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12 VOCATIONS

VARIETY OF GIFTS, ONE SPIRIT

EMBRACING THE STRENGTH OF ST. NERSESS

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2025
MACALUSO'S, HAWTHORNE, NEW JERSEY

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ST. NERSESS ARMENIAN SEMINARY

GREETINGS FROM BISHOP MESROP

What a pleasure it is to send my blessings, and express my warm congratulations, to St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, as it honors another group of twelve alumni, and the impact they have had on the Armenian Church in North America—and indeed on our holy church throughout the world.

This year's honorees represent an exciting period in the history of St. Nersess Seminary. Indeed, the magnitude of the seminary's success can be seen in the fact that three distinguished bishops of the Armenian Church are being honored this evening.

In addition, the clergymen being recognized tonight represent a new generation of servants of the church, who have brought fresh energy and unique talents to their vocations—continuing noble family legacies, and reaching out in new directions of ministry. Likewise, the lay ministers being honored tonight have greatly enriched the life of our Diocese and its parish communities, by filling our community with music, and inspiring its youth to seek the Lord.

We give glory to God for all of these individuals, and for the institution that decisively shaped them in their callings. On this occasion, we also invoke the blessed memory of Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, whose mighty vision ensured that an Armenian seminary would be planted in the soil of North America, so that faithful souls who heard the Lord's call could have a place to learn, grow, and pursue a life of service to God.

Our precious St. Nersess Seminary is where the mission of the Armenian Church is revealed, and renewed, for new generations of our people. May that continue under the guiding hand of our Lord Jesus Christ.

My warmest congratulations and gratitude go to Fr. Mardiros Chevian and the Seminary faculty and staff; to the organizers of tonight's event; and of course to our twelve worthy honorees. I send brotherly affection to my fellow Primates of our North American dioceses, Archbishop Hovnan Derderian and Bishop Abgar Hovakimyan. May our Lord continue to bless St. Nersess Seminary in its critical mission to our worldwide church.

BISHOP MESROP PARSAMYAN
Primate, Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America
President of the St. Nersess Board of Directors

GREETINGS FROM ARCHBISHOP HOVNAN

It is with heartfelt joy and deep admiration that I extend my warmest congratulations to St. Nersess Armenian Seminary on the occasion of its Gala Banquet, celebrating twelve of its devoted alumni who have faithfully served our Holy Church with humility, wisdom, and love.

This special gathering, entitled "12 Vocations: Variety of Gifts – One Spirit," stands as a living testimony to the sacred mission of St. Nersess Seminary — a mission that has shaped generations of clergy and lay ministers who continue to labor in the vineyard of our Lord. The seminary's commitment to academic excellence, spiritual formation, and pastoral leadership has borne abundant fruit across our dioceses, parishes, and faithful communities throughout North America and beyond.

As St. Paul reminds us, "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:4). Indeed, through their diverse callings — as bishops, priests, deacons, and lay ministers — the twelve honorees embody the unity of the Spirit and the richness of service that strengthen our Armenian Church and deepen its witness in the world.

I convey my heartfelt blessings to His Grace Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese and President of the Board of Directors, to the Seminary Dean, faculty, staff, and all benefactors who, through faith and dedication, continue to advance the legacy of St. Nersess. Special congratulations to the twelve honorees. May this evening inspire renewed commitment to the spiritual and educational mission entrusted to the seminary by our forefathers.

May the Almighty God continue to bless St. Nersess Seminary, and may the Holy Spirit guide all who are called to serve — in unity and love — for the glory of God and the flourishing of His Holy Church.

ARCHBISHOP HOVNAN DERDERIAN
Primate, Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America
Vice President of the St. Nersess Board of Directors

GREETINGS FROM THE DEAN

This coming year we will celebrate the 65th anniversary of the founding of St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, the first and, even today, the only Armenian Seminary in the western world. An idea which was born of the mind and vision of Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, of blessed memory. What has followed is sixty-five years of learning and teaching, worship and prayer, vision and innovation. This has all led to an increase in our student body and ordinations. **Vision and Innovation!**

More than seventy graduates serve the Armenian Church as bishops, priests, deacons, and lay ministers, not just on this continent but in other parts of the world. The rays of light emanating from this institution have reached out and touched our faithful, not only in North America, but also in Armenia, Jerusalem, Constantinople, and Western Europe. We are continuing to develop even stronger ties with our historic hierarchical centers around the world and working at creating partnerships with other dioceses. **Partnership and Collaboration!**

This past summer we increased our number of conference offerings for youth all with very good attendance. The enthusiasm that has been building encouraged us to add one more session this coming summer, bringing the number up to five sessions. In addition to the five sessions to take place on our campus, we are planning again to lead a group of altar servers to Jerusalem for a specialized Deacons' Training Program there. **Enthusiasm and Growth!**

The above examples of the seminary's progress are just a few of the areas where we have made an impact. The progress that we celebrate today is because of you – our donors, supporters and advocates. Your unwavering trust, wise investment, and enduring commitment have strengthened the foundation upon which our continued success rests: advancing our mission, igniting new initiatives, and expanding our impact across Armenian communities here and throughout the world. **Commitment and Trust!**

Because of you, we have transformed dreams into reality and ideas into action. To all of you, we extend our deepest gratitude for your shared belief in our mission. You continue to inspire us to move forward with…

Vision and Innovation, Partnership and Collaboration, Enthusiasm and Growth, Commitment and Trust!

May the Risen Lord continue to inspire us all and bless this sacred institution!

FR. MARDIROS CHEVIAN
Dean, St. Nersess Armenian Seminary

CONSECRATION OF ST. HAGOP CHAPEL AT ST. NERSESS ARMENIAN SEMINARY

His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of all Armenians, consecrated the St. Hagop Chapel and officiated at the opening of the new Armonk campus on November 12, 2016. He was assisted by Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, former Primate of the Eastern Diocese and President of the Board of Directors, and Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese and Vice-President of the Board of Directors.

Haig & Elza Didizian were the grand benefactors of the property, theological center, and St. Hagop Chapel.

12 VOCATIONS PAST HONOREES

2021 Honorees: The first 12 students to graduate from St. Nersess and St. Vladimir's Seminaries and be ordained: (back row) Fr. Garabed Kochakian (1976), Fr. Arakel Aljalian (1993), Fr. Yeprem Kelegian (1977), Fr. Sahak Kaishian (1993), Fr. Vasken Kouzouian (1994), Fr. Tavit Boyajian (1993), Fr. Stepanos Doudoukjian (1996), Fr. Shnork Demirjian (1991), Fr. Diran Bohajian (1993); (front row) Fr. Kevork Arakelian (1973), Fr. Karekin Kasparian, Bishop Daniel Findikyan, Fr. Mardiros Chevian (1985), Fr. Simeon Odabashian (1996).

