremely important will be the topics on how to protect the environment, natural resources, and wildlife, how to minimize the adverse effects on the natural environment, conserve cultural heritage. Another important area for awareness raising and projects work will be bringing tourists and local communities together for mutual benefit.

Resources needed: assets (already available), training in basics of ecotourism and environmental pilgrimage, financial investments (grants, cheap loans, donations, any other possible funds).

Direct target group: 100 youth trained in environmentally friendly tourism and pilgrimage.

CELEBRATION

Experience 1997-2022

ART and partners celebrated church holidays, as well as traditional and international ones, organised and participate in various festivals. Participation in the cultural events in their own community was common.

Among religious celebration the ritual of “Andastan” stands out as unique, typical only to the Armenian Church. It shows deep understanding of the surrounding world and environment by our Church fathers.

The word “andastan” is translated as “cultivated lands, field, garden, etc”. It is the ritual of the blessing of the fields, the four origins of the world. During this ceremony four corners of the earth are blessed, it is offered for the fertility and fruitfulness of fields and gardens, as well as for cities and villages and their inhabitants. This spiritual ceremony, loved by believers, is performed from the beginning of spring to autumn, so that our



fields and gardens are free from natural disasters, and there is prosperity in the world. One more noteworthy function of Andasatan is to restore the damaged Mother Nature.

Future Plans 2023-2025

Celebrations are uniting people, at the same time during various festivities people get information, and new knowledge, thus becoming agents for expansion of fresh and sustainable ideas.

Together with religious celebrations and festivities the others will be included into the events calendar of all centers and projects. This will serve not only as information sharing and knowledge raising action, but will be supplemented with shows, flash mobs or short lectures on various environmental problems worldwide, in the country and in the community in particular. This will need some homework to develop up-to-date information on the problems and drawbacks in the community, but also show ways how to change the state of affairs related to a problem. E.g establish a nursery for endangered plants in the area with further replanting in the places of their previous areal. Concrete actions will show that everyone could be an environmentalist.

On April 22 we celebrate Earth day, it is a



significant part of celebration calendar of the centres and youth groups. Environment is a big subject, but if we reflect on it, it is not as complicated. It starts and it ends with us, with each person. It could begin with small decisions to make at household and personal level, such as the food on our tables, the type of car we buy, how we travel, etc. It shows how good or vile we are to the environment. Breaking or building our environment starts with small things. People around us will start to do the same, the community, the society copies the same.



Isaiah 11:9
“They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”



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