



Li-Hua Lan / Staff photographer

**A VISITING PRIEST**, the Rev. Diran Papazian, of Detroit, (*right*) conducts the baptismal ceremony for 11-month-old Zachary Stephan Ispentchian last week at St. Paul's Armenian Apostolic Church in Syracuse. He is held by his uncle and godfather, Glenn Donovan, of Rochester, as his parents, Amy Elizabeth Ispentchian and Ara Stephan Ispentchian, watch.

# A Story of Survival

## Armenians remember those slain by Turks

By **Renée K. Gadoua**  
Staff writer

Richard Roomian's father left his family in Armenia — then a part of the Ottoman Turkish Empire — in 1915 to come to America and earn a living as a tailor.

He settled in Syracuse and soon sent money for his family to flee oppression from the Turks and join him. His parents never made it.

His mother — Richard Roomian's grandmother — was killed before she could board a boat. His father — Roomian's grandfather — died on a forced march out of Armenia that left an estimated 150,000 people dead.

"That's the story of every Armenian. They have immediate relatives that were killed," said Roomian, a leader in Central New York's Armenian community.

A recent failed congressional resolution would have la-



Li-Hua Lan / Staff photographer

**ZACHARY ISPENTCHIAN**, 11 months, is baptized by the Rev. Diran Papazian with the help of Ispentchian's uncle and godfather, Glenn Donovan, last week at St. Paul's Armenian Apostolic Church in Syracuse.

beled as genocide the deaths of Roomian's grandparents and hundreds of thousands of other Armenians by Turks beginning in 1915.

Roomian says the resolution would have been a cathartic step toward forgiveness, while opponents say such a resolution was not an appropriate congressional action. Others pointed out a resolution could harm U.S. relations with Turkey.

Many scholars view the

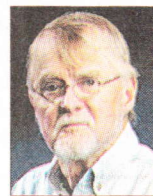
deaths of 1.5 million Armenians during the World War I era as the first genocide of the 20th century. Turkey's leaders say the deaths occurred during inter-ethnic conflict.

Roomian says it's important that people understand the Armenians' story of survival. He was born and grew up in Syracuse, home to an Armenian community of about 350 families. He now lives in Rochester and serves as chair of the

## Author to examine Armenians' struggle

**DICK CASE**

POST-STANDARD COLUMNIST



My friend Bob Koolakian is ready to publish his study of Central New York's part in the Armenian

independence movement; the timing couldn't be better.

He lectures on it today at Syracuse University's Bird Library.

"Struggle for Justice" details the American Committee for the Independence for Armenia. Bob's grandfather George was a member of the committee, and the book is based partly on his papers.

This comes as Congress struggles with the wording of a resolution condemning the slaughter of Armenians almost a century ago. Was it genocide?

# Armenians arrived locally about 1894

## ARMENIANS, FROM PAGE B-1

parish council of St. Paul's Armenian Apostolic Church, 310 N. Geddes St., Syracuse.

The church serves as a cultural center for many Central New York Armenian-Americans.

St. Paul's is one of 10 Armenian Apostolic churches in New York. Others operate in Binghamton, Rochester and Niagara Falls. A second Armenian church in Syracuse, St. John's, 372 W. Matson Ave., closed a few years ago.

About 1.3 million Christian Armenians worship in about 110 churches in the United States, said Michael O'Hurley-Pitts, spokesman for the Armenian Church headquarters in New York.

The church, a branch of the Oriental Orthodox Christian Church, was founded at the foot of Mount Ararat in ancient Armenia, which is now in Turkey. Mount Ararat is believed to be where Noah's ark came to rest after the biblical flood.

Christianity became the national religion of Armenia in 301 A.D., a fact that's still significant, O'Hurley-Pitts said.

"Armenians' Christian identity is tied up in their national identity," he said.

O'Hurley-Pitts is disappointed the resolution was abandoned.

"If we favor the passage of the resolution, it is because we cannot pick and choose which crimes against humanity are worth recognizing and which are not," he said.

At the very least, he said, the proposed resolution raised interest in Armenian history.

"The Armenian people don't need an act of Congress to tell them there are gaping holes in their family trees," he said.

Armenians began arriving in Syracuse about 1894, according to "Like One Family: The Armenians of Syracuse," a 2000 book by Arpenia S. Mesrobian, former director of Syracuse University Press.

"Even while the recently arrived immigrants sought to establish themselves in a new land, their minds and hearts remained with the families and compatriots they had left behind in a homeland which most of them would never see again," she wrote in the preface.

That's how Nevart Apikian, of Syracuse, remembers her youth. Her father came from Armenia to America about 1910.

## To learn more

Learn about the Armenian church:

[www.armenianchurch.net](http://www.armenianchurch.net).

Read House Resolution 106: Affirmation of the United States Record on the Armenian Genocide Resolution:

[www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=hr110-106](http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=hr110-106).

## Support for resolution

The National Council of Churches is bucking the conventional wisdom in Washington by criticizing Congress for shelving a measure that would label the deaths of thousands of Armenians in 1915 "genocide."

The council and its affiliated humanitarian agency, Church World Service, approved a resolution at the groups' annual General Assembly Nov. 6-8, calling it "unacceptable that the United States has yet to officially recognize the Genocide of 1915."

The resolution "strongly urges the leadership of the U.S. House of Representatives to bring forth this legislation before the end of this Congress." The National Council of Churches, an umbrella group of 35 mainline Protestant and Orthodox denominations, includes the U.S. branch of the Armenian Orthodox Church. Armenian Archbishop Vicken Aykazian is beginning a two-year term as council president.

Speaking "as persons of faith," the National Council of Churches and Church World Service expressed their "concern that the truth was not upheld by our elected representatives."

— Religion News Service

She was a charter member of the now-defunct St. John's Armenian Church and remembers attending picnics with Syracuse's Armenians.

"Everybody would talk, and people gave \$25 or \$50 to \$100 for people who needed it in Armenian organizations," she said.

She said people were passionate about their homeland, but rarely talked openly about what they experienced.

"You didn't ask questions," she said. "You got little snip-pets."

Renée K. Gadoua can be reached at [rgadoua@syracuse.com](mailto:rgadoua@syracuse.com) or 470-2203.