

The Journey to Ordination

By Alice Argnian and Ardis Gregory

Five years ago, the *Torchbearer* staff wrote an article about the St. John Armenian Church (SJAC) Acolyte Training Program under the direction of Fr. Aren Jebejian and assisted by Fr. Armash Bagdasarian and Deacon Rubik Mailian. At that time, the *Torchbearer* staff attended several classes and observed the thirteen acolytes in training to provide insight to our readers and potentially attract more participation in this important program. (See *Torchbearer*, June 26, 2022 edition.)

Most recently, on May 31, 2026, his Grace Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan was celebrant during Badarak and ordained two sub-deacons and five acolytes to serve at the Lord's Altar. Several of the acolytes had trained for more than five years at an early age while others moved on to pursue higher education at university or college.

The five newly ordained acolytes are Alex Koceyan, Bakrad Khasroof, Michael Togmajyan, Diran Rasho, and Noah Matoian. They have completed their training and demonstrated those proficiencies required to assist the celebrant and deacons during Badarak. Vartan Ohanesian and Thomas Omartian were elevated to the level of sub-deacon.

The journey from acolyte to sub-deacon requires a deep sense of responsibility, teamwork and active participation with the understanding that they will be performing their many duties in front of the SJAC parishioners. Parental support is crucial and involves coordinating schedules and supporting their child through positive reinforcement. Acolyte training prepares them to assist clergy with candle lighting, carrying and extinguishing, carrying the cross during the processional entrance, preparing and wearing their vestments, and progressing to the level of sub-deacon.

During recent interviews with some of the newly ordained altar servers they shared their thoughts and feelings about this very important journey and how they got there.

Sub-Deacon Thomas Omartian

Seventeen-year-old Thomas Omartian is the son of Dr. Thomas Omartian and Reverend Charity Omartian. His journey began in 2019 and befittingly on Holy Thursday, when he and his father joined the SJAC Acolyte Training Program. What began as parental encouragement grew into Thomas's own love and faith in God and the Church. Five years later in 2024 he was ordained as acolyte or *tbir*. That year he was fortunate to visit Armenia and Holy Etchmiadzin which further deepened his spiritual life and commitment to the church.

Acolyte training included learning ritual movements, chants and litanies as well as studying the Armenian language, a challenge he embraced wholeheartedly. Although he did not grow up speaking Armenian Thomas remains determined to "keep on learning" regardless of how hard the language may be.

Thomas is grateful for all the support and guidance from Hayr Soorp Aren Jebejian, Der Armash Bagdasarian, Der Garabed Kochakian, Deacon Rubik Mailian, Deacon Onnig Boyajian, and Deacon George Boyajian. He also thanks everyone at St. John Armenian Church which he describes as, "a place of stability, growth, and hope."

Sub-Deacon Vartan Ohanesian

Twenty-six-year-old Vartan Ohanesian is a student at Henry Ford College where he is studying Psychology. He is the son of Der Abraham Ohanesian and Yeretzgin Shakeh Ohanesian. Growing up in a pastoral family, serving on the altar came naturally to him. Vartan had also served on the holy altar periodically while attending high school and after the COVID epidemic he felt a calling to serve more regularly and focusing on becoming a sub-deacon became more important to him.

Mastering the Armenian language was one of his greatest challenges. Vartan credits his father, Der Abraham and Deacon George for dedicating time to help him reach this milestone. Today, Vartan loves serving on the altar and hopes he is an example for future generations of acolytes.

Acolyte Noah Matoian

Fourteen-year-old Noah Matoian is the son of Nicole Matoian and one of the newly ordained acolytes. He will begin attending Bloomfield Hills High School this fall. Learning the Armenian liturgical hymns, ritual movements and using the censer came naturally for Noah. As he explains, "Once I became more comfortable with the people and duties everything was just a breeze."

Acolyte Diran Rasho

Diran Rasho is a ninth grader at the AGBU Alex and Marie Manoogian School and is the son of Diyar and Maral Rasho. He has worked diligently to learn how to chant in Armenian. "Over time I have learned how to do the many chants and have become more capable and confident." He has also disciplined himself to learn the Armenian language to better serve the church. He feels more confident since attending Armenian School.

Many people have played a role in Diran's journey. He is thankful to his parents for bringing him to church and to what he learned in the acolyte practice sessions. Diran also states, "Father Aren helped me a lot to develop my skills along the way. Deacon Rubik has also led me on this journey and taught me how to use the candles and incense."

Acolyte Bakrad Khasroof

Twenty-year-old Bakrad Khasroof is the son of Sogheek and Linda Bakrad. He was born in Zakho, Iraq, is currently attending Oakland Community College and hopes to pursue a degree in Business and Accounting.

Bakrad credits Hayr Soorp Aren as the driving force behind him pursuing his role in the Church. As he beautifully states, "The person that drew me to becoming an acolyte is without a doubt Hayr Aren. His commitment to the church and serving God really inspired me to do the same."

The most challenging part of this journey was learning the Armenian language. Through persistence and love for the church Bakrad achieved his goal. He was even

surprised himself at how much he has been able to learn through the direction of Hayr Aren and Deacon Rubik. "They welcomed me with open arms and made me feel comfortable." Bakrad encourages others to follow their calling. "So, if you have a spark or are willing to put forth the effort to come up and serve the Lord, we will gladly welcome you."

All the young men who were recently elevated and ordained in our church share many common values. They did not achieve their positions alone. It took a "village" to support them. We are proud and feel blessed that they have chosen this path to follow. Many doubted themselves but they persevered with the help of parents, clergy, deacons and above all, they kept their connection with God. These young men now serve the Lord with humility and grace.

Congratulations to them and their families.

Next time you see them after church service, take a moment to say, hello and thank you.