

# CHILDREN AND FAMILY MINISTRY



# LIVING THE DIVINE LITURGY

**A Guide for Active Participation  
of Children and Family Worship**

**Rev. Fr. Garabed Kochakian**

**DIOCESE OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH OF AMERICA (EASTERN)**



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**By Rev. Fr. Garabed Kochakian**

Foreword by

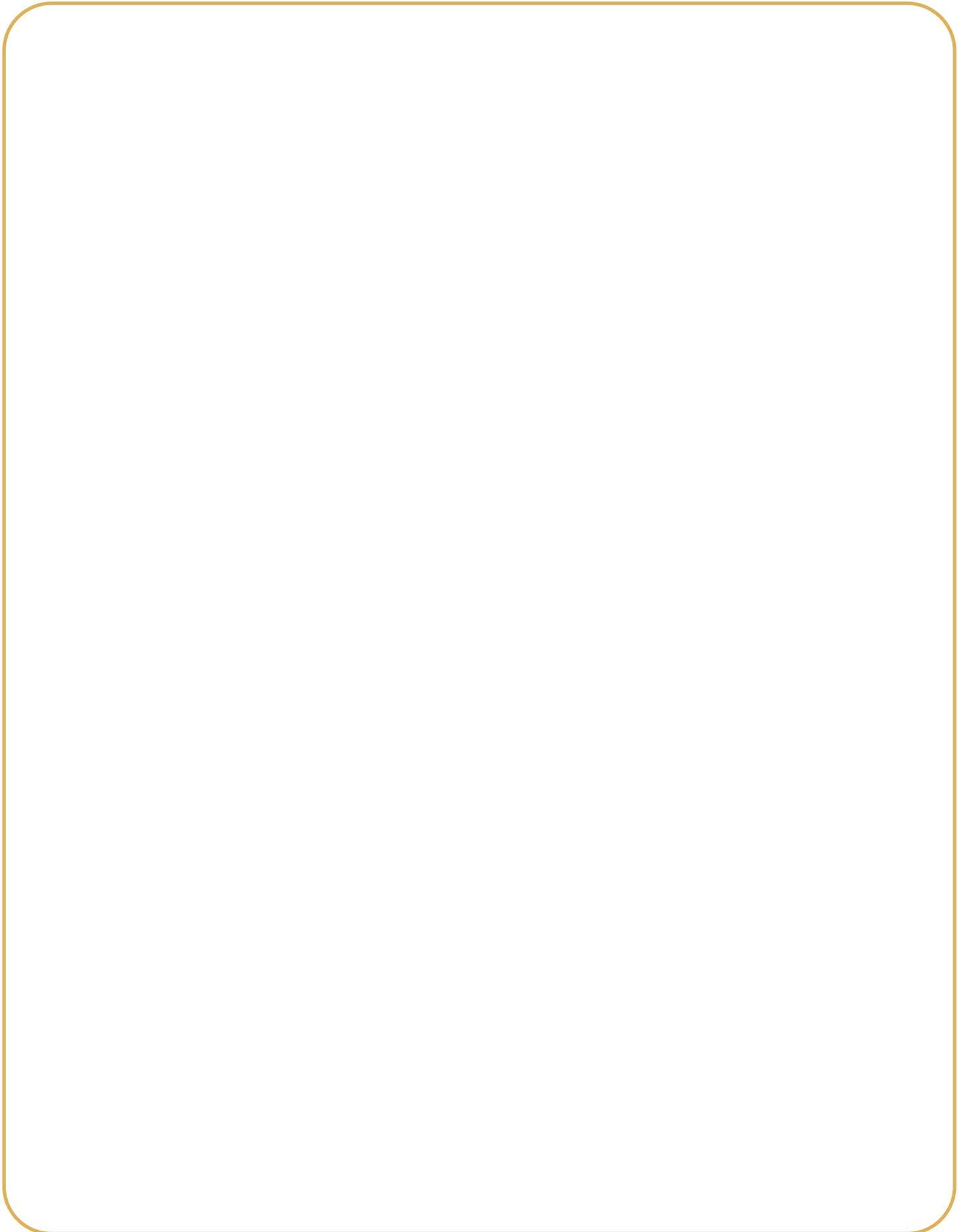
Rev. Fr. Untzag Nalbandian

The Pastor of Holy Ascension Armenian Orthodox Church  
of Trumbull, CT

**By the order of**

**Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate**





## *Foreword*

Sunday School or Soorp Badarak (Divine Liturgy)?

To prioritize Sunday School or Soorp Badarak is not a new dilemma us. I have heard some clergy, parents, educators and parishioners ask this question for at least two decades. Some will immediately insist both are important. Others believe Sunday School should not replace Soorp Badarak and must be scheduled at a different time.

In our town, the Roman Catholic Church approaches this challenge differently by holding Christian Education on Wednesday evenings. On Sunday mornings, parents are encouraged to attend the Divine Liturgy with their children. This is easy for them because most of their parishioners live in the same town as their church. Parents drive less than 10 minutes, making it easy for them to bring their children to mid-week Christian Education, known in our tradition as Sunday School.

Our Holy Ascension parishioners come from 22 different towns and cities, making it nearly impossible for most to bring their children to church during the week, as they are not locals. However, still the question remains: where should our children be during the celebration of Soorp Badarak on a Sunday morning? In the sanctuary or in the Sunday School class?

When I was newly ordained, many parents told me they faithfully brought their children and teens to the Armenian Church. Though they may not have fully understood what was happening in the sanctuary, they were present – they watched, smelled the incense, heard the hymns, and witnessed every action of the priest, deacons, and Parish Council members. Some may argue that times have changed, but I say that SoorpBadarak has not, and the importance of communal prayer has not diminished.

