



Alumni of the Month
December 2019
Gary Townsend

Central Council Secretary Nick Tashjian, interviews former ACYOA Central Council member, Gary Townsend, of the Armenian Church at Hye Pointe in Haverhill, MA about his life growing up in the Church and involvement in the ACYOA.

Nick Tashjian: How did you first get involved in the ACYOA?

Gary Townsend: Very good question. I'd have to say it was when I was 14 years old. Our church, Holy Cross Armenian Church in Lawrence, MA, had a small number of youth in the Juniors age group but a larger, stronger group of Seniors, so we would combine some activities between the two groups. At that age, I also began attending St. Nersess Seminary summer sessions at its former location in New Rochelle. That is where I met so many new friends from across the country, and that is where I feel my involvement in the ACYOA really took off.

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

GT: The ACYOA had a significant impact on my life. It has allowed me to visit many beautiful cities and parishes, to meet many Armenians throughout the country from a young age, to create friendships, and to generate so many lasting memories that will last a lifetime. Most importantly, the ACYOA also had an indirect impact on how I met my lovely wife. It was through my ACYOA friendships that I also became involved in the Armenian Students Association (ASA) in Boston. It was there that I was introduced to a beautiful Armenian girl named Joyce Jamgochian, who by the grace of God is now my wife of 32 years and mother to our two adult sons John and Michael.

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

GT: I have many favorite memories! Sports weekends were and always will be favorite memories of mine. Not only did you have sports competitions, but the camaraderie of all the participants allowed us to make new friends and reconnect with old friends. The modes of transportation to the weekends also created unforgettable moments, like a 16+ hour car ride to Chicago and traveling by air with a group of 14 people to Toronto. Another very fond memory was being named the recipient of the Sam Nersesian Service award in 1982. During that summer, I was fortunate to meet Sam's siblings at St. Nersess. To then be named the recipient in the fall was and always will be a humbling experience for me.

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

GT: My family is first and foremost the biggest influence. I am blessed to walk through life with my wonderful, loving wife, and God blessed us with two healthy, caring boys who are now young men. The unexpected death of my brother in 2008 has also manifested in me the need to live each day of my life to its fullest, to thank God

for what he has given to me, to love, to forgive, and to help however I can. Each day we have is a blessing, and we truly do not know when our last day will be and should never take anyone or anything for granted.

NT: Are you still involved in your parish community?

GT: My grandparents (who were instrumental in building what was the Holy Cross Armenian in Lawrence, MA), my parents, and my brother were always active in parish life, and they instilled that same spirit in me. Since I was young, my church has always been my second family. I serve the community in any way I can. I am an ordained deacon, so I strive to serve as faithfully as I can. I have also served as Parish Council chair, Fundraising chair, Parish Assembly chair, as well as assisted at other events as much as I can.

NT: Any advice for current and future ACYOA members?

GT: Enjoy the time and camaraderie during your ACYOA years. The memories and friendships will never leave your life. Use your involvement in the ACYOA as a springboard to serve within your parish, whether it be as a Sunday School teacher, choir member, altar server, or worshipper. By staying involved, you will continue to build new relationships and new experiences. Who knows, you may be lucky enough to be involved in the building of a new church/parish as I have been with the merger of The Holy Cross Armenian Church in Lawrence, MA with the St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church in Haverhill, MA! Building the Armenian Apostolic Church at Hye Pointe (<https://www.hypointearmenianchurch.org/>) has given me the opportunity to understand first-hand what our great-grandparents, grandparents, and parents have been able to accomplish.