

*Statement from Rev. Michelle Torigian on the Armenian Genocide Resolution:*

I am the granddaughter of an Armenian Genocide survivor. My grandfather, Azad Torigian, was 6 when the Genocide began. He came from Darmon, Keghi, in the area of Ezermun.

Azad told me of the death he witnessed, of being marched and being hungry. He spoke of the women throwing themselves and their children into the Euphrates River to escape the hands of the persecutors so they wouldn't be raped and their children kidnapped. This was ethnic cleansing. People were marched to their death -- toward a hole in the ground in the wilderness of Deir Zor (an area that is in Syria). Men were beheaded. Women were assaulted. Some were even crucified. People were killed as they marched to their graves.

For five years, Azad wandered in exile, some days only eating the greens on the side of the road. Eventually, he met up with his family in the United States. But his trauma didn't end here. Azad told me about his flashbacks from what he witnessed: every time he crossed the Mississippi River close to where he settled in Illinois, disturbing visions continued to rush back into his mind, never to completely disappear. He died in 1996 without hearing any apologies from Turkey or recognition of these atrocities from his adopted country, the United States. Even today, politicians will avoid the word "genocide" as not to offend our political allies.

Unfortunately, like so many genocides and atrocities around our world and even in our country, we don't speak out when seeing people tortured, mostly because of fear. Because people in our world stopped speaking of the Armenian Genocide, Adolf Hitler thought he could get away with the Holocaust: "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?" Because people have chosen not to remember horrendous genocides of the past, other groups of people, from Jews in Europe to Muslims in Bosnia, have experienced the trauma of exile and annihilation.

The Armenian Genocide started on April 24, 1915. Each year, on or around April 24, places of worship take time to remember the Armenians and their stories. Churches like ours, St. Paul UCC on Old Blue Rock Road in Cincinnati, hold a service with the Armenians in our community to remember those who died and name our loved ones who survived.

Acknowledging these atrocities and remembering the stories from this genocide connects us to all of humanity. No group of people should ever be oppressed, beaten and killed for any reason. When we are able to speak out loud the stories of those who survived the Armenian Genocide of 1915 and other violent situations, we stop the spread of oppression in our world. Every time we remember, the wilderness is left behind. God is the God of justice, hope and restoration. As it says in Isaiah 40:4 "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain."

By voting in the affirmative for this resolution today, we keep the story alive. We recognize the pain that settled in the hearts of survivors, we remember the lives lost and we celebrate the hope of new life that is found in diasporic Armenian communities around the world.