Attending the celebration of Soorp Badarak is a Sunday School class itself. It offers a profound religious experience and teaches our children to connect with everything that is at the heart of our Armenian-Christian heritage: our faith, sacred music, religious customs, the unique sanctuary, altars, religious paintings, vestments, and, of course, the homily, which could serve as the Sunday School lesson of the week. I believe children should be present during the liturgy to experience and participate in the sacred mysteries. Soorp Badarak is not just an event. It is a formative experience in the life of the believer, especially for children.

One of my most precious memories is seeing a little 4 year old whose mother brought her to church from birth, holding her doll in one hand and the Soorp Badarak book in another. Of course, she could not read, but I consider this spiritual readiness. Just like my 2 year old granddaughter whose mother, my daughter, brought her to church from infancy. When the curtain closed, she shouted for all to hear, “Babig (referring to me) is playing peekaboo with me!” Again, spiritual readiness. And the gift of faith and spirituality is the most important gift we can give our children.

The Children and Family Ministry of our Diocese provides weekly electronic resources that parents can use at home. As Catholicos Megurdich Khrimian Hayrig said over 150 years ago, “Home is the best school.” I would add, “Every home is, or could be, a small church if the parents so choose.” I know this is true for some parents.

Remember, our religious education should not be confined to Sundays – every day can be a Sunday School class in our homes. And thank God, we have all the resources needed to support our parents in this important work. As we begin a new school season in September, I invite all our parents of school-age children to reflect on these points and share their thoughts with one another, their children, family and with their priest on their children’s Christian education.

Rev. Fr. Untzag

## *Preface*

I took on the task to establish the program *Living the Divine Liturgy* during my pastorate at St. John's Armenian Church of Greater Detroit with the intention to renew our experience of the beauty and the mystery of the celebration of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. With this in mind, together with the assistance of the St. John Armenian Church Sunday School staff, we successfully celebrated this special Badarak for a number of years.

