



## Alumni of the Month September 2018 **Fr. Stepanos Doudoukjian**

*ACYOA Central Council Secretary, Mallory Maslar interviews Fr. Stepanos Doudoukjian, pastor of St. Peter Armenian Church in Watervliet, NY, about his life growing up in the Church, and involvement in the ACYOA.*

**Mallory Maslar: What was your involvement in the ACYOA like growing up?**

**Fr. Stepanos Doudoukjian:** I grew up involved in many aspects of church life at St. Thomas Armenian Church in Tenafly, New Jersey. I was active in the ACYOA juniors, and in my junior year of High School, I was chosen to be part of a steering committee to help regroup and restructure our ACYOA. We had a close-knit group growing up as teenagers and enjoy reconnecting to this day.

**MM: How do you think the ACYOA has affected your life?**

**FSD:** When I was a teenager, ACYOA was a guide and rudder for my life's footsteps. I was a borderline "thug", so ACYOA helped reign me back into the life of the church. It gave me structure, faith, and friends when I needed it most.

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

**FSD:** On a local level, I had lots of fun at our yearly progressive dinners which was a huge success over 35 years ago at St. Thomas Armenian Church in NJ. Ironically at St. Peter in Watervliet, we have implemented the same activity. It has been seven years going strong and the kids always ask when we are doing it again. I also enjoyed our periodic Friday night gatherings and discussions with our pastor, Fr. Arnak Kasparian of blessed memory. It would always simply be — come as you are and ask what you want. I remember Houston Sports Weekend in 1989. It was the year that Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan passed away. ACYOA cancelled the dances, and the Galleria Hotel allowed all of the ACYOA seniors to ice skate through the night in their indoor skating rink. My buddies and I had so much fun, while respecting the somber tone of the weekend. Road trips to visit ACYOA friends in other cities were ALWAYS fun! Attending regional ACYOA retreats, especially in New England were adventurous and rewarding.

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

**FSD:** At the age of 15, I attended my first St. Nersess summer conference, under the leadership of Fr. Mardiros Chevian (at the time Deacon Michael). The experience changed my life. Since 1981, I believe I have missed only one year of being involved with those summer conferences. My parents have been the best role models for me. They were simple, everyday folks. They were truly grounded in the Armenian Church and faith. They made it a point each and every Sunday (summers too) that we all went to church to worship as a family.

**MM: What are you most looking forward to with the newly formed St. Peter ACYOA Seniors?**

**FSD:** I thoroughly enjoy being together with our group of young adults at St. Peter Armenian Church. We appreciate each other's company and each time we gather, I present some sort of spiritual component to our get together. The young adults are receptive, and their hearts are always open. I am amazed and inspired by their deep faith and commitment to the Armenian Church. The spiritual depth of our St. Peter ACYOA Seniors and Juniors is a joy to experience, pastorally. Let's see what ideas they come up with for 2019.

**MM: What is your involvement with the ACYOA now as a pastor for over 20 years?**

**FSD:** As the parish priest of St. Peter Armenian Church, we are proud that we have hosted Junior sports weekend in 1998 and 2003. We will once again host it this Columbus Day Weekend. Our Junior ACYOA is so excited to be hosting! Reach New HYEghts - is the theme! I aim to make ACYOA a place that is inviting, welcoming, and where young kids can feel free to be themselves. I make every event an opportunity to check in with kids spiritually.

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

**FSD:** ACYOA is a perfect way to create life-long friendships, build a foundation in the Armenian Church, and grow in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.