2023 Honorees: (back row) Fr. Mikael Devejian (2000); Yn. Sirarpi Feredjian Aivazian (1978); Nancy Basmajian (1979); Shaké Ajamian Derderian (1989); Fr. Bedros Kadehjian (2005). (front row) Fr. Sarkis Petoyan (1998); Fr. Krikor Sabounjian (1998); Fr. Mardiros Chevian, dean; Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate; Abp. Avak Asadourian (1977); Fr. Aren Jebejian (2004); Fr. Hovsep Karapetyan (2004). Missing from photo: Fr. Abraham Ohanesian (1999); Yn. Valerie Goekjian Zahirsky (1974).

Reflection

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all them in everyone. NRSV

— 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

St. Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 that the Church is enriched by diverse gifts, all flowing from the same divine source: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Though individuals may have different callings — bishops, priests, deacons, or lay ministers — each is given for the common good and united in **PURPOSE.** This truth shines forth in St. Nersess Seminary's celebration of *12 Vocations: Variety of Gifts – One Spirit,* where **DIVERSITY** is embraced as a sign of God's design and the Armenian Church's strength.

The Church's **VITALITY** depends on this richness: bishops shepherd with **WISDOM,** priests offer the sacraments with **DEVOTION,** deacons support the liturgy with reverent **SERVICE,** and lay ministers strengthen the **COMMUNITY** with faith-filled action. Each role brings its own **INSPIRATION** and nurtures **HARMONY** within the Body of Christ. Yet all are empowered by the one **SPIRIT.** This unity in diversity reflects the very mystery of the Holy Trinity: distinct persons, one essence. Rooted in God's will, our differences do not divide us, they complete us.

We are called, then, to honor and support one another's **FAITH** and **KNOWLEDGE,** recognizing that every vocation, seen or unseen, is essential to the life of the Church. In doing so, we also discern our own gifts and use them faithfully and selflessly, trusting that God works through our collective efforts to build His kingdom.

WISDOM

Baptized Sarkis Avedis in Baghdad, Iraq, **BISHOP VAHAN HOVHANESSIAN** was first inspired to seek the priesthood by Archbishop Avak Asadourian, a St. Nersess graduate, while a young parishioner at St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church. "Looking back, I can see how through his ministry and that of other faithful clergy, God began weaving a tapestry of spiritual mentors in my life... confirming my calling to serve Christ through the Armenian Church and people."

His calling led him to study at St. Nersess Seminary from 1986–1989. On June 2, 1990, Archbishop Avak Asadourian ordained him into the holy priesthood in Baghdad, with Bishop Nareg Shakaryan as his sponsoring priest and Dr. Carnig Ovanessian as godfather. On November 6, 2011, he was consecrated a bishop by His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, at Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia.

Ordained as Fr. Vahan, he has faithfully served at the following parishes: visiting pastor of Holy Cross Armenian Church (New York, NY): 1990-1991; grand sacristan of St. Vartan Cathedral (New York, NY): 1991-1993; pastor of St. Leon Armenian Church (Fair Lawn, NJ): 1993-1998; interim dean at St. Nersess Seminary (New Rochelle, NY): 1998-1999; pastor of Holy Martyrs Armenian Church (Bayside, NY): 1999-2009; Primate of the Diocese of the UK and Republic of Ireland (London, UK): 2009-2015; Pontifical Legate to Western Europe (Paris, France): 2009-2018; Primate of the Diocese of France (Paris, France): 2014-2022; Director of the Karekin I Educational Center: 2023-present.

"The Holy Spirit spoke to my heart, confirming my calling to serve Christ."

INFLUENCES ON THE PATH TO THE SEMINARY?

The arrival of Avak Srpazan to my home parish in Baghdad was a gift from God. His sermons and vibrant youth programs inspired me and, along with other faithful clergy, confirmed my calling to serve Christ through the Armenian Church.

THE GREATEST CHALLENGE YOU FACE?

Convincing my parents that God was calling me to the priesthood. Having completed a degree in engineering, they naturally hoped I would pursue that career path. But through prayer, discernment, and guidance from Archbishop Avak Asadourian and others, I realized the Lord was calling me to dedicate my life to His service. Eventually, my parents blessed my decision and were proud of it. It was a testament to how God works in our hearts long before others can see His plan unfolding.

FEEL CLOSEST TO FULFILLING YOUR CALLING?

Participating in and leading Bible study sessions.

FAVORITE MEMORY AT ST. NERSESS?

Our retreats were profound encounters with the living God — moments when heaven seemed to touch the earth. They were blessed times of reflection, worship, prayer, and fellowship, when we could step away from routine and immerse ourselves completely in God's loving presence.

Bishop Vahan Hovhanessian

FAITH

"I was just 13 years old when I felt a powerful calling deep within me. It wasn't something I could explain. It was as if God was gently whispering to my heart," recalls **BISHOP NAREG BERBERIAN.**

Born in Beirut, Lebanon, and baptized with the name Vasken, his vocation led him first to the Seminary at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, and then to St. Nersess Seminary, where he studied from 1988–1991.

"My greatest influence in my decision to enter the Seminary was my godfather, the Very Rev. Fr. Kevork Garbisian. He was more than a spiritual mentor; he was a guiding light in my life. With conviction and deep faith, he planted the idea in my heart and nourished it with encouragement."

On July 26, 1992, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian ordained him into the holy priesthood at St. Vartan Cathedral in Manhattan. His sponsoring priest was Archbishop Haigazoun Najarian, and his Godmother of Ordination was Bertha Moriarty. On November 16, 2014, His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, consecrated him as Bishop at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

Before becoming Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Brazil, Bishop Nareg faithfully served the Armenian Church in a variety of parishes: St. Vartan Cathedral (New York, NY), St. Kevork Armenian Church (Houston, TX), St. James Armenian Church (Richmond, VA), St. George Armenian Church (Hartford, CT), St. Sarkis Armenian Church (Charlotte, NC) and St. David Armenian Church (Boca Raton, FL).

"I knew my life was meant for something sacred: to serve, to learn, and to walk closely with God and His Church."

THE GREATEST CHALLENGE YOU FACE?

I have come to understand that serving God means opening my heart not only to joy, but also to rejection, to being misunderstood, even to hate. The successes and the struggles, the pain and the peace, they all shape us. They teach us, humble us, and bring us closer to the heart of Christ. And it is in those hardest moments that I look to Him— the One who was rejected, betrayed, and crucified. He is my strength. He is my reason. And He is my comfort when the path becomes heavy.

FEEL CLOSEST TO FULFILLING YOUR CALLING?

When I forget about myself and simply show up with all my imperfections, with open hands and a willing heart. That is when I know: I am not just serving God. I am walking with Him.

FEEL CLOSEST TO FULFILLING YOUR CALLING?

While studying in Armenia, I was deeply inspired by the highly educated clergy whose profound knowledge of biblical studies and theology left a lasting impression on me. At St. Nersess, I was blessed to be guided by Fr. Mardiros Chevian, a true spiritual leader and fatherly presence who believed in me. His Eminence Archbishop Khajag Barsamian was another cornerstone in my vocation — I had the honor of being his first candidate to ordain. Throughout my 25 years of service as a pastor, Srpazan stood by me with steadfast support.