Excited to share this worship experience with all our parish communities, the Children and Family Ministries Department of the Eastern Diocese has created this *Living the Divine Liturgy* guide booklet for pastors and church school educators with the hope to encourage family worship in your parish and provide an engaging way for students in Sunday Schools along with their families to actively participate and learn about the Divine Liturgy. In parishes where there is no formal Christian Education school or limited grade levels, this program could still be used to invite young adults and their families to more actively engage the Soorp Badarak.

Why is it important to worship together and especially with our children? Why do we need to encourage them to be an essential part of the Divine Liturgy? The short answer is because our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ himself said "*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.*" (Matthew 19:14). Simply put, families who celebrate the Divine Liturgy together grow spiritually together. Family worship using the *Living the Divine Liturgy* program provides opportunities for ongoing discussions at home and Sunday School where they can share their experiences and feelings about the portions of the Soorp Badarak in which they actively participated, reflecting on how their participation strengthens their relationship with Christ and the entire Church community.

Additionally, this deeper immersion into worship through the *Living the Divine Liturgy* program not only helps to educate families about the richness and impact of our worship, but also highlights our common union as members of His Holy Church. Our communal worship reveals the special relationship we share with Jesus Christ and each other which we entered into through Holy Baptism, born again into new life in Him as a member of the Body of Christ. It is through corporate worship that we reaffirm our unity with Christ, as branches of the True Vine, receiving spiritual nourishment and renewal from Him through our collective prayers and reception of Holy Communion.

Each individual parish is unique with its own particular needs, challenges and resources. The *Living the Divine Liturgy* program should be tailored to each individual parish at the discretion of the pastor to maximize its effectiveness in order to encourage parishioners and their families, particularly the youth, to engage the Soorp Badarak thoughtfully and enthusiastically.

Prayerfully,

Rev. Fr. Garabed Kochakian

Former Pastor of St. John Armenian Church

## Introduction

*Living the Divine Liturgy* program is designed for Church School students and their families, encouraging both children, parents/guardians and all family members to engage in the Sunday celebration of the Divine Liturgy through active participation at various moments throughout the service. This guide aims to organize and enhance their engagement with and understanding of the Sunday Eucharist service.

It is strongly recommended that all liturgical functions, particularly the reading of the proper lections of the day, be rehearsed and reviewed at home and explained to children before the actual Sunday of the Soorp Badarak (Divine Liturgy) in which they will take part.

As stated earlier, this special Divine Liturgy has proven to be highly successful in making the Soorp Badarak a truly 'living' experience for both youth and their family members by inviting their active participation in various components of the Divine Liturgy on Sunday mornings. As part of Christian education programs in the parishes, it can be offered once a month. It is very important to announce (through the parish's printed and electronic media) well in advance the specific dates when it is to be celebrated to allow families to prepare and attend together.

During the week before the designated Sunday, the church office and teachers should make reminder telephone calls to the parents. This will ensure that both parents and children are aware of their assigned participation. Clear instructions are provided in this manual to remind participants when to arrive and seating arrangements within the sanctuary. The current maroon pew book (*The Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Church, St. Vartan Press, New York, 2011.*) should be used to facilitate worship during the service.

Older students not having a particular liturgical function can assist the Parish Council by distributing Sunday Bulletins, ushering parishioners to pews and/or taking the plate collection.

**Frequency:** Pastors with their parish staff can offer this worship experience at least once a month, replacing Sunday School classes. The other Sundays of the month will continue with regular classroom instruction.

### Recommended ages for responsibilities:

- Offering of Gifts of bread and wine: Grades 4-6
- Tabor Procession: Grades 3-7
- Reading the Lections: Grades 7-8
- Offering the Kiss of Peace: Grades 8-12
- Leading General Confession: Grades 7-8
- Greeting and Bulletin Distribution to parishioners:  
Junior and High School levels with younger kids helping/learning

Preparing for the successful execution of this program, the following points will help the overall worship experience:

- A. This document should be reviewed by the pastor with the Church School Staff in preparation for this special Divine Liturgy.

