



Alumni of the Month December 2018 **Gary Hovhanessian**

Central Council Secretary Mallory Maslar interviews Gary Hovhanessian, parish council chair of St. Hagop Armenian Church in Pinellas Park, FL, about his life growing up in the Church and involvement in the ACYOA.

Mallory Maslar: How did you first get involved in the ACYOA?

Gary Hovhanessian: My mom, Queenie, has been a devout church attendee and very involved with everything at church. Mom was my Sunday School teacher, and then she was Superintendent. She then became our ACYOA advisor. I was also involved in student government in junior high and high school, so getting involved in church organizations from the time of my youth just seemed to be a natural thing. I was very influenced by my mom.

MM: What impact has the ACYOA had on your life?

GH: It has impacted my past, present, and future; I am still involved. It is hard to count how many times I've been on Parish Council and how many times I've been chairman. I'd have to look back in to our past minutes. I enjoy church. It brings me peace and tranquility whenever I am able to get to church on Sundays and help out in many other ways when I'm able to. It's rewarding.

MM: What are some of your favorite memories being involved in the ACYOA?

GH: Having an entire set of "Armenian friends." Besides my high school friends with whom I grew up, it was unique to go to church on Sundays and have "friends" from other towns. Then, it became more regional when we drove off to dances in Watertown or Worcester or New York or Milwaukee, etc. Hosting the General Assembly and Sports Weekend in 1982 was a highlight. We were hoping to help our children host again a generation later but it hasn't happened yet. Never say never.

MM: What have been some of your influences in your Christian life?

GH: Besides my mom and dad, I have been influenced by the many clergy who I've come to know over the years and have learned from their words and wisdom. Probably the most influential person would be Archbishop Torkom Manoogian. He was dynamic and charismatic. Archbishop Torkom had such a great relationship with New Britain that we now have a Torkom Drive in New Britain. But our local priests have also been great leaders. Father Vartan Der Assadourian was very steadfast in his Christian beliefs. He helped me with a college research paper by translating with me and reading to me all the old Parish Council minutes that were written in Armenian so that I could formulate a history of The Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection in New Britain.

MM: Are you still involved in your parish community?

GH: Yes, yes, yes, and I wish I could do more. I'm presently Parish Council Chairman.

MM: Any advice for current and future ACYOA members?

GH: Our parish's ACYOA and our church need a "pied piper." We had the wonderful George Tashjian in the late 1970's, who took on the role at our Diocese of ACYOA Executive Secretary. Within a year or two, he had ACYOA at a new pinnacle. We had our anniversary ball in Worcester at Mechanics Hall, with 1,500 people in attendance. However, when George left his role, the entire process fizzled. I feel we need another leader like him. I'm confident that Father Daniel Findikyan will be a "pied piper" and lead us through the challenges he spoke about in his address to our banquet honoring the 77th anniversary of the New Britain parish. He needs help from each and every parish priest, as well as lay people. We can never give up.