FINAL THOUGHTS TO SHARE?

I must recall the powerful presence of Yn. Diane Chevian. She was a spiritual sister to so many of us, a constant source of strength, compassion, and grace. She offered her wisdom, comforted us when we struggled, and encouraged us when we doubted ourselves. She had a way of making each of us feel seen, heard, and cared for. Her absence is deeply felt. She helped shape what St. Nersess Seminary is: a place of learning, of faith, of family. May God grant rest to her soul and crown her with peace.

Bishop Nareg Berberian

KNOWLEDGE

"St. Nersess is the most important institution of the Armenian Church in America."

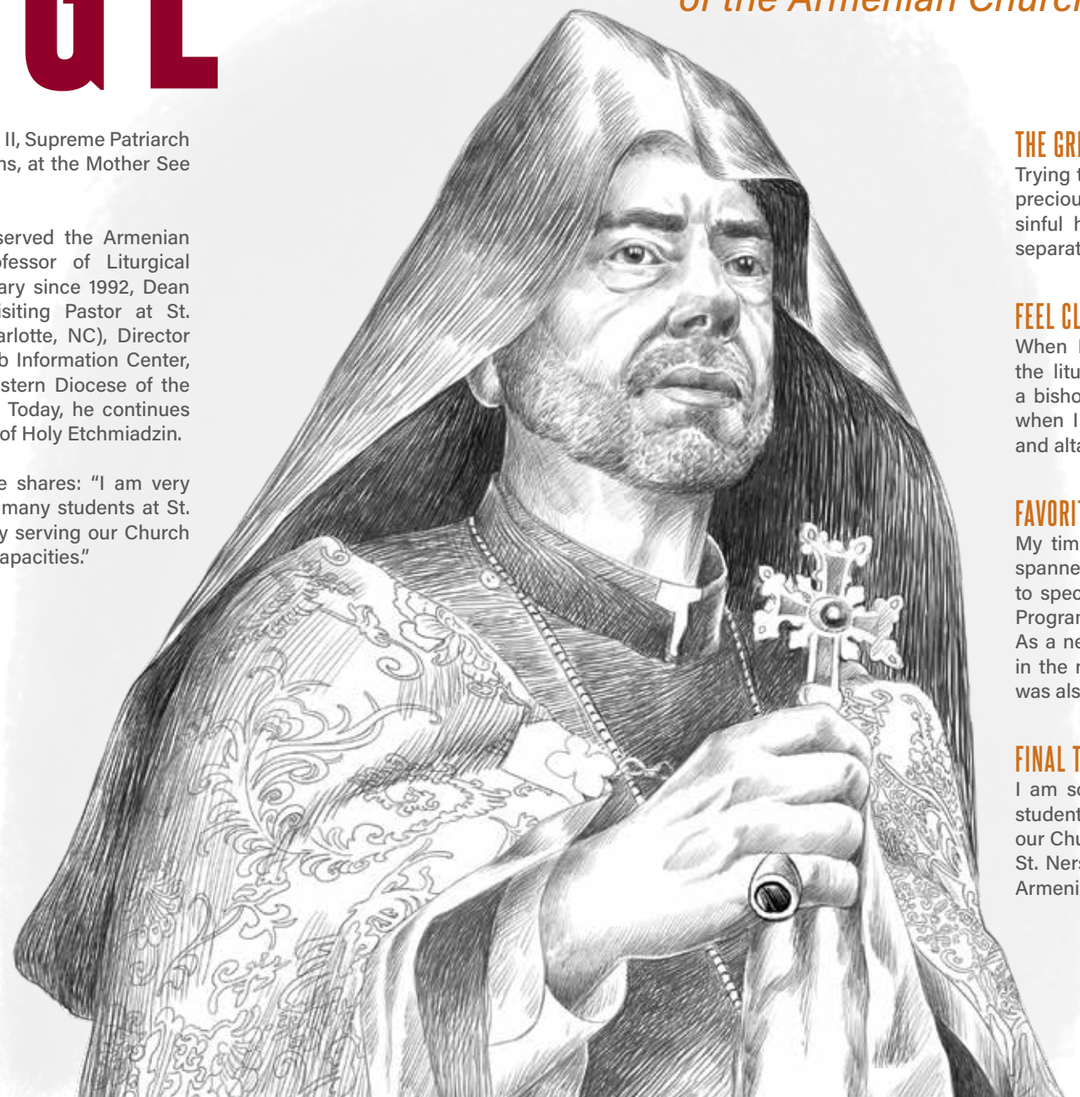
BISHOP DANIEL FINDIKYAN was born in Fort Worth, TX, and baptized with the name Michael. He recalls sensing his vocation early: "Something I felt in my heart starting around age 14. From there it was up and down. Some days certain, some days doubtful, many days wondering." Along the way, he was blessed with mentors who helped shape his journey, including Fr. Kevork Arakelian, Fr. Mardiros Chevian, Fr. Karekin Kasparian, Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, Fr. John Meno, Fr. Robert Taft, and Dr. Tom Samuelian.

His calling led him to study at St. Nersess from 1985–1989. On September 14, 1997, at St. Vartan Cathedral, he was ordained a priest by Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, with Fr. Mardiros Chevian serving as his sponsoring priest and Haroutune Merzian as his Godfather. On May 12, 2019, he was consecrated a bishop by His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

Bishop Daniel has faithfully served the Armenian Church in many roles: Professor of Liturgical Studies at St. Nersess Seminary since 1992, Dean of St. Nersess Seminary, Visiting Pastor at St. Sarkis Armenian Church (Charlotte, NC), Director of the Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center, and former Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America. Today, he continues his ministry at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

Reflecting on his vocation, he shares: "I am very proud of, and grateful for, my many students at St. Nersess who are now faithfully serving our Church as priests, and in many other capacities."

Bishop Daniel Findikyan



THE GREATEST CHALLENGE YOU FACE?

Trying to reconcile the Church as truly the holy and precious Body of Christ, versus the dysfunctional, sinful human institution from which it cannot be separated.

FEEL CLOSEST TO FULFILLING YOUR CALLING?

When I am teaching and when I am celebrating the liturgical services, especially the Badarak. As a bishop, my most rewarding moments have been when I have ordained priests, as well as deacons and altar servers.

FAVORITE MEMORY AT ST. NERSESS?

My time at St. Nersess, in various capacities, has spanned most of my life, from 1978 to today. It is hard to specify one moment. My first Deacons' Training Program as a participant in 1978 was very powerful. As a newly consecrated bishop, ordaining deacons in the new St. Hagop Chapel (St. Jacob of Nisibis) was also deeply inspiring.

FINAL THOUGHTS TO SHARE?

I am so very proud of, and grateful for, my many students at St. Nersess who are now faithfully serving our Church as priests, and in many other capacities. St. Nersess is the most important institution of the Armenian Church in America.

