

## **Cooperative Committee on Armenian Missions: Background and Purpose**

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Wider Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ and its predecessor body, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), has had a close relationship with the Armenian community since very early in its mission work in Anatolia, Turkey. That mission engagement began in 1819. The Rev. Megrdoch Karagoezian, General Secretary of our partner, the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East (UAECNE), has said that the American Board missionaries “midwifed” the birth of the Armenian Protestant church. Armenian Protestantism, therefore, began in Turkey, and has since spread throughout the Middle East and indeed the world. The Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) is a mission institution of the global Armenian Protestant church. It was founded in 1918, and is based in Paramus, NJ, with a new office in Burbank, CA.

In 1927, the ABCFM and the AMAA entered into an agreement to provide for “unification of the evangelical Christian work among and through the Armenian people throughout the world.” That agreement was replaced with a new one, which took effect in 1950, “to make more effective the cooperative work being carried on among and through Armenians in the area of the Near East Mission of the American Board.” This 1950 agreement established the Cooperative Committee for Armenian Missions (CCAM), which continues to meet annually.

Over the course of time, as the AMAA and the ABCFM/UCBWM/WCM have continued to function and engage in mission, the CCAM has evolved to become a forum for mutual sharing and engagement, for discussion of possible cooperation and collaboration and, primarily, for decision making on the use of the Donchian Fund.

John B. Donchian established a Foundation Fund in his will, dated Feb. 6, 1919. The Fund was designated to be “expended in the City of Diarbekar, Asia Minor... and also in the cities of Mardon and Harpout, Asia Minor for the charitable, educational, religious or eleemosynary purposes of asylums, hospitals, schools and churches in said cities.” The ABCFM was chosen to administer the Fund. Following the Armenian Genocide, which began in 1915, the number of Armenians in Anatolia was drastically reduced. Many Armenians who survived established a community in Aleppo, Syria, and Armenians are spread throughout the Middle East (and the world). The UAECNE is based in Beirut, and its member churches are primarily in Lebanon and Syria. In addition, the Republic of Armenia became independent from the former USSR, of which it was a member, in 1991. In 1994, the AMAA and the UBCWM agreed that the spendable income from the Donchian Fund would be available for the AMAA’s use in the Republic of Armenia, as the AMAA was then able to undertake work there.

The Cooperative Committee meets annually, following the AMAA’s spring board meeting and before the UCC’s spring board meeting. The CCAM has consistently recommended that 75% of the spendable income from the Donchian Fund be used for the AMAA’s work in Armenia, and that 25% be used by the AMAA in coordination with the UAECNE in Syria and Lebanon. The average spendable income from the fund from 2001-2012 has been approximately \$171,130.

This fund is a restricted fund and requires a vote of the board, based on the recommendation/motion brought by the CCAM, which is a mandated committee of UCBWM/WCM.