**Note:**

1. On the day *Living the Divine Liturgy* is to be celebrated, the priest should consider designating a deacon to remain in the chancel throughout the Divine Liturgy to guide and assist the participants when they are to execute their liturgical responsibilities.
  2. Guiding the children to go to their proper locations and at the right time is crucial for making the flow of the Divine Liturgy as flawless as possible. Before the day of the celebration of this special Soorp Badarak, a meeting between the pastor and the assigned deacon will be helpful.
- B. A week prior to this special celebration of Soorp Badarak, assign the families and other designated participants their roles during *Living the Divine Liturgy*.
- C. Consider meeting with assigned families and individuals and review their functions ahead of time.
- D. In order for all children to have a full experience and understanding of the Divine Liturgy, it is imperative that they remain for the entire service, participate in the Sacrament of Penance and join their parents in the Holy Communion line (if baptized) to receive the life-giving Sacrament of our Lord's Body and Blood.
- E. Following Holy Communion, children may leave for class instruction if there is time or remain until the end of the Divine Liturgy.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

**Singing in the Choir**

- Arrange with the Choir Director to have children not assigned a specific liturgical task to sing with the choir. It will be a special experience for them to be invited and join the older choir members.
- Provide Divine Liturgy books to children to take home and practice the words and music of the hymns.
- CDs or other recordings (such as web links to the Diocesan Sacred Music Department) can be provided to children and families to practice/enjoy the sacred liturgical music at home.

**Serving at the Altar**

- Young boys who would like to serve at the altar can also be encouraged to participate with the pastor's consent.
- Like the choir, the boys serving at the altar should be given Soorp Badarak missals (books) and any available recordings to practice at home. These can be provided by the pastor.



# LIVING THE DIVINE LITURGY

## A Guide for Active Participation of Children and Families

### KEY MOMENTS OF PARTICIPATION

#### OFFERING OF THE GIFTS OF THE BREAD, WINE AND MAHS

**SELECT:** Assign the family who will undertake this responsibility at least two weeks prior to the service. Meet with them and go over their roles.

**PREPARE:** On the day of the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, the *nushkhars* and the *cruet of wine* are placed on one tray and the *mahs* on another. The table should be set in the center (or to the right) of the main aisle near the chancel railing.

**STEP ONE - THE BEGINNING OF THE LITURGY:** After the Celebrant, deacons and altar servers enter the chancel for Soorp Badarak and just prior to their ascension to the high altar, the Celebrant should pause just before reciting «*ի մէջ տաճարիս*» (page 8). At this point the Celebrant will invite the chosen family of the day to bring forward the offerings. They shall step out of their pews walking to the table where the wine and bread are placed and bring them forward.

The following invitation to announce the presentation of the gifts can be used (or modified as the Celebrant sees fit):

**Script suggestion:** *“This morning, we invite [Names of Child(ren)] and their parents, [Names of parents], to present the gifts of Bread and Wine to the deacons. These earthly offerings of bread and wine will be transformed into the Holy Communion of Christ’s Body and Blood during today’s Divine Liturgy.”*

**STEP TWO:** The introduced family unit (the parents, their child[ren], etc.) will walk to the center aisle and present the *nushkhars*, wine, and mahs to the deacon(s) standing in the chancel. The deacon(s) will then carry them up to the altar table.

## THE TAPOR / CENSING

**THE PROCESSION (TAPOR):** The Celebrant descends the altar to walk through the congregation (page 11). This recalls the teaching ministry of Christ when Our Lord descended from heaven, assumed our human nature and instructed people about faith in God.

**TAKING PART IN THE TAPOR:** Teachers must be ready to line up the children to form the procession and to walk with the clergy. Teachers can discuss this preparation with the children the Sunday before the *Living the Divine Liturgy* service.