SERVICE

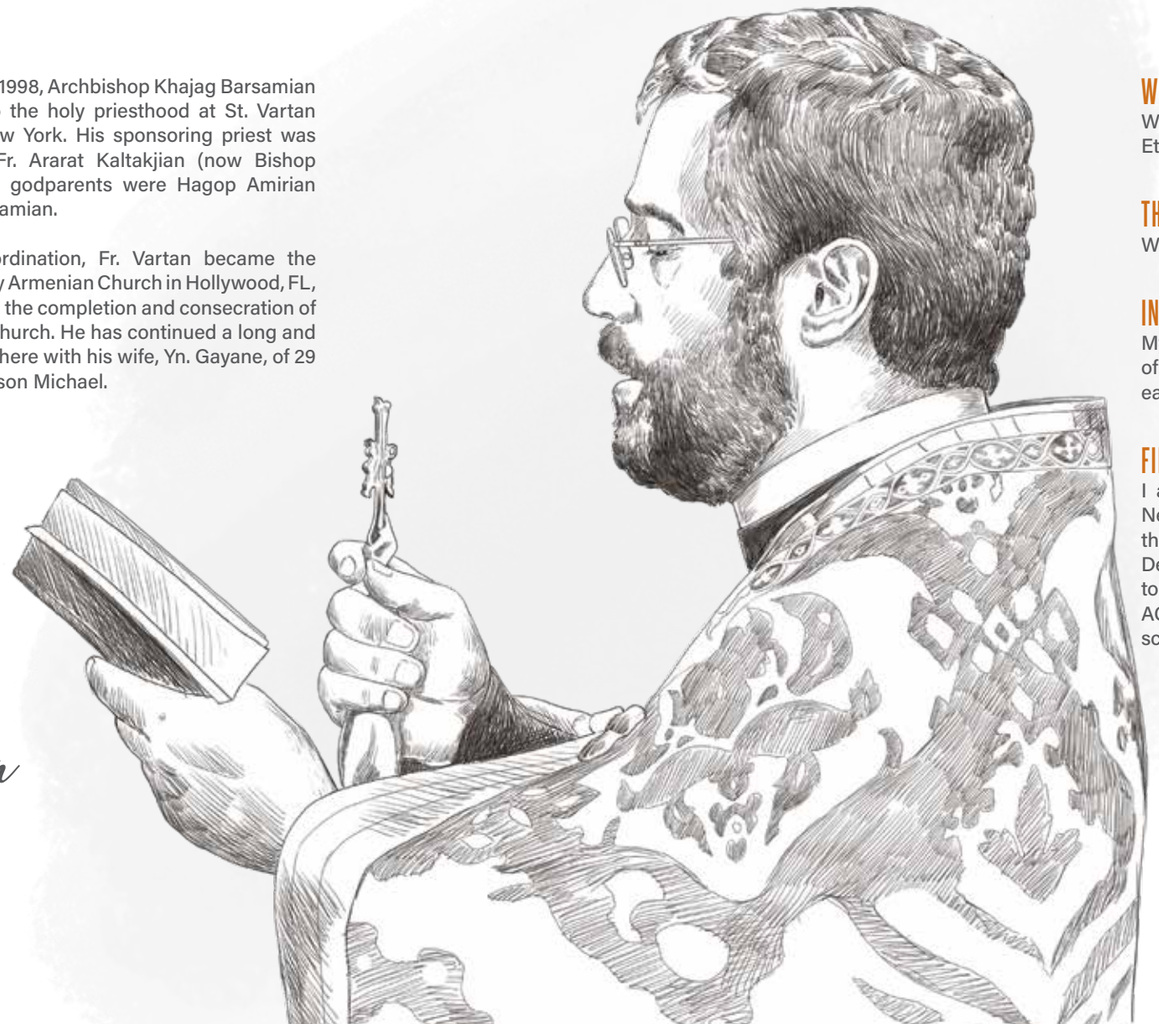
"For me, the fulfillment of my calling is an ongoing ministry."

FR. VARTAN JOULFAYAN was baptized Dikran in Beirut, Lebanon. It was his parents who first "sowed the seeds of faith" in his heart. He believed it was God's call that led him to enter the seminary at Holy Etchmiadzin, a decision that set the course for his lifelong service to God and the Armenian Church. "My joy has been to serve and feel spiritual contentment. Let God reward you, not men."

He enrolled at St. Nersess Seminary from 1993 to 1995. His favorite memory at the seminary was during the Christmas season, the get-togethers with other seminarians on Friday evenings, and the "Left on 22."

On February 22, 1998, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian ordained him to the holy priesthood at St. Vartan Cathedral in New York. His sponsoring priest was the Very Rev. Fr. Ararat Kaltakjian (now Bishop Ararat), and his godparents were Hagop Amirian and Lousarev Atamian.

Following his ordination, Fr. Vartan became the pastor of St. Mary Armenian Church in Hollywood, FL, where he guided the completion and consecration of the newly built church. He has continued a long and fruitful ministry there with his wife, Yn. Gayane, of 29 years, and their son Michael.



Fr. Vartan Joulfayan

WHEN DID YOU FEEL YOU HAD A CALLING?

When God called me through the bells of Holy Etchmiadzin.

THE GREATEST CHALLENGE YOU FACE?

When I conducted the funerals of young men.

INFLUENCES ON THE PATH TO SEMINARY?

My greatest influence was while I was in the Seminary of Holy Etchmiadzin. I would say the writings of the early church holy fathers have influenced me.

FINAL THOUGHTS TO SHARE?

I am grateful to God for directing my path to St. Nersess and St. Vladimir's, and I am immensely thankful to the Board of Directors, Professors, and Dean of St. Nersess for giving me the opportunity to study at the seminary. I am also grateful to the AGBU, Gulbenkian Foundation, and ASA for my scholarships.

DEVOTION

"My greatest influence on my path to the seminary was the beauty of our Holy Badarak and the rich traditions of our Church."

FR. HOVHAN KHOJA-EYNATYAN was born in Yerevan, Armenia, and baptized with the name Leon. Unlike many, his priestly vocation came later in life, around the age of 40. "In all honesty, I never wanted to be a priest in the conventional sense. But at a certain point — when I was almost 40 years old — I came to a deep realization: I needed to be a priest. From that moment on, it was no longer a question. I knew, with certainty and conviction, that this was the path I was meant to follow."

He studied at St. Nersess Seminary from 2007 to 2010. "It simply wasn't possible for me to go to Etchmiadzin or any other seminary to pursue this path. Only — and truly only — because of St. Nersess am I now living my dream."

On July 11, 2010, he was ordained into the holy priesthood by Archbishop Khajag Barsamian at St. Mary Armenian Church in Washington, DC. His sponsoring priests were Fr. Vertanes Kalayjian and Fr. Hovsep Karapetyan, with Zakar Shahverdian serving as godfather.

Since 2011, Fr. Hovhan has served as pastor of St. James Armenian Church in Evanston, IL, and also chairs the Eastern Diocese's Sacred Music Council. He and his wife, Yn. Narine, have been married for 28 years and have two children, Tatevik and Alexander, and two grandchildren, Lilit and Davit.

