

Task Force: A Rebuilding Project

A Vision Brief for the AEUNA 2020–2022

AEUNA MISSION STATEMENT

The Armenian Evangelical Union of North America (AEUNA) **unites** its churches, ministries, and community in Christian mission. It does this by **equipping** its pastors, lay leaders, and seminary students with spiritual knowledge, resources, and services, consequently **supporting** their ministries spiritually and materially.

In conjunction with its mission, the AEUNA aims to **represent** the Armenian Evangelical Church among numerous constituencies, including the wider Armenian community, Christians of other ethnic backgrounds, and even segments of North and South American cultures writ large.

The AEUNA is its people, both its own leadership team of pastors and staff, and those it seeks to serve.

AEUNA CORE VALUES

Building on its legacy, the AEUNA should always be a strong presence to **raise, encourage, and shepherd** the Armenian Evangelical churches, ministries, and community with **Christlike intentionality, transparency, integrity, and inclusivity (Matthew 21:12, John 15:15, Acts 13:1–3, Ephesians 2:14, James 1:22–25)**.

BACKGROUND

- **HISTORY:** The AEUNA values its Armenian history of becoming the first nation to adopt Christianity in 301 C.E. It also celebrates the five pillars of the Armenian Evangelical Church movement borne in 1846:
 - The proclamation of the Word
 - Worship
 - Fellowship
 - Witness
 - Service

The AEUNA consists of thirty-three churches with four in Canada, twenty-six in the USA, and three in South America. It also established two camps, with one on the west coast (Camp AREV, established 1977) and one on the east coast (Camp Arevelk, established 2000), and two fellowships with an east and west coast Women's Fellowship (AEWF-E & AEWF-W), and with an east and west coast youth fellowship (AEYF-E & AEYF-W).

The AEUNA was organized in 1971 in Southfield, Michigan by the merger of the *Armenian Evangelical Union of Eastern States and Canada* and the *Armenian Evangelical Union of California*. Its mission was to coordinate and unify the various regional Armenian Evangelical Unions and churches that started in the USA from the late 1800s, with the directive to promote the Armenian Evangelical Church and evangelize His Good News. The number of churches established by 1900 were six, and grew to twenty-three by 1972; now, in 2020, the number stands at thirty-three churches.

- **STRUCTURE:** Currently thousands of people participate in the AEUNA churches, camps, and fellowships, which are governed and managed by a paid staff as the AEUNA Office:
 - Minister to the Union (MTTU)
 - Office Administrator (Executive Assistant to the MTTU)
 - Communications Director (as consultant)
 - Camp AREV Director and Operations Manager
 - Camp Arevelk Director (seasonal staff – part-time)
 - Minister to the Youth – Eastern Region

The AEUNA Office is supported by a set of volunteers alongside the AEUNA Board of Directors (AEUNA BOD):

- Nine committees: Executive, Stewardship, Ministry, Evangelism, Personnel, Armenian Heritage, Publications, Joint Home Missions Committee (JHMC), and Committee on Youth
- Two fellowships: (AEWF-E & AEWF-W and AEYF-E & AEYF-W)
- Moderator
- Vice-Moderator
- Clerk
- Treasurer
- National Representative to the Youth
- Camp Arevelk staff
- Camp AREV committee
- Recognized organizations—including but not limited to the AMAA, AMAC, ATSA, SPA, AESC, AEWC—participate in events and meetings with one delegate from each organization having a voting seat on the AEUNA BOD.

THE CALL FOR A CRITICAL MOMENT OF SELF-ASSESSMENT

As the Armenian Evangelical Church grew and evolved through the ages of the diaspora, its community's needs changed, and churches began to dissipate from the AEUNA. At earlier moments, the AEUNA stepped forward to offer effective support. Today, because of the slow but continual decline in the presence and participation of churches and congregants, especially with the younger generations, a new response is needed.

As a first measure, the AEUNA BOD conducted what is known as a SWOT analysis at its September 2019 meeting, reviewing *strengths*, *weaknesses*, *opportunities*, and *threats* of the AEUNA mission. At this meeting, many issues threatening the life of the AEUNA became clear.

