



ALUMNI OF THE MONTH

NANCY BASMAJIAN

Central Council Vice Chair Chelsea Kress interviews former ACYOA Executive Secretary Nancy Basmajian about her time in the ACYOA, her role in the Church, and what she sees as the future of the ACYOA. Nancy is the longest serving Executive Secretary in the history of the ACYOA, serving in that position from 2003 to 2013.

CK: How did you get involved in the ACYOA?

NB: I was one of those young people who went through the system—I was active in my parish with both our Juniors and Seniors chapters. Years later, after I graduated from seminary and joined the Diocesan staff, first as Director of the Juniors, then in the Department of Christian Education and St. Vartan Camp, an opportunity with the ACYOA Central Council presented itself. The position of ACYOA Executive Secretary was being revived, and I just jumped in, serving in that position for ten years (I might add that I was the longest serving Executive Secretary in the history of the ACYOA). I still remember the first Council I worked with—Saro Kalayjian, now Fr. Avedis, was the Central Council Chair at the time; other members of that Council included Maria Derderian, Diran Jebejian and Jennifer Morris—all still actively serving in our Church. That says a lot about the ACYOA as a vehicle for training church leaders.

CK: What impact has the ACYOA made on your life?

NB: The ACYOA was a great foundation for my service to the church, and I'm not the only one. I recall one year at the Diocesan Assembly, someone asked the delegates, "How many of you credit the ACYOA for your involvement in the church?" Hands went up all over the room!

CK: What makes you so passionate about the Armenia Service Program (ASP)?

NB: I went on ASP in 1979 with a large group of young people from both the Eastern and Western Dioceses. It was an exciting and inspiring experience—I felt an immediate connection with the land and its people. It also deepened my Armenian roots, and gave me a renewed appreciation of the Armenian Church as one of the ancient churches of Christendom. So I know first-hand the impact of ASP; it's one of the best things the ACYOA does. That's why I was so moved when the General Assembly a few years back created the Nancy Basmajian ASP Scholarship Fund.

CK: What do you hope to see for the future generations, not only within the ACYOA, but within the Armenian Church?

NB: I'd love to see young people get more involved in parish life. National events and initiatives are popular, but I believe it's on the parish level that we experience Christian life more deeply and personally. That's been my observation over the years. The Church needs a viable ministry for women beyond the wonderful work being done by our Women's Guilds. There are so many smart young women in the ACYOA. I yearn to see

them come together and do women's ministry within the church. I'm currently serving in my parish at Cheltenham with a team doing adult Christian education. One of my biggest disappointments is the lack of young people involved in this ministry. I wish we could train them to lead Bible studies (and other educational programs) for the entire parish—not just their peers. They need to learn about faith development and reach out to their respective communities and enable people to grow in their faith. How amazing that would be!

CK: What is your favorite ACYOA memory?

NB: When I was Executive Secretary, I formed relationships with young leaders that continue to this day, and I value that. As a young member of the ACYOA, my fondest memories are of retreats, Bible studies and just having face time with clergy and peers to talk about faith and life issues. We were actually doing theology, and I treasure those moments.

CK: What do you want your legacy to be?

NB: I'm not into legacies. It's not about individuals. What's important is the organization, the ACYOA. However, there is one exchange that sticks with me about the impact one person can have on another. I was working with the Juniors at the time, and one of the members of the group—a high school senior told me that as part of her college application, she had to write an essay about a person who made a difference in her life...and she wrote about me. I guess that would be my legacy.