THE GREATEST CHALLENGE YOU FACE?

Lack of time! I constantly feel the urge to do more — there are always projects and ideas I want to pursue. But too often, I find myself postponing or setting them aside simply because there isn't enough time in the day. Balancing responsibilities while trying to nurture new initiatives remains an ongoing struggle.

FEEL CLOSEST TO FULFILLING YOUR CALLING?

Celebrating Badarak, in the hospital room (visiting), and funerals.

MODELS OR MENTORS IN YOUR MINISTRY?

I have been deeply blessed by many faithful and inspiring individuals, but it was Fr. Vertanes Kalayjian whose profound humility, unwavering dedication to the Church, and pastoral compassion left a lasting imprint on me. He was not only a mentor, but a true model of what it means to live and serve as a priest — grounded in prayer, steadfast in faith, and selfless in service.

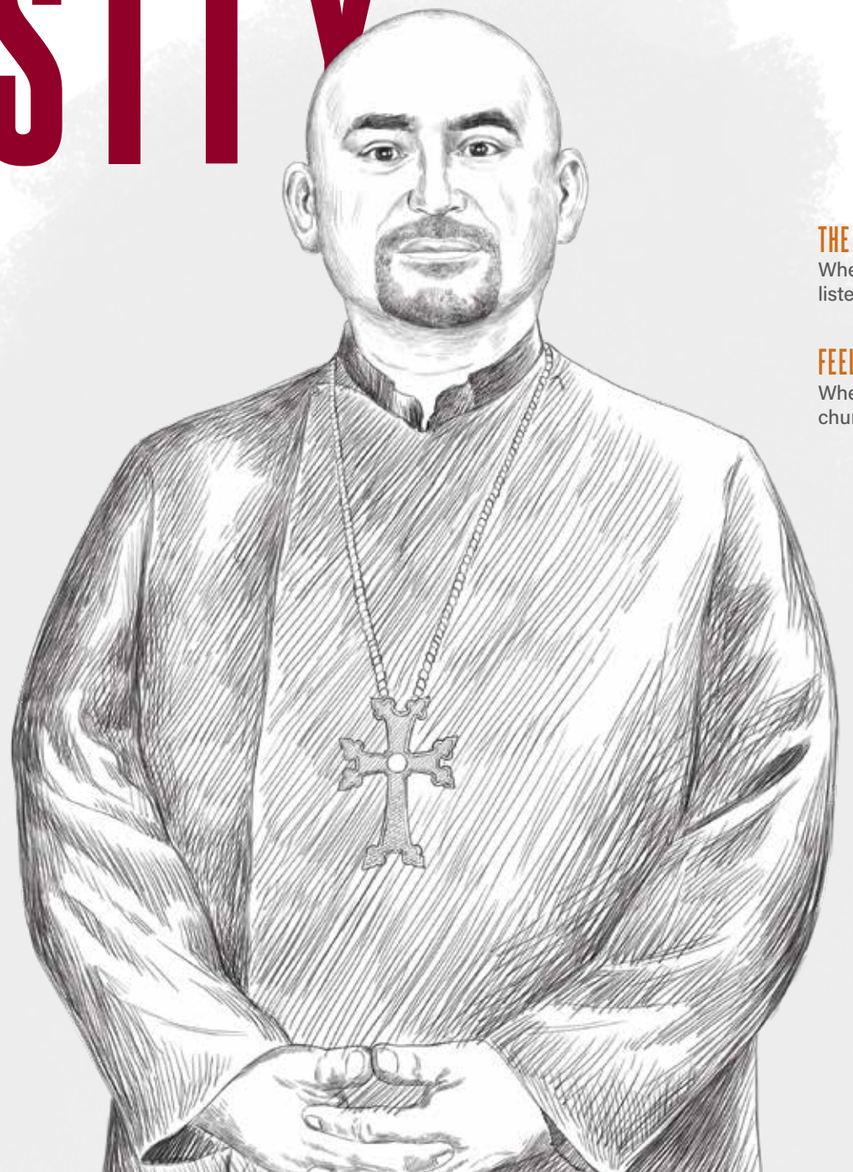
I am also continually inspired by my brother clergy. Each one, in his own way, reflects a different facet of the priestly calling. In many ways, the brotherhood of clergy is like a living icon—a shared witness to Christ's love and a continual reminder that we grow best in communion, not isolation.

FAVORITE MEMORY AT ST. NERSESS?

Professor Abraham Terian, during his final year at the seminary, offered several condensed courses so I could complete his classes. Dr. Terian would teach me from noon to 5 PM — often one-on-one. His dedication and encouragement gave a powerful boost to my studies and helped propel me forward in the formation process.

Fr. Hovhan Khoja-Eynatyan

DIVERSITY



"When I minister to children and see them in the church during Holy Badarak is when I feel closest to my calling."

FR. GHEVOND AJAMIAN was born in Akron, Ohio and baptized Justin Avedis. His calling to the priesthood was sparked after moving between towns and attending the St. Nersess High School Summer Conference. His family — especially relatives who had previously attended seminary — greatly influenced his path to St. Nersess.

He studied at St. Nersess Seminary from 2006–2010. "I will always remember the camaraderie I had with my fellow seminarians — learning, studying, serving, and living together. Each person's experience is unique, but we all share the same emotions and adventures together."

On August 25, 2013, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian ordained him into the holy priesthood at St. Sarkis Armenian Church in Carrollton, TX. His sponsoring priest was the Very Rev. Fr. Daniel Findikyan, and his godfathers were his uncles, Dn. Vartan Ajamian and Ara Ajamian.

Fr. Ghevond and his wife, Yn. Hasmik, have built their parish life at St. Sarkis Armenian Church. In 2022, he led the parish's vision to construct a new Armenian Church and banquet hall. They have been married for 17 years and are blessed with one daughter, Noelle Srbouhi.

THE GREATEST CHALLENGE YOU FACE?

When I preach love and forgiveness, people do not listen and do the opposite.

FEEL CLOSEST TO FULFILLING YOUR CALLING?

When I minister to children and see them in the church during Holy Badarak.

MODELS OR MENTORS IN YOUR MINISTRY?