- **WHAT EMERGED FROM THE ASSESSMENT:**

- Six areas of concern were highlighted:
 - **Worship** (apathy for churches to participate within the AEUNA community, empty pulpits, high leadership turnover, organizational differences in church structure, contention over worship styles, gap from youth camps to youth presence in our churches, perceived relevance, etc.)
 - **Culture and History** (drift from historical mission, language differences, immigration)
 - **Marketing** (lack of unified strategy, high leadership turnover, lack of a well-articulated and compelling story)
 - **Communication** (individual churches are siloed rather than networked, lack of pastoral unity or knowledge of community happenings, poor communication throughout the community, generational gaps)
 - **Technology** (varying degrees of awareness and usage)
 - **Financial** (lack of funds to support its mission; lack of donors and sponsors, and the inability to attract them)

THE AEUNA CHALLENGE QUESTION:

How can the AEUNA ensure the sustainability of its culturally particular traditions of worship as it moves into the twenty-first century?

PROJECT PROPOSAL

A **Task Force**, empowered by the AEUNA BOD, will use a ‘congregant centric’ approach¹ in an environment designed to motivate discoveries and opportunities to investigate and explore viable solutions that **rebuild the AEUNA into a stronger and more relevant Christian mission, for its churches, ministries, and community.**

NEXT STEPS:

To further the first measure made in the September 2019 BOD SWOT analysis, a thorough assessment of the greater Armenian Evangelical community is needed. Such work will allow us to uncover the problems, challenges, and obstacles hindering the effectiveness of the AEUNA.

To complete an assessment of this size, a Task Force is needed to facilitate a strategy and be accountable for the results.

TASK FORCE AND ITS AUDIENCE

The Task Force is a group of passionate and experienced professionals grown within the AEUNA community whose skill sets are directly responsive to the six areas of concern that arose from the BOD’s self-assessment. The members of the Task Force have diverse gifts in the six disciplines of **worship; culture and history; marketing; communication; technology;** and **finance**. It is crucial to note that this team is authorized by the BOD and supported by an advisory group with deep institutional knowledge of the AEUNA.

The Task Force:

Worship: Rev. Jeremy Tovmassian, Rev. Razmig Minassian, Dr. Heather Ohaneson

Culture & History: Rev. Berdj Djambazian, Rev. Ron Tovmassian

Marketing: Talin Avakian Borekjian

Communication: Jennifer Telfeyan-LaRoe

Finance: Candice Nahigian, Nicholas Aynilian Jr.

Technology: Norayr Orchanian, Arie Orchanian

Advisory Group

The Moderator, MTTU, Souzi Baghdikian, Rev. Dr. Haig and Nancy Kherlopian, Nora Wilson, Elise Kalfayan, Pastor Joe and Lena Garabedian, Bruce and Christine Momjian, Zaven Khanjian, Alina Balabanian, Rev. Hendrik Shanazarian, Rev. Georges Dabbo, Magda Poulos, Christine Kutlu, Tenny Nigoghossian, Lena Minassian, Pastor David Azizian, Pastor Harut Khachatryan.

¹ We have adapted the term “congregant-centric” from the commercial world. The definition of this term is the following: Engaging the people, in the pews alongside our pastors and ministry leaders, in a process to learn and identify how the AEUNA can best support our church and outreach leaders in ministering to them.

The audience is the AEUNA itself. The Task Force will work with the constituencies of the Union with a focus on their needs, pains, and gains. Doing so advances the goal of rebuilding and strengthening the Union and its churches so that they will be sustainable in the twenty-first century.

To respond to their needs, the Task Force will visit with, build trusting relationships with, and interview these groups in segments:

- AEUNA leadership and staff
- Current Armenian Evangelical pastors, church congregants, and lay leaders
- AEUNA ministry arms
- Youth and young professionals—our future!
- Past members, pastors, and seminary students
- Prospective members, including non-churchgoing Armenians and the friends, acquaintances, and family members of our current congregants
- Invested parties: the AEUNA committees, affiliates, recognized organizations, BOD (We understand that there may be overlap between these categories.)

