

ACYOA Alumni Of The Month – August 2023

Larry Farsakian

St. James of Nisibis Armenian Church, Evanston, Illinois

As part of ACYOA Central Council's meeting and visit at St. James in July, Central Council member Andrew Yenicag interviewed Deacon Larry Farsakian about his life growing up in the ACYOA and Armenian Apostolic Church.

Andrew Yenicag: Larry, I hear you are from the West Coast! Which parish community did you grow up in, and how did you first get involved in the ACYO(A)?

Larry Farsakian:

I am from a small parish, St. Mary of Yetteem. I grew up in Visalia, California which was about 10 miles from Yetteem. Back in my day there was no Jr. or Sr. ACYO (in California we called ourselves ACYO, no ACYOA, ACYOC or ACYO-WD, just ACYO). We became members once we started high school, so I was 13 years old. Being from a small community, we were always involved in some church activity, so this just carried over into participating in ACYO. I became chairman of our chapter when I was a senior in high school, so I was 17 at that time.

Andrew: I also hear that you too served on Central Council, as part of the ACYO Western Diocese! What experiences or memories stick out from your time on Council?

Larry:

I was on Central Council from 1978-1980. I became Chairman in 1979. In my first term on Council, I served on the Council with my sister, Linda Farsakian Wall. The Chairman was Professor Barlow Der Mugerdichian who was a great organizer making all our jobs easy. The most memorable thing was that in 1979 my brother, Alan Farsakian (who later served on Central Council), and I traveled to Milwaukee, Wisconsin to attend the 1979 ACYOA Sports Weekend. I met many people who remain friends, but most importantly I met my wife, Wendy Koshgarian, also an ACYOA alumni, at that event. From the experience gained, my brother and I came back to California and implemented some ideas into our Sports Weekend. In 1980, we held our first Sports Weekend Banquet, dinner and dance, which still exists today.

Andrew: What impact has the ACYO(A) had on your life?

Larry:

The impact ACYO has had on my life is simple. It was one of the foundations upon which I began to serve our church. I became immersed in our Armenian church through ACYO attending summer camp, retreats, and youth events with others throughout the diocese. The people I have met along the way have remained lifelong friends.



Larry & Wendy Farsakian, also an ACYOA alumnus.

In 1975, when I was 19 years old, I traveled to Armenia and Jerusalem as part of the ASP trip organized by the ACYOA of the Eastern Diocese. Led by Fr. Nersess Jebejian, this experience augmented my involvement with the Armenian Church. On the trip were Fr. Krikor Sabounjian (known as Artie back then), Michael Zeytoonian, Richard Norsegian, and Debbie Stepanian DerAsdourian, each a great role model and all well-respected members of their communities. (In fact, Debbie was the one who introduced me to my wife, Wendy, in Milwaukee!) The point to make is that the ASP trip for me, and for anyone who goes, was one of the pillars in building my commitment to our Armenian Church.

Andrew: How do you remain involved in your current parish community? Does parish life at St. James differ from St. Mary, Yetteem?

Larry:

Presently, I serve as a Deacon and Sacristan at St. James in Evanston. I am a past Parish Council member and have helped in organizing many church events, serving as our Taste of Armenia Street Fair Chairman for 25 years. For the Chicagoland Armenian churches, I have led Genocide Commemorations and concerts. On a Diocesan level, I have chaired the Pontifical visit of Catholicos Karekin II for the Chicagoland community, and when St. James of Evanston hosted the Diocesan Assembly in 2010, I served as the General Chairman.

Parish life does not differ from one parish to the next. You attend, you participate, and you commit yourself to serving your church. All the grandmothers are the same. All the children are the same. The only difference is the location.

Andrew: What, or who, have been some of your influences on your Christian faith?

Larry:

First and foremost, the most important influence on my Christian faith were my parents, Sam & Betty Farsakian, especially my mom who took us to church every Sunday for Sunday School and Badarak, and faithfully played the organ for 65 years. Next in line are my grandparents, Deacon Garbed (Charlie as he was known) and Rose Simonian, who faithfully served our Yetteem community for years, and my Great Grandmother Araxie Panosian who carried our faith with her wherever she went. In fact, my grandfather Charlie and his two nephews built the present church in Yetteem in 1947. So Yetteem's church has a very special meaning to me and all my family members. Spiritually, in my youth our parish priests, Fr. Garabed Kalfayan and Fr. Vartan Kasparian were big influences in me serving on the altar. My father, Sam, and my uncle, Richard Hagopian, set great examples in being a steward of our church and diocese by serving in administrative capacities on councils and committees. All those mentioned above are just a few of the many role models who influenced my service to our church.

Andrew: Do you have any advice for current and future ACYOA members?

Larry:

Use the time in ACYOA as the stepping-stone to your commitment to our Armenian church and your Armenian culture. Get involved and STAY involved. Too many members of ACYOA participate when younger but drift away as adults. Our church needs you, not just in the present, but also in the future to help perpetuate our heritage.

I can't guarantee much, but I can guarantee you this...The friends you make in ACYOA will be your life-long friends. And that's the best part of membership, knowing our church and your friends will be with you for the ages.