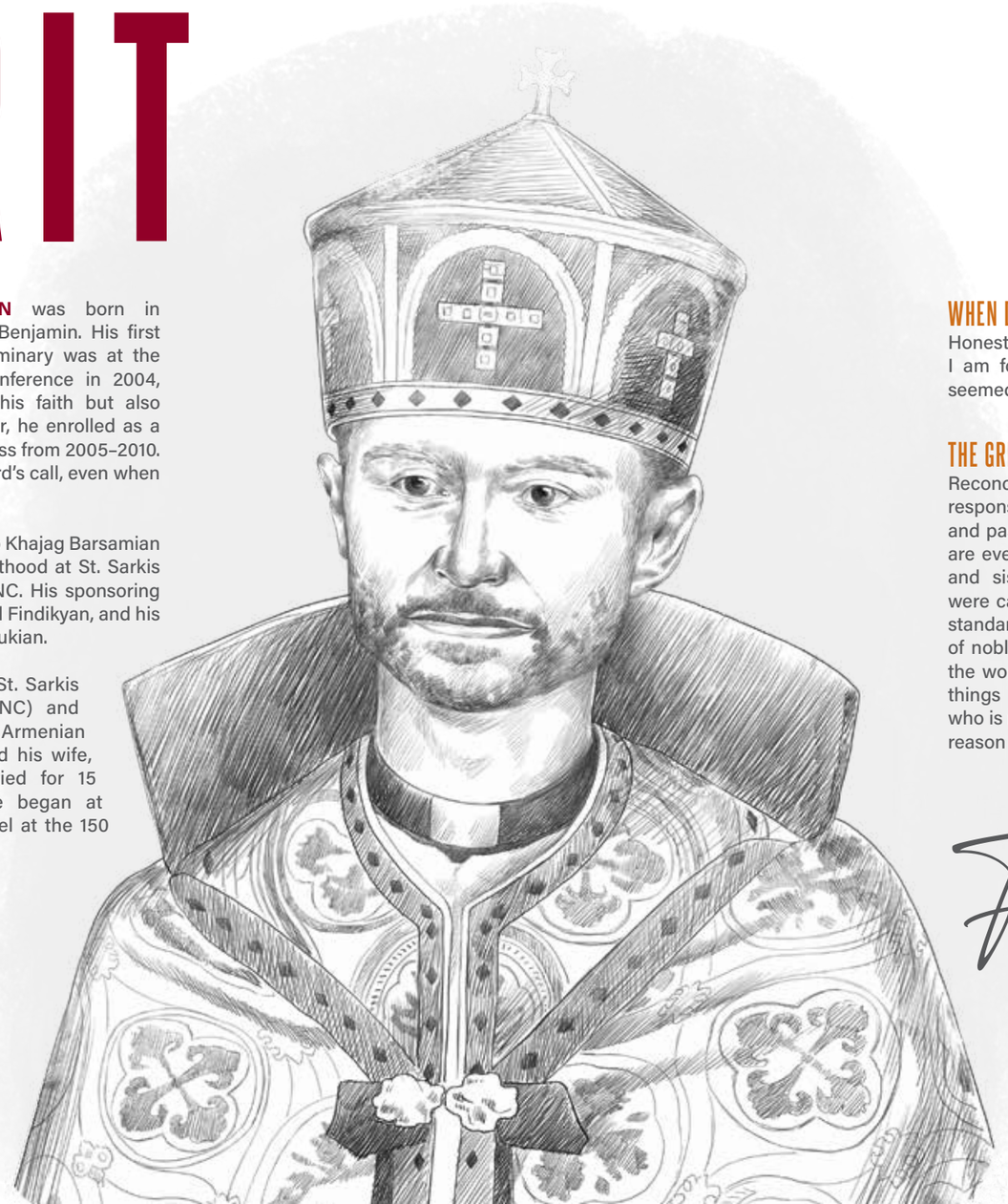
There have been many mentors, but perhaps the one who has left the greatest impression on me was Very Rev. Fr. Ghevont Samoorian. His advice and lessons in parish life and ministry helped shape me into how I minister, preach, and serve.

FINAL THOUGHTS TO SHARE?

St. Nersess is the heart of the Armenian Church in the Western Hemisphere. It pumps the blood of the Church —seminarians, both lay and clergy — into the Diocesan Center, churches, parishes, communities, and homes. Just as a heart must be kept healthy and strong, likewise, our St. Nersess Seminary must be kept the same.

Fr. Ghevond Ajamian

SPIRIT



"St. Nersess as an institution has impacted my life far beyond simply education."

FR. SAMUEL RITH-NAJARIAN was born in Philadelphia, PA, and baptized Benjamin. His first encounter with St. Nersess Seminary was at the Post High School Summer Conference in 2004, where he not only deepened his faith but also met his future bride. A year later, he enrolled as a seminarian, studying at St. Nersess from 2005–2010. "I trust that I am following the Lord's call, even when it has seemed uncertain."

On December 7, 2014, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian ordained him into the holy priesthood at St. Sarkis Armenian Church in Charlotte, NC. His sponsoring priest was the Very Rev. Fr. Daniel Findikyan, and his godfather was Dn. Yervant Kutchukian.

Fr. Samuel's ministry began at St. Sarkis Armenian Church (Charlotte, NC) and continues today at St. James Armenian Church (Richmond, VA). He and his wife, Yn. Danielle, have been married for 15 years. Fittingly, their marriage began at the Seminary itself, in the chapel at the 150 Stratton Road campus.

WHEN DID YOU FEEL YOU HAD A CALLING?

Honestly – I've never known. I've had to trust that I am following the Lord's call, even when it has seemed uncertain.

THE GREATEST CHALLENGE YOU FACE?

Reconciling my own unworthiness with the heavy responsibility I have been entrusted with as a priest and pastor. St. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:27-28 are ever confounding me in my vocation: 'Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.' As one who is neither wise nor strong, I trust God has some reason for calling me.

FEEL CLOSEST TO FULFILLING YOUR CALLING?

Visiting people in the hospital. Being present with the sick and suffering, praying with them for God's mercy and healing.

MENTORS OR MODELS IN YOUR MINISTRY?

Fr. John Meno of the Syriac Orthodox Church was a mentor to me since my ordination until he passed away earlier this year. More than providing guidance and support to me as a young priest, he was a model of holiness through his prayer, preaching, humility, and compassion.

Fr. Samuel Rith-Najarian

INSPIRATION

FR. YEGHISHE KSACHIKYAN was born in Yerevan, Armenia, with the baptismal name Mkrtich. Inspired by the "love and attention he received from my clergy brothers," he first studied at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin before continuing his studies at St. Nersess Seminary from 2007–2011. He fondly recalls "spending time with fellow seminarians and dedicated clergy and staff."

He was ordained into the holy priesthood by Archbishop Hovnan Derderian on January 25, 2015, at St. Leon (Ghevontiants) Armenian Cathedral in Burbank, CA. His sponsoring priests were Fr. Shnork Demirjian and Fr. Khajag Shabazyan, with Andranik Zorayan serving as godfather.

Fr. Yeghishe has served as pastor of St. James Armenian Church in Sacramento, CA, since his ordination. In 2022, he guided his parishioners in their long-time effort to move their sanctuary to a new location. Under his pastoral leadership, the parish has grown both in participation and in the variety of programs and outreach initiatives offered.

He has been married to Yn. Tatevik for 16 years, and together they are blessed with four children: Arpine, Hovhannes, Sose, and Khosrov.

Fr. Yeghishe Ksachikyan

"We're strengthened by the Spirit to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge."

THE GREATEST CHALLENGE YOU FACE?

