



First Armenian Presbyterian Church

First Armenian Presbyterian Church History

On July 25, 1897, 40 men and women met in the upper room of Nicholls's Hall in Downtown Fresno and organized the First Armenian Presbyterian Church, the first ethnic Armenian congregation in the Golden State. Rejected by the American churches of the area, the immigrant congregants called Reverend Doctor Lysander Tower Burbank, a retired missionary to the Ottoman Empire, to the pulpit. Four years later, during the pastorate of Reverend George Haroutune Filian, the congregation constructed their first physical home at Fulton and Santa Clara Streets. This was the steepled octagon that author William Saroyan attended as a boy and wrote about many years later. Dr. Casbar Mallarian, a scholar of literature, and Reverend Doctor John Baptist Haygooni, a minister and medical doctor, ministered to the congregation during the first decade of the 20th Century. Reverend Mgrdich Hagop Knadjian, a prolific author was the shepherd of the congregation during the World War I years, when 50 young men and women served in the American Expeditionary Force in Europe.

Reverend Doctor Garabed Manoug Missirian, a graduate of Harvard University and Andover Divinity School, succeeded to the pulpit but passed away from a ruptured appendix after a mere three years of service. Reverend Vartan Bedros Amirkhanian, a survivor of the Armenian Genocide, became the sixth pastor of FAPC and saw the congregation through the Great Depression. Near the close of his pastorate, the congregation moved to a new campus at First Street and Huntington Boulevard. Reverend Arsham Khachadoor Yeramian became the seventh pastor and ministered to the Church during World War II, when more than 100 young

men and women from the Church family served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Reverend Yeramian departed in 1954 and was succeeded by Reverend Theodore Yacoub Daghlian, a missionary, pastor, and editor in Egypt. Reverend Daghlian resigned eight years later and the congregation called Reverend Vartkes Manuel Kassouni to the pulpit from the Armenian Evangelical Church of New York City. During his 12-year ministry in Fresno, the Church vigorously pursued an expansion program and constructed a new Christian Education Building and Sanctuary.

On December 10, 1978, Reverend Bernard Asadoor Guekguezian succeeded Reverend Kassouni. Reverend Guekguezian emphasized outreach efforts to Californians of Armenian descent as well as emigres from the Middle East and the Republic of Armenia. He retired in January 2001 after presiding over construction of a new Fellowship Hall and celebration of the Congregation's Centennial. On June 1, 2003, Reverend Mgrdich Melkonian became 11th Senior Pastor of the Church and devoted almost nine years of ministry in Fresno to being "rooted and united in Christ." Reverend Melkonian emphasized world missions and invited speakers to share about the persecuted Church around the globe. In May 2012, Reverend Melkonian departed to become "Pastor to the Armenian Evangelical Pastors of Armenia." On September 15, 2013, the membership elected Reverend Gregory Vahack Haroutunian of Belmont, Massachusetts as their new senior pastor and his first Sunday in the pulpit was February 2, 2014. During his seven years in the pulpit, the congregation has embraced the theme, "Love God. Love Others. Make Disciples" and has worked tirelessly to strengthen the prayer life, discipleship, and missions ministries of the congregation.