

Four Students from Jerusalem's Sts. Tarkmanchatz School Visit St. Nersess Seminary

Now, in its eleventh thriving year, an innovative program that brings young Armenian students from Jerusalem's Sts. Tarkmanchatz School to a summer program at St. Nersess Seminary, gave the unique opportunity to four young Armenians this year. For the first time, the number of students chosen was increased from two to four.



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Started eleven years ago by the Rev. Fr. Mardiros Chevian, Dean of St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, this innovative project has come to fruition through the contributions of generous donors. This year's major benefactors were Russell and Susan Kashian (Wis.). Additional benefactors included Gregory and Meline Toufayan (N.J.), Keith and Karyn Bilezerian (Mass.), Steven and Karen Nargizian (N.J.), Glenn and Kristin Dabaghian (N.J.), and Joseph and Kristine Casali (N.J.).

The goal of this coveted program has been for exceptional Sts. Tarkmanchatz students to come to the United States. In doing so, they have the invaluable opportunity to interact with their Armenian-American peers, to learn from each other, to strengthen their Christian faith, and to explore the special experiences of New York and its environs.

A day after they arrived in New York from Jerusalem, I met this year's four students which included 17-year-olds Sarin Gejehoushian, Armine Mirzoyan, Shoghig Shahanian, and 18 year-old Nadia Abu Ata—all born in Jerusalem. With obvious enthusiasm, they said that they looked