Managing multiple tasks in a parish life from the small matters to big, while knowing that more needs to be done to bring our people closer to God.

FEEL CLOSEST TO FULFILLING YOUR CALLING?

Teaching my children and parishioners the Word of God. Helping families and individuals that come to church for guidance and directing them to the love of Christ our Lord.

INFLUENCES ON THE PATH TO THE SEMINARY?

The love that I received from my clergy brothers.

MODELS OR MENTORS IN YOUR MINISTRY?

The clergy serving in our Western Diocese; the lives of the saints and their writings directed to priests.

PURPOSE

FR. AVEDIS KALAYJIAN was born in Neptune, NJ, with the baptismal name Saro. Growing up in a household deeply devoted to the Armenian Church — his parents, Fr. Vertanes Kalayjian and Yn. Anahid, both served faithfully — he was immersed in parish life from his earliest years. "By the time I was 16-17 years old, I was pretty sure I wanted to become a priest," he recalls.

Following college and a short career, he enrolled at St. Nersess Seminary from 2011 to 2014. "My favorite memory during my years at the seminary was Archbishop Yeghishe Gizirian's presence in the chapel and on campus." On July 24, 2016, he was ordained into the holy priesthood by Archbishop Khajag Barsamian at St. Vartan Cathedral in Manhattan. His sponsoring priest was Fr. Vasken Kouzouian, and his brother, Dn. Zaven Kalayjian, served as godfather. It was a special day, as both Fr. Avedis and Fr. Armash Bagdasarian were ordained together.

Fr. Avedis currently serves as pastor of St. Mesrob Armenian Church in Racine, WI. He and his wife, Yn. Karen, have been married for 17 years and are blessed with two children, Aram and Arev.

"My parents were my greatest influences on my path to the seminary."

THE GREATEST CHALLENGE YOU FACE?
Finding a proper medium to communicate with parishioners. Technology made somethings easier, but other things much harder.

FEEL CLOSEST TO FULFILLING YOUR CALLING?
During bible studies and other presentations on church topics.

INFLUENCES ON THE PATH TO THE SEMINARY?
Fr. Vertanes Kalayjian and Yn. Anahid, who lived a life of service to the Armenian Church.

MODELS OR MENTORS IN YOUR MINISTRY?
To some extent I still look to how things were managed by my parents in my home parish to design programming for current parish life.

Fr. Avedis Kalayjian

VITALITY

FR. ARMASH BAGDASARIAN, born in Istanbul and baptized Vahe, began his spiritual journey at the Patriarchate of Constantinople. "I often attended the various services that took place throughout the churches in Istanbul, and I was inspired to pursue the priestly vocation during those years," he recalls. His greatest influence on his path to seminary was Patriarch Mesrob Mutafyan of blessed memory.

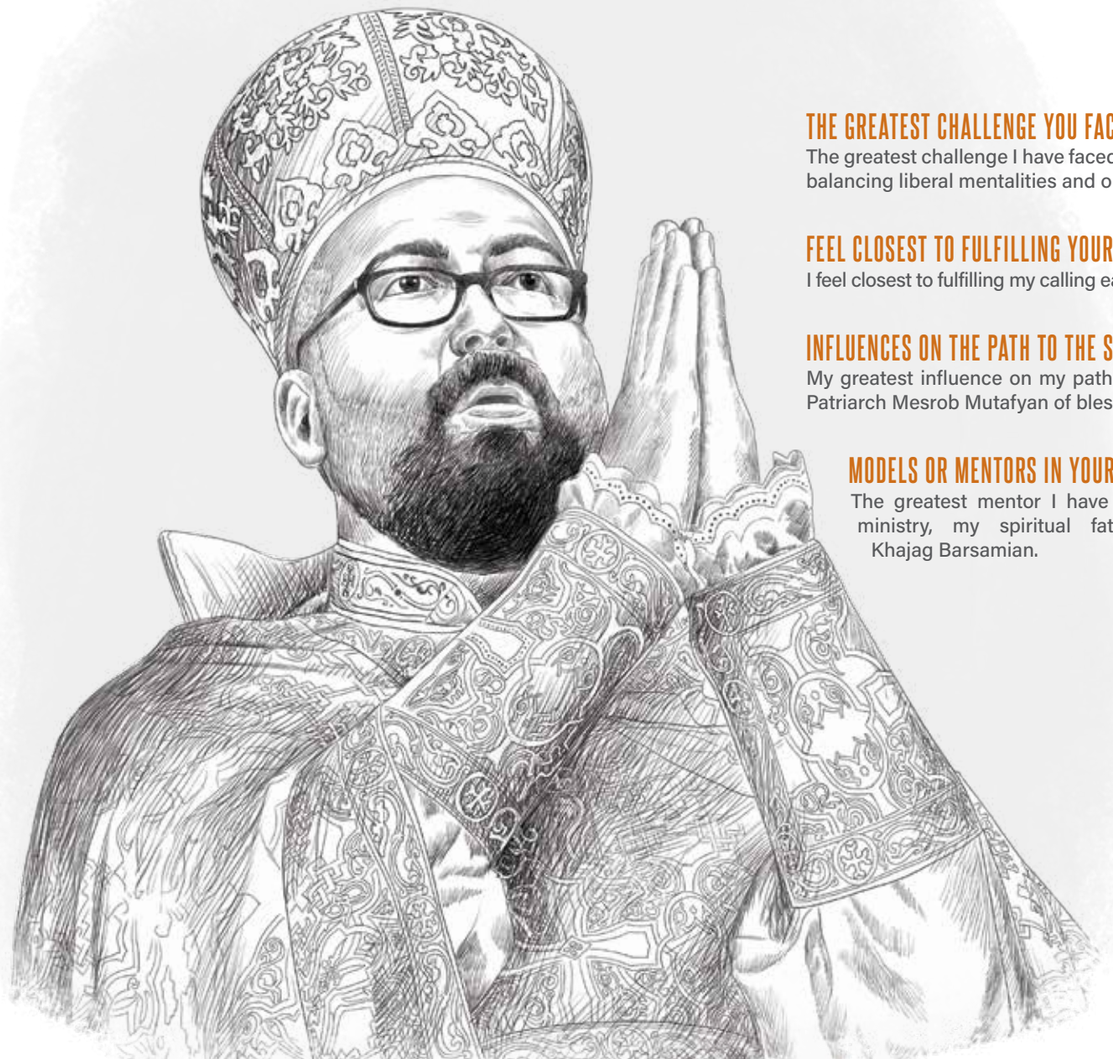
After graduating university, he moved to the United States where he served at Holy Cross Armenian Church in Union City, NJ, while also working as a diamond setter in New York's Diamond District. With the encouragement of Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, he enrolled at St. Nersess Seminary from 2013 to 2015.

On July 24, 2016, Archbishop Barsamian ordained him to the holy priesthood at St. Vartan Cathedral in New York City. His sponsoring priest was Fr. Mardiros Chevian, and his godfather was Mr. Krikor Kucukyan. It was a blessing to be ordained alongside fellow seminary graduate, Fr. Avedis Kalayjian.

