

Hope for the *Armenian* Teen

by Rev. Dr. Fr. Stépanos Dingilian

Life is like a puzzle – it has to be put together in order for it to make sense, to be shared and enjoyed. Interestingly, we put together most of this life’s puzzle when we are teenagers. It is no wonder that we tend to be baffled, frustrated, and anxious when we are teens.

Here is something else that is interesting. Teens generally put together the puzzle that consists of family, friends, school, acquaintances along with likes and dislikes such as cell phone, lap top, car, songs, and forms of entertainment. Armenian teens have even more pieces of the puzzle to put together in addition to the above ones – extended family, community, Church, tradition, history, language, and the global Armenian community. It is no wonder that the frustration and anxiety for the Armenian teen can be even greater and deeper than teens of other heritage.

On the one hand, having a puzzle with smaller pieces can be easier to put together. On the other hand, the puzzle with greater number of pieces is more challenging and completing it is more exciting and fulfilling. For this reason, putting the puzzle of life for the Armenian teen can be overwhelming and intimidating, even though in the long run it can be more inspiring. Trying to fit all these pieces of the puzzle together may be so overwhelming that an Armenian teen may try to ignore and abandon his or her Armenian Faith and heritage, and lose sight of the long-term sense of satisfaction.

To avoid this abandoning of the Armenian identity, there is a greater need for encouragement and hope for the Armenian teen to work through the puzzle and not give up. So where will this support and hope for the Armenian teen come from? Only from his or her parents! The parents hold the key to bringing hope to the teen. Others may help, but that hope must come through the teen’s parent’s life experiences.

Fortunately, when a teen turns to his or her parents, most if not all Armenian parents are willing to go out of their way to help their teen. Unfortunately, after doing their best, the parents often fall short of their expectations. Often parents become even more frustrated than their offspring teens for not giving them the support the teens need. Certainly, they could blame the school, the Church, the ‘system,’ but eventually they begin feeling guilty for not doing enough as parents.

Why? Why do parents often fall short of providing the necessary hope and guidance to help their offspring teen put the pieces of life’s puzzle together? Because there is another teen for whom they first need to bring hope, answer questions, and put the pieces of the puzzle together: *The teen that is within them, the teen that is within the parents.* The parents were also teens at one time and they also had questions and needed to put life’s puzzle together.

Until they are able to completely put that puzzle together for their *inner* teen and be hopeful themselves, they are not able to create that hope for their *offspring* teen.

These series of insights are intended to bring hope for the teen – both the teen that is within us as parents and for our teen offspring. The puzzle of life for the Armenian teen is enormous and is often intimidating and discouraging. In order to help the teen offspring, parents need to first and foremost put together the pieces of the puzzle for the teen within them and be hopeful themselves, and then they'll be able to convey that hope and bring encouragement to their offspring teen. When this interdependence and relationship between parents and teen become genuine and supportive, it is then that the family life becomes hopeful and joyful.

These insights are based on seminars at the Armenian Apostolic Church of Riverside, and a book by Rev. Dr. Fr. Stepanos Dingilian entitled "The Hopeful Family."