

ACYOA Alumni Of The Month – May 2022

Dr. Sarkis Kechejian

St. Sarkis Armenian Church, Carrollton, TX



Andrew Yenicag: What are some of your favorite memories from your time growing up in the ACYOA and in the Armenian Church?

Dr. Sarkis Kechejian: Well, that takes me back to the 1950's, at about the time the Armenian Church of the Holy Martyrs was conceived and built. I grew up in Jamaica, Queens, NY and our family was an active part of the new Armenian Community developing on Long Island. It was only natural that I would join the ACYOA as a teenager. We had an active youth group that met regularly, and would organize socials, parties and activities that would bring us closer to the church.

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

SK: As we grow and develop, we're kind of like trees. The longer the roots of a tree, the stronger the tree is. The ACYOA made up a large part of the roots that are inside me, the roots that helped me to grow as an individual and helped to shape a lot of my thinking at this point in my life.

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

SK: My parents, especially my mother, had a big influence in my faith. Both parents were genocide survivors that came to the United States in the mid 1920's. My mother taught by example and one of her pearls of wisdom was "where there is a will there is a way". An example of this was in the 1950's when the Holy Martyrs Church was being built, the Parish Council was raising money for the church – although they had big donors, they needed support from the whole community. My father was a photo engraver, a union man, and my mother was a housewife and seamstress and was well known in the community as a great cook. When it came time to contribute, my mother said, "we will donate 100 pans of baklava provided the church sell it at \$10.00 a pan." The orders came in and for the next 2 years, I cracked and cleaned walnuts as my mother made and delivered the baklava and raised \$1,000.00 for the church.

AY: After your time in ACYOA, how did you remain involved in your parish community and in the Armenian Church as a whole?

SK: While in medical school at Boston University, I would attend services at St. James Armenian Church in Watertown. I then moved to Dallas in 1970, where there were only a handful of Armenian families at the time. Once the community started to grow in the 1980s, I was chosen to be the initial Parish Council Chairman. Together with other families, we worked

really hard to remain united and develop our community. This culminated in the Consecration of St. Sarkis Armenian Church in 1991, where I was asked to be the Godfather of our Church. In addition, for many years I was the St. Sarkis delegate to the Diocesan Assembly, where I advocated for more English to be introduced into our Liturgy.

AY: ACYOA Central Council had the pleasure of visiting the beautiful new campus and sanctuary of St. Sarkis – which was consecrated this past April – during our December 2021 meeting. How does it feel to embark on this new chapter with the St. Sarkis Parish?

SK: This was a once in a lifetime project. I have been blessed with being around at the consecration of the first St. Sarkis and now the consecration of the successor. I think the new campus is unbelievable, it is very unique and was designed extremely well by Elie Akilian, keeping some of the old and bringing in some new features as apparent with our beautiful sanctuary. The gymnasium and event center are first class, and it is a campus that everybody is very proud of. The future is really bright for our community because of our ability to work together, and we are excited that our youth continues to be a part of that.

AY: St. Sarkis last hosted an ACYOA General Assembly & Sports Weekend in 2004. How excited are you for the St. Sarkis ACYOA Seniors to host General Assembly & Sports Weekend, welcoming Armenians from all over the country to Dallas?

SK: I think it's wonderful! We are so happy to be hosting General Assembly & Sports Weekend once again. The more that our youth can get together, the more experiences they will be able to share and bring back home to their own communities.

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

SK: As a "lifelong member" of the ACYOA, I encourage you to stay involved. Wherever you go the memories of this group will remain with you. If you have suggestions on ways to improve things, always take them to your Priest and Parish Council. Change is inevitable. You are the future of our Church and our Culture.