**Note:** In parishes which have several students in the lower grades, with the approval of the pastor, consider assigning three children to carry the Processional Cross and Kshotz. Consider having all other children carry a wooden cross which they may have made during a previous class activity.

**STEP ONE:** Younger children from grades 1-5 can take part, leading the clergy through the nave (sanctuary). They shall gather between the deacon holding the Processional Cross and the Celebrant as the altar curtain opens. They are part of the procession with priest, deacons and altar servers walking around the church.



When the Celebrant censes the children, the children should learn to respond «Յիշեսցիր եւ զիս առաջի անմահ Գառնին Աստուծոյ» (*Heesh-escheer yev zees arachee anmah Kareenun Asdoodzo* - Remember me before the immortal Lamb of God).

Note: This dialogue here between the children/family worshippers is a request to the priest that he pray for them throughout the service of the day.

**STEP TWO:** Children guided by their teachers and walking in the procession shall then return to the center of the chancel, standing there until the Celebrant incenses them before ascending to the altar. Thereafter, the children can take their places in the pew.

## THE LECTIONS OF THE DAY

**WHAT THIS IS:** Readings from the Old Testament Prophets and New Testament (Epistles and Gospel) are read in English. After these readings, the sermon is traditionally delivered, to help explain and teach the Word of God.

**SELECT:** Three older students (grades 6 and older) who will read.

**PREPARE:** The reading location shall be determined by the pastor. The Lectionary should be open to the exact passages that are to be read. The text should already be printed for them or they can read from the Lectionary authored by Father Arshen Aivazian (St. Nersess Armenian Seminary publication). The pastor can make this text or book available.

- In preparation, the readings should also be distributed to the designated children ahead of time for them to practice at home during the weeks preceding the service. This ensures accuracy and gives the readers confidence.

**STEP ONE - WHAT TO WATCH FOR:** During *Soorp Badarak* when the Celebrant gives the Holy Gospel to the deacon (page 14), the designated student accompanied by their parents walks forward to the base of the bema (altar). If possible, another deacon standing in the chancel can guide them at the appropriate time.

- While the Trisagion hymn *Soorp Asdvadz* (Holy God) is sung, the children and parents should step closer to the altar. The deacon will walk to the front of the altar holding the Holy Gospel Book in his hands, then lowering it to the children and parents to venerate as they make the sign of the Cross and reverently kiss the Holy Book.

**STEP TWO:** After kissing the Holy Gospel, the children and parents wait until the Celebrant turns and blesses them. They then will go to their places to wait until the choir finishes their responses (the Great Litany - pp 15-19) and it is time to read the lectionary.

**STEP THREE:** Upon completion of the readings, they may return to their seats in the pews.

**NOTE:** It is essential to try to include every child of the appropriate age to present the lections of the Divine Liturgy to the congregation, giving all of them this opportunity as members of the community of faith entrusted with this honorable role.

## THE NICENE CREED, PROFESSION OF THE FAITH

**WHAT THIS IS:** The faith and doctrine of the Armenian Orthodox Church are based upon Apostolic teachings, Holy Tradition, and the written Word of God. The Nicene Creed is the main statement of faith in the Armenian Church. It was adopted by the 318 bishops at the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325. St. Arisdagés, the son of St. Gregory the Illuminator, represented the land of Armenia at the council (see on the following page).

**STEP ONE:** Prior to proclaiming the HAVADAMK /The Nicene Creed, the Celebrant will turn to the faithful, pausing after the choir sings *Park kez Der Asdvadz mer* to explain the Nicene Creed.

**Script Suggestion:** *“We now invite you all to join us in the confession of the Nicene Creed, the faith of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church, found on the bottom of page 18 of the Divine Liturgy books, which is the unifying statement of what the one Holy Catholic (Universal) and Apostolic Church believes, written in AD 325.*”

**STEP TWO:** The congregation, adults and children together, will then recite the Creed in English, affirming the faith of the Armenian Orthodox Church. Hands are held palm to palm, with fingers extended and thumbs crossed.



