



Alumni of the Month  
September 2019  
**Douglas Tashjian**

*Central Council Secretary Nick Tashjian, interviews his father and former ACYOA Executive Secretary Douglas Tashjian, of St. Leon Church in Fair Lawn, NJ about his life growing up in the Church and involvement in the ACYOA.*

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

**Douglas Tashjian:** My parents were active members of St. Thomas. I grew up at St Thomas, attended Armenian School, Sunday School, and along with my friends, I couldn't wait to turn 13 and join the ACYOA Juniors chapter.

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

**DT:** I made lifelong friends in ACYOA Juniors and Seniors. My first experience in leadership and working with adults was as the Juniors Chairperson. The skills I learned in this position prepared me well for other opportunities as I began my career. I became close to my priest, Fr. Arnak Kasparian, and that became a lifelong friendship. I became a member of the St. Thomas Parish Council, and later served as Chairperson & Diocesan Delegate for my current parish, St. Leon Church in Fair Lawn, NJ.

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

**DT:** In late 1986, I was between jobs, back home from living in Boston. I was at the Diocesan Center where I respectfully greeted His Eminence Archbishop Torkom Manoogian. He was surprised to see me and asked what I was doing. When I told him, he volunteered that the ACYOA Seniors needed an Executive Secretary, which was the title of the position at that time. He thought that with my years of involvement in ACYOA and my business experience, I might be an ideal candidate to manage the ACYOA. I started that position in January 1987, thinking I would stay for two years, but on December 7, 1988, Armenia was devastated by an earthquake. Like everyone at the Diocese, I jumped into aiding Armenia, which culminated in me leading a group of ACYOA Seniors in the summer of 1989 to build a house in Stepanavan. We did it, 25 of us, and I made lifelong friends. That fall, I became engaged to Christina Derdarian who I had met at an ACYOA event at St. James in Harrison, NY, now St. Gregory The Enlightener in White Plains, NY. To come full circle, we are especially proud of our oldest son, Nicholas, who is now on the ACYOA Central Council.

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

**DT:** Christian leadership, Christian fellowship, Christian stewardship, religious and cultural education, and spiritual development. Close relationships with coworkers with whom I worked with at the Diocese, especially Nancy Basmajian, Elise Antreassian, and Adrienne Alexanian. Close relationships with eminent spiritual leaders; namely my first priest, Fr. Arnak Kasparian; my current priest, ACYOA alumnus Fr. Diran Bohajian; my wife's first priest, ACYOA alumnus Fr. Karekin Kasparian; my colleagues from my years at the Diocese, ACYOA alumnus Fr. Garabed Kochakian, and each of their Yerezgins. His Eminence Archbishop Torkom Manoogian was a mentor to me. I first met then Vartabed Khajag Barsamian in 1987 at the Diocese and the rest is history. Finally, I have known His Grace Bishop Daniel Findikyan since he was a teenager, and have

also attended the St. Nersess summer conferences with my brother Craig, I have confidence in Bishop Daniel's leadership for the Armenian Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**NT: Are you still involved in your parish community?**

**DT:** Yes, both my wife and I serve St Leon. I served as a member on the Parish Council and later as the Chairperson, as well as a Diocesan Delegate. My wife taught Sunday School for over 10 years. She also served with her sister as co-advisors for the ACYOA Juniors chapter. Today, both of us work at our annual Food Festival and Picnic.

**NT: Any advice for current and future ACYOA members?**

**DT:** Since its founding in 1946, the ACYOA has provided leadership, educational, and spiritual development opportunities to generations. It's been an uninterrupted success, tying Armenians together in parishes and Dioceses. It's a comforting respite from the relentless intrusion of outside influences. My wife and I often share how we experienced ACYOA as our own safeguarded world. My advice is to turn off the phones for a few hours, give of your talents, and get immersed.