Fr. Armash and his wife, Yn. Maran, have been married for 12 years and are blessed with two children, Nathaniel and Nayra. His ministry has taken him to Soorp Haroutiun Armenian Church (Orlando, FL), St. John Armenian Church (Detroit, MI), and now Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church (Wynnewood, PA).

Fr. Armash Bagdasarian

"I feel closest to fulfilling my calling each and every day."



THE GREATEST CHALLENGE YOU FACE?

The greatest challenge I have faced in my vocation is balancing liberal mentalities and our Christian faith.

FEEL CLOSEST TO FULFILLING YOUR CALLING?

I feel closest to fulfilling my calling each and every day.

INFLUENCES ON THE PATH TO THE SEMINARY?

My greatest influence on my path to seminary was Patriarch Mesrob Mutafyan of blessed memory.

MODELS OR MENTORS IN YOUR MINISTRY?

The greatest mentor I have looked to in my ministry, my spiritual father, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian.

HARMONY

"Sing to the Lord, and you will be showered with blessings."

DN. RUBIK MAILIAN was born in Tehran, Iran. As a youth, he first felt the call to serve while singing in church. Music, he realized, was more than expression — it was prayer, communion, and vocation. Through graduate studies in choral music and later seminary, that conviction deepened. When Fr. Arakel Aljalian, then Dean of St. Nersess, invited him to study at the seminary, his path became clear. "I knew then that my vocation was to serve God and His people through music," Dn. Rubik recalls.

He studied at St. Nersess from 1995–1998. Just months before graduation, a providential meeting changed the course of his ministry. Varsenik Apkarian, a member of the St. John Armenian Church Choir in Detroit, invited him to visit and lead a workshop. That encounter became the doorway to his life's work: for the past 27 years, Dn. Rubik has served as Music Minister at St. John, directing the Komitas Choir and nurturing generations of faithful through sacred song.

"I am deeply thankful to have shared in this sacred work, and I pray that the music we sing continues to uplift hearts for generations to come. I am also grateful for my family, my choir members, the clergy, and the church community whose love and support sustain me."

Dn. Rubik and his wife Joyce have been married for 24 years and are blessed with two children, Sevana and Areg.

HOW HAVE YOU FULFILLED YOUR VOCATION?

I have devoted my life to serving the Church as a music minister — conducting the Komitas Choir, teaching and preserving the sacred music of the Armenian Apostolic Church, training new directors, supporting clergy during services, and guiding acolytes, deacons, and altar servers. Sharing the richness of our liturgical tradition with the faithful has been central to my vocation.

THE GREATEST CHALLENGE YOU FACE?

The lack of accessible resources for Armenian Church choir directors. Being largely self-taught in Armenian sacred music and liturgical structure demanded perseverance and creativity. Yet that challenge strengthened me, inspiring me to create and share new resources and to support others facing the same struggles.

FEEL CLOSEST TO FULFILLING YOUR CALLING?

When non-Armenians, who do not understand the language, approach me after Badarak, a wedding, or funeral and say: 'I felt God in the music you performed.' That is when I know this work is holy.

MODELS OR MENTORS IN YOUR MINISTRY?

Komitas Vartabed has been my greatest model — his deep faith, devotion, and mastery of sacred tradition guide my ministry. I have also been blessed by the mentorship of clergy, including Fr. Garabed Kochakian, Fr. Diran Papazian, and Fr. Aren Jebejian, whose encouragement has enriched my journey.

Dn. Rubik Mailian

COMMUNITY

MARIA DERDERIAN was born in Wynnewood, PA. Reflecting on her journey, she shares: "We are all called by God—to use our gifts to serve Him, to actively live out our faith, and to share that with others."

Her path to lay ministry was shaped by early involvement in the Armenian Church. Beginning with ACYOA Juniors and continuing through roles as a Summer Conference and St. Vartan Camp staff member, ACYOA Central Council member, and service trips to Armenia, Maria discovered both a calling and the encouragement of others who recognized her potential.

These experiences inspired her to pursue further study at St. Nersess Seminary, where she enrolled from 2005–2007, almost a decade after her first encounter with the seminary at a High School Summer Conference in 1997.

"St. Nersess gave me the space and the tools to see that I had a role in the ministry of our Church and Diocese," she recalls. After contributing on a Diocesan level, today Maria serves as Youth Minister at St. James Armenian Church in Watertown, MA. "Now as a Youth Minister, I try to help young people have the same meaningful experiences in the Church that I did, and to help them see themselves as God sees them, in a world that often tries to tell them they are not enough."

"I feel that there is a great need for more lay people to serve and contribute to the Church. St. Nersess is a place where that seed can be planted."

THE GREATEST CHALLENGE YOU FACE?

Taking a break! In ministry, there is always more work to do, more people to reach, more connections to make. Another challenge has been shifting the narrative that young people are losing faith. I don't believe that is the case. Numbers are useful, but real ministry happens one-on-one and in smaller groups. We may not always see the results right away, but the seeds we plant are in God's hands.

FEEL CLOSEST TO FULFILLING YOUR CALLING?

The most special moments are often the casual conversations when youth stop into my office to talk about life — school, friendships, challenges—and often about faith. I also feel it deeply during retreats, programs, or services when young people are engaged and witnessing their faith with one another.

MODELS OR MENTORS IN YOUR MINISTRY?

My first model was my own family, whose involvement in the Church first introduced me to St. Nersess. Over the years, I've been blessed with mentors among clergy and lay leaders whose dedication and unique gifts inspired me to continue my journey. I have also been greatly influenced by our Church 'elders'—bishops and senior clergy whose wisdom and quiet leadership left a lasting example.

FINAL THOUGHTS TO SHARE?

St. Nersess has had a great impact on my life. I am grateful to God for the opportunities He has given me and for the time I spent there. I feel there is a great need for more laypeople to serve and contribute to the Church. St. Nersess is a place where that seed can be planted.

Maria Derderian

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Heartfelt Congratulations to all the honorees and my brothers in Christ. May your light shine ever brighter, illuminating the path of faith and love for all around you

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Established in 2015 by Dr. Lucy Balian Rorke-Adams

For Dr. Lucy Balian Rorke-Adams, making a planned gift to St. Nersess Armenian Seminary was both an expression of gratitude to God for her many blessings and a way to make a lasting investment in the future of the Armenian Church. "I have had a good life and want to repay God and give back to the Armenian Church," shares Dr. Rorke-Adams.

Planned gifts may include bequests through wills or trusts, life insurance, appreciated securities, or retirement plan beneficiary designations.

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Lynn Pinajian Beylerian
Co-Chair

With the valuable assistance of staff members
Dn. Levon Altiparmakian
Dottie Bengoian
Robin Perlmutter
Donna Barsamian Sirounian

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ST. NERSESS ARMENIAN SEMINARY

486 BEDFORD ROAD, ARMONK, NEW YORK 10504
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