



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT OF THE MONTH

LAURIE ONANIAN

Central Council member Arsen Yelegen interviews former ACYOA and Central Council member Laurie Onanian about her involvement in ACYOA and the impact it left on her life. Laurie is a parishioner at Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Church in Providence, RI.

AY: How did you first get involved in the ACYOA?

LO: I first heard of ACYOA through my father, Ed Onanian, who was very active in the organization and was a former Central Council Chairman. I grew up in the Washington D.C. community, a young parishioner of St. Mary Armenian Church. When I was a young teen, the parish revived its Juniors chapter and that is how I began to get involved. I served in leadership positions for several years until I went to college. I attended the University of Delaware and moved to Boston upon graduation. Once settled, I joined the Seniors Watertown chapter at St. James Armenian Church. It was quite a different experience than being in Washington D.C., as our parish was a small, yet wonderful, community where we all felt like one family. In contrast, Watertown was and still is one of the largest parishes in our Diocese. As such, the parish had a strong chapter with many members. The pastor of St. James at the time, Rev. Fr. Dajad Davidian, encouraged my participation and welcomed me warmly into the community. Incidentally, he was Executive Secretary of ACYOA while my father was on Central Council and officiated my parent's wedding! He always says that he is responsible for me! In Watertown, I soon got elected to the Seniors executive committee and started to get more involved with leadership. I began attending Sports Weekends and was fortunate enough to get elected onto the Central Council at the 1988 General Assembly and Sports Weekend in Providence, on the 42nd anniversary of the organization. This was especially meaningful to me because the ACYOA was established in Providence in 1946, and because my father was a native son of the parish and served on Central Council for three years.

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

LO: The ACYOA has had a huge impact on my life, even now. Coming from a small parish, our ACYOA members were like family. Service in the organization taught me how to become a leader in the community and how to communicate with authority figures. I learned at a young age when I was a part of the Juniors that sometimes not everything will go the way you had planned it, especially when organizing an event. You should always be prepared with a Plan B. While I was serving on Central Council and also on the ACYOA executive committee in Watertown, the earthquake in Armenia happened. At an ACYOA meeting, Der Dajad told us that children affected by the earthquake would be coming to Boston for medical treatment and they would need housing. I was working in Boston City Hall, in the Mayor's office at the time and told Mayor Flynn about this situation. The Mayor was able to use his clout and connections to secure free housing for four months in a luxury condo complex for the parents of these children, directly across the street from Mass General Hospital. This made it a bit easier for the Armenian community, as they no longer needed to shuttle them from their homes in the suburbs to the hospital in the city. I credit my leadership positions in ACYOA and the church in general with giving me the skills to help influence and motivate people in positions of power, like the Mayor, like our Primate, and like the several university presidents alongside whom I worked in academic development. Serving on Central Council really taught

me how to express myself with my peers and people in authority to help bring about new ideas and positive change.

AY: What is your role in the Church now?

LO: The ACYOA has really prepared me for leadership roles in the Church. I have served as a Sunday School teacher and as a member of our parish's nominating committee for a few years. I recently became a member of the St. Nersess Seminary Board of Directors. I am also a member of the parish investment committee and bazaar committee at Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church in Providence, RI. I have also helped with various key fundraising efforts for our parish. I participated in our parish pilgrimage to Jerusalem this past January, led by Fr. Shnork Souin.

AY: Any words of advice to our current generation of ACYOA members?

LO: I would say this: Cherish your time in the ACYOA and enjoy every single minute of it because it goes by too fast, like everything in life. Your generation is well-equipped to serve the needs of the Armenian Church today. What you are doing now is not only impacting your generation of young Armenians but the next generation coming after you as well. You offer inspiration to others much younger than you. Continue growing a strong pipeline of leaders, and recognize that it is a privilege to serve the Armenian Church. Know that what you are doing now will serve you well in the future no matter what career you pursue. The leadership skills you learn in the ACYOA will make you better people and better contributors to society.