# THE NICENE CREED

## PROFESSION OF OUR FAITH

*We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of things visible and invisible.*

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of God the Father, only-begotten, that is of the substance of the Father.*

*God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten and not made; of the same nature of the Father, by whom all things came into being in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible;*

*Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, took body, became man, was born perfectly of the holy Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit.*

*By whom he took body, soul and mind and everything that is in man, truly and not in semblance.*

*He suffered and was crucified and was buried and rose again on the third day and ascended into heaven with the same body and sat at the right hand of the Father.*

*He is to come with the same body and with the glory of the Father to judge the living and the dead; of His kingdom there is no end.*

*We believe also in the Holy Spirit, the uncreated and the perfect; who spoke through the Law and through the Prophets and through the Gospels;*

*Who came down upon the Jordan, preached through the apostles and dwelled in the saints.*

*We believe also in only one catholic and apostolic Holy Church;*

*In one baptism with repentance for the remission and forgiveness of sins;*

*In the resurrection of the dead, in the everlasting judgment of souls and bodies, in the kingdom of heaven and in the life eternal.*

## THE SERMON

The Celebrant will then deliver a sermon tailored for children. It could be delivered after the Lections or after the Nicene Creed. This will be determined by the Celebrant.

If room allows, children (the younger ones) can come to the chancel and sit on the floor while the Celebrant speaks to them.

## THE KISS OF PEACE (THE VOGHCHOOYN)

**WHAT IT IS:** This is an act of reconciliation for the unity of the Church in the love of God. When the faithful embrace one another, sharing the greeting by saying «**Քրիստոս ի մէջ մեր յայտնեցաւ**» (*Kreesdos ee mech mer haydnetsav* – Christ is revealed amongst us) to which others respond, «**Օրհնեալ է յայտնութիւնն Քրիստոսի**» (*Orhnyal eh haydnootyoonun Kreesdosee* - Blessed is the revelation of Christ).

**NOTE:** *The veil of the chalice has been opened for the first time, revealing the Body and Blood of Christ, and the faithful rejoice at this revelation.*

**WHAT TO DO:** Select four students assigned to offer the *Voghchooyn* greeting to worshippers. Instructions from teachers prior to the day of the *Living the Divine Liturgy* experience will ensure proper delivery. These children should know how to say «**Քրիստոս ի մէջ մեր յայտնեցաւ**» (*Kreesdos ee mech mer haydnetsav*) “Christ is revealed amongst us”.

**STEP ONE:** The assigned students at the designated time (page 27) will approach the chancel and wait until the deacon holding the poorvar (censer) descends the altar steps. The Celebrant will give the Kiss of Peace to the deacon in the chancel who will in turn pass it to the children.

**Script Suggestion:** *“At this time in the Soorp Badarak we shall share in the Kiss of Peace and offer to each other a sign of love and peace which our Lord often shared with the apostles during His ministry. When saying this greeting, the one who offers it says, KREESDOS EE MECH MER HAYDNETSAV [Christ is revealed among us] and the one who receives the kiss answers, ORHNYAL EH HAYDNOOTYOONUN KREES-DOSEE [Blessed is the revelation of Christ].”*

**NOTE:** *If there is a guest clergyman present, the Voghchooyn will be first given to him who will then pass it on to the children. If this is the case, the children will receive the Kiss of Peace from the clergyman by kissing his right hand.*

**STEP TWO:** The Celebrant then will pause at this point to announce and explain the significance of the gesture and provide guidance how to give and receive the Kiss of Peace. Once the deacon has returned to the altar, the children will wait until the priest turns around and blesses them to pass it onward to the congregation.

**STEP THREE:** As the priest makes the sign of the cross towards the worshipers and the hymn *Kreesdos ee mech* (page 27) is sung, the children will carry this greeting to the worshippers seated in the pews. After they finish giving the Kiss of Peace, the students will return to their pews.