THE STRATEGY – SUMMARY

The Task Force will undertake a three-step process: 1. **Discovery** of challenges and opportunities; 2. **Ideation** of solutions; and 3. **Implementation** of the solutions.

- Each aspect of the three-step process has objectives, key actions, financial requirements, and deliverables (the output).
 - **PHASE 1 – DISCOVERY:**
 - **The objectives** of the discovery phase are to listen to the community, gain as much information as possible from the community, and build relationships among people.
 - **Key actions:** Church visits and interviews with the AEUNA community. Additional work will be to review the AEUNA operations, financials, bylaws, and policies.
 - **Financial requirements** will be mostly around church visits. To mitigate costs, the Task Force can utilize zoom video meetings for some of the initial interviews. Some expenses will be the materials needed to host church visits and interviews and software needed to collect and store the data the Task Force collects.
 - **The deliverable** (or output) is to learn, categorize, and recognize opportunities of growth and advancement and areas of concern that may be problems or obstacles to fix.

○ **PHASE 2 – IDEATION:**

- **The objective** of the ideation phase is to work collaboratively with the AEUNA community to investigate and explore solutions in response to those challenges and opportunities that were uncovered in Phase 1 in close partnership with the community.
- **Key actions:** Brainstorming and gamestorming meetings. In this phase, we will employ the valuable method of gamestorming, which is a way of stimulating ideas in an open, trusting, and joyful atmosphere.
- **Financial requirements** will focus on the organizing and hosting the brainstorming and gamestorming meetings. We will be setting up each meeting as one and a half days or two day events. The number of meetings and number of attendees to the meetings will be determined after phase 1.
- **The deliverable** is a set of feasible ideas co-generated with the Task Force and wider AEUNA body.

○ **PHASE 3 – IMPLEMENTATION:**

- **The objective** of the implementation phase is to bring the ideas co-generated in Phase 2 to fruition by testing, learning, adapting, and finetuning them.
- **Key actions:** Assembly and assignments of targeted work groups to transition the ideas found in Phase 2 into new working structures and strategies, mitigate risk, and phase out what has been identified as not part of the new structure and operations.
- **Financial requirements** will be to streamline costs and restructure the AEUNA business model and budget to support the new working structures and strategies.
- **This deliverable** is *the* goal of the entire endeavor, namely rebuilding a stronger, sustainable network of Armenian Evangelical ministry in Canada and the Americas.

- Throughout the work, the Task Force will be dedicated to having a disposition that is simultaneously grounded in reality and hopeful for the future.
- The Task Force will operate and communicate in an open, friendly, and compassionate manner reflective of Christ's calling (as shown in the book of 1 Peter).
- Status reports and findings will be shared for review with the AEUNA BOD as stakeholders and the wider AEUNA community at regularly scheduled events within the strategy schedule.

The Schedule – SUMMARY

PHASE 1 – DISCOVER: six months (January to June 2021)

PHASE 2 – IDEATION: six months (July to December 2021)

PHASE 3 – IMPLEMENTATION: six or more months (January to June 2022)

THE BUDGET – HIGHLIGHTS

We acknowledge that any effort with this ambition will require a substantial budget and that the AEUNA is currently in no position to make consequential financial contributions.

We perceive costs for the first two phases of the project to be primarily from travel and lodging for two or more Task Force members:

- **Phase 1** – Church visits and interviews: Visiting thirty-three churches, key individuals, AEUNA committees and fellowships, and camps
- **Phase 2** – Brainstorming/Gamestorming: Attending and hosting meetings. Number of meetings and number of attendees will depend on results from Phase 1.
- Additional costs would include but not be limited to materials, equipment, and payment for external consultants and experts.

By **Phase 3**, the Task Force will be streamlining costs and applying new financial models to support the new structure .

To support the costs generated in Phases 1 and 2, the Task Force will conduct a fundraising initiative, and on behalf of the AEUNA.

