



MASTERCLASS #1 – SPECIAL SESSION: TRANSFORMING BARRIERS TO CHANGE WITHIN THE ARMENIAN CHRISTIAN ECOSYSTEM

Cover

Today we conclude Masterclass #1 with a discussion of one of the greatest barriers to transformation within the U.S. Armenian Christian Ecosystem.

The barrier is not money. The barrier is not a shortage of volunteers. The barrier is not a shortage of good intentions. The barrier is an inability to accurately assess reality.

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We begin with what we call the two most meaningful numbers. They describe a single group – U.S. Armenian females aged 18 to 29 – and one behavior: whether they attend church on a given Sunday.

We focus on this group because they represent the future of the community: the women who will, or will not, carry the faith into the next generation.

The numbers are these. Of every 1,000 U.S. Armenian females in this age group, just 7 attend church. 993 do not.

Across the entire United States, only 246 Armenian females aged 18 to 29 attend church on a non-holiday Sunday, while 34,181 do NOT attend church. That's 7 out of every 1,000, or just 0.7 percent.

To understand what that means, compare it to other Christian groups in the United States, measured the same way, per 1,000.

Protestants: 300 attend. Catholics: 280. Among Orthodox Christians, the top quartile sees 200, the median 150, and even the bottom quartile 70.

Measured against the other Orthodox Christian groups in the United States, U.S. Armenians rank 22nd out of 23 – next to last.

These are not numbers most organizations track, and for many they are not numbers they would want to confront. But they are reality – and as we said at the outset, transformation begins the moment reality becomes more important than assumptions.



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Those first numbers were about attendance. Now let's turn to financial transparency. Over the past several years, Khachkar Studios has researched almost 100 Armenian religious entities in the United States and around the world. The findings are sobering.

Approximately 30% operate at what we classify as Negative Financial Transparency. Another 10% operate at No Financial Transparency. Approximately 55% operate at Little Financial Transparency. Only about 5% demonstrate Good Financial Transparency. And none achieved Excellent Financial Transparency.

Think about that for a moment. If these findings are directionally correct, then 95% of organizations are operating below what would generally be considered good transparency practices.

Why does this matter? Because organizations cannot effectively improve what they do not accurately measure. They cannot effectively manage what they do not transparently disclose. And they cannot effectively build trust when stakeholders do not have access to meaningful information.

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Those last numbers told us how Armenian organizations score on their own. But a number on its own can be hard to judge. So let's place it side by side with another large Christian community in the United States – the Catholic Church.

The Catholic comparison comes from the Catholic Leadership Institute, drawing on a 2025 survey of roughly 35,000 parishioners across U.S. Catholic parishes.

Among those parishes, just 3% show No transparency, and 6% Little. 16% are Average. And the two largest groups sit at the top – 38% reach Good transparency, and 37% Excellent.

Put simply, only 9% of U.S. Catholic parishes show negative to little financial transparency, while 75% show good to excellent.

Now hold that against the Armenian picture. 95% of Armenian parishes show negative to little financial transparency. Only 5% show good to excellent. It is very nearly the mirror image.

We don't share this comparison to discourage. We share it to set a marker. The five-year goal for U.S. Armenian parishes is straightforward – to triple the share of churches demonstrating good to excellent financial transparency, from 5% to 15%.



Measured against a Catholic benchmark of 75%, that target is modest. But it is a beginning. And like everything in this Masterclass, it starts with the willingness to confront the number honestly rather than explain it away.

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Now let's move to an even larger challenge: the Dunning-Kruger Effect. The Dunning-Kruger Effect describes a situation where individuals or organizations with low competence dramatically overestimate their competence.

In simple terms: the less they know, the more confident they become; the more they know, the more humble they become.

The most dangerous point is what some researchers call the Peak of Mount Stupid. We have chosen to call it the Peak of Mount Worst Practices.

This is where organizations confidently defend practices that are objectively poor. This is where failure is celebrated as success. This is where evidence is ignored. This is where benchmarking is avoided. This is where criticism is viewed as an attack rather than an opportunity to learn. Most importantly, this is where transformation becomes almost impossible.

Why? Because organizations that know they have a problem can improve. Organizations that do not know they have a problem can improve once they discover reality. But organizations that are convinced poor performance is actually excellent performance have almost no motivation to change.

That is the real barrier. Not lack of money. Not lack of volunteers. Not lack of effort. A lack of accurate self-assessment.

The purpose of this Masterclass is not to criticize. The purpose is to replace assumptions with evidence. To replace opinions with benchmarking. To replace defensiveness with learning. And to replace decline with transformation.

Every successful turnaround in history began with the same first step: an honest assessment of reality. Because transformation begins when reality becomes more important than assumptions.

Thank you for participating in Masterclass #1.