**NOTE:** For the remainder of the Divine Liturgy children and families must stay and continue to participate in prayer and worship. Encourage the congregation to join in singing of the Lord's Prayer (Hayr Mer) on page 41 and other hymns, and most importantly, to receive Holy Communion. At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, *mahs* is distributed to those who did not receive Holy Communion. *Mahs* is placed on the back of one's hand and consumed there. If you wish to take *mahs* home for a family member or someone who could not attend the Divine Liturgy, it can be taken in a little baggie or napkin.

## THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE (GENERAL CONFESSION)

In the parishes of the Eastern Diocese just prior to receiving Holy Communion, the Sacrament of Penance is offered. Should there be available students not already assigned another liturgical function, at the discretion of the celebrant/pastor, children and or a family unit designated by the priest may lead the congregation in reading aloud the general form of confession.



## HOLY COMMUNION

After Confession is completed and when the Body and Blood of Christ is offered, before receiving the Eucharist it is proper to bless oneself making the sign of the Cross saying “*Megha Asdoodzo*” (I have sinned against God).

### THE FINAL BLESSING AND RECEIVING MAHS

**WHAT IT IS:** Mahs “Մաս” means “portion” in Armenian. It is blessed, unconsecrated bread (not Holy Communion) that is given to the faithful at the end of Badarak, to take to those who were unable to share in Holy Communion. It becomes their “portion” of the Badarak. If you or a student have not received Holy Communion, upon exiting the church, it is encouraged to receive mahs by extending your right hand (palm down) so that a small piece of bread can be placed on the back of your hand.

As you receive the mahs, say, “Բաժին իմ Աստուած յաիտեան” *Pazheen eem Asdvadz haveedyan* (God is my portion forever). Those who receive Holy Communion should not consume the mahs, but should take it to those who were unable to attend Soorp Badark

**NOTE:** If one receives Holy Communion at the Soorp Badarak, then there is no need to receive mahs. Mahs is offered to those who, for their own reasons, do not take Holy Communion.

#### The proper words said when giving and receiving Mahs is:

##### Giver:

Մասն եւ բաժին եղիցի քեզ ի Սուրբ Պատարագիս:  
*Masun yev pazheen yegheetsee kez ee Soorp Badarakees.*  
May this be your portion and share in this Holy Sacrifice.

##### Receiver:

Բաժին իմ Աստուած յաիտեան:  
*Pazheen eem Asdvadz haveedyan.*  
God is my portion forever.



## CONCLUSION

We wish to reiterate that active participation in the Divine Liturgy enriches children's and their family's spiritual growth and understanding of their faith. It is through engaging in various roles that they become integral members of the worshiping community, while at the same time, learn the movements of worship and words of praise Armenians have used for millennia.

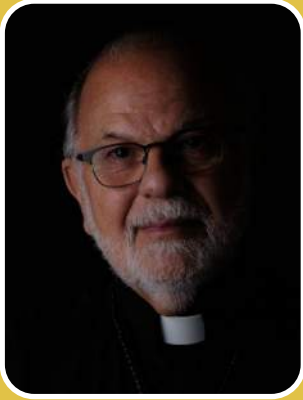
Remember that this comprehensive immersion into worship not only educates families about the richness and impact of corporate worship, but also provides an opportunity for post-service discussions at home. Families should share their experiences and feelings about the portions of the Soorp Badarak in which they actively participated, reflecting on how this engagement strengthens their relationship with Christ, each other, and the entire church community.

*"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."*

*Matthew 5:14-16*







*"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth."*

*- 3 John 1:4*

Let's give our children every opportunity to learn about God's love and grow in their faith, and also experience their priceless Armenian Christian heritage, language, history and culture.

Rev. Fr. Garabed Kochakian  
Former Pastor of St. John Armenian Church



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