The Task Force has already applied for one grant from the Louisville Institute, which funds research and scholarship that strengthen the church.

Budget Assumptions:

Costs in phase one can be reduced by using zoom video calls in lieu of church visits and interviews, which will most likely be required due to COVID restrictions.

The AEUNA and churches will support AEUNA staff and pastors when needed to attend meetings and participate in project events. The Task Force expects congregational participants or their churches to cover their own travel and lodging expenses to attend the project meetings or events.

Cost would be mitigated by hospitality provided from churches and the AEUNA community at times of church visits, interviews, and meetings (if COVID requirements allow).

The Task Force will produce a more precise estimate of costs and budget forecast.

POTENTIAL OBSTACLES

Any initiative comes with a set of challenges. Below are potential obstacles that we anticipate arising in the process that the Task Force will plan to manage:

- **Working with a large variety of church sizes**
 - How do we support all of them, regardless of size?
- **Adapting to worship and culture trends**
 - How do we make ourselves a relevant church in the twenty-first century?
- **Honoring language and communication**
 - How do we accept, embrace, and navigate the reality of the different languages spoken across our churches?
- **Embracing the wide diversity in demographics**
 - How do we acknowledge, celebrate, and nurture the mixture of generations, cultures, and backgrounds within our communities?
- **Considering our tradition, the status quo, and bylaws**
 - How do we encourage everyone to not think too critically or skeptically upfront?
 - How can we honor our traditions while allowing for necessary development and growth?
- **Creating comfort in messy conversations**
 - How can we create safe spaces to facilitate necessary dialogues that will sometimes become messy?
- **Maintaining stamina and endurance**
 - Once the newness and excitement die down, how can we ensure stamina? How can we hold people accountable throughout the process?
- **Facilitating conflict resolution and productive discernment**
 - Can we recruit and/or hire qualified personnel to facilitate conflict resolution and healing, when necessary?
- **Gaining buy-in and commitment**
 - How can we elicit the necessary support to actualize long-term goals?
 - How can we continue to encourage a volunteer-oriented culture while creating space for more work that is compensated?

THE TASK FORCE PROMISE

We promise to provide you with a skilled team that partners with you in a credible, proven process to achieve practical solutions to our churches' needs. Working together, we will create a better, stronger, and more robust AEUNA that can effectively carry out its mission in the dynamic climate of the twenty-first century.

We promise to leave no one out. We promise to be accessible and responsive. We are reachable at vision@aeuna.org. We promise to be accountable, owning up to what we do by giving regular status reports and meeting with the BOD at milestones in the process. We promise to be tenacious and positive in the face of challenges.

We envision the rebuilding of the AEUNA in biblical terms, focusing on Ephesians 2:19-22: "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone**. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. **And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit**" (NIV).

We also recall the cooperative language of 1 Corinthians 12:12: "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ" (NIV).

Thus, we long for each part of the AEUNA to do what it is designed by God to do, building on Christ Jesus our cornerstone and working gracefully together for the enduring glory of Christ's kingdom.

MANDATES AND ACTION ITEMS AS AGREED BY THE BOD:

- Authorize the Task Force members to facilitate the rebuilding project within the AEUNA.
 - Commitment from the BOD and wider AEUNA community to participate with a positive attitude, understanding that lack of participation will delay or hinder results.
 - The Task Force agrees to work purposefully, honestly, and transparently; to produce deliverables as defined by the project strategy; to ensure stakeholders, invested parties, and the wider AEUNA are updated with progress reports; and to take direction from the AEUNA BOD when assessing and defining deliverables of the project.
 - Agreement to the strategy as defined in the strategy summary.
 - Agreement to the schedule summary with two caveats: the Task Force will seek to work within the constraints of busy church calendars and Union events, and the wider body of the AEUNA recognizes that potential obstacles could delay results.
 - Willingness from the AEUNA BOD to invest in the future of the AEUNA by bridging the expenses of the project until self-funding via subsidies, grants, and donations is raised.
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