



Alumni of the Month

April 2019

Cindy Russell

Central Council Secretary Mallory Maslar interviews Cindy Russell of St. Gregory of Narek Church in Cleveland, OH about her life growing up in the Church and involvement in the ACYOA.

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

Cindy Russell: It's hard for me to pinpoint my first moments with ACYOA, but it just felt like a natural extension of Sunday School. I remember our ACYOA meetings right after Badarak on Sundays. Our mothers were the advisers. The meetings were a learning experience for the kids and the moms! One of the really nice things about ACYOA is how inclusive it felt. There was no application or screening process – if you had an affiliation with the church...you were a member! As the former treasurer of ACYOA, if you actually paid your dues...even better!

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

CR: Being an active member of ACYOA all my teenage life was really special. It was the foundation to building some of my strongest friendships. When you grow up in a family where you are told that "you can only sleep over the houses of your Armenian friends", you make Armenian friends real fast!! What makes ACYOA so special is that no matter where life might take you, those friends and connections made through ACYOA stand the test of time. I've been a part of many, many other non-church organizations, and I can easily say that isn't always the case.

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

CR: I have had so many amazing experiences through ACYOA. One of my favorites is the annual Pancake Brunch on Palm Sunday (ACYOA Day). As kids, we had NO IDEA what we were doing in the kitchen. Our moms were more than happy to let us learn through experience, and it usually wasn't pretty. There was always a lot of disorganization, panic, and mayhem in the kitchen, but somehow we always managed to pull off a great breakfast that everyone looked forward to year after year. We also grew closer to each other when we worked together to achieve a unified goal.

I'd be remiss if I didn't say that I lived for ACYOA Juniors Sports Weekends each year. We used to stay at the homes of families in the host city. To this day, I hold some of those memories as some of my fondest. You don't easily forget the feeling of your suitcase flying off the roof of a car on the freeway. When we pulled over to assess the situation, we discovered all of my shoes and clothing spewed across four lanes of the Indiana interstate. Not exactly fun for a 14-year-old girl. By the way, my parents seriously still have that suitcase. What have been some of your influences in your Christian life?

This is simple for me – I try to live by the Golden Rule. Treat others as you would like to be treated. If more people would subscribe to this belief, we'd have a much kinder world.

MM: Are you still involved in your parish community?

CR: Yes, of course. I hope there is never a time that I am not involved with my parish community. I've been involved with our church bazaar from year one. My kids were infants, and it wasn't easy to work at church, but where there's a will, there's a way. Working in the kitchen for our bazaar is some of the most exhausting work, but it's also some of the most rewarding work. Friendships are formed that are very special to me. I've been involved in our Women's Guild for many years. I was our parish's Hye Camp advisor and chaperone. I've been on the leadership committee for many Sports Weekends, Diocesan Assemblies, and Pontifical Visits. I'm currently serving on the Auditing committee. It never ends, and I pray it never will!!

MM: Any advice for current and future ACYOA members?

CR: Make time for ACYOA and for the Church in general. I know how busy kids are today; my three college kids are no different. But try to make ACYOA and Church a priority. Your experiences will make you a better person. The people you meet will love and accept you for who you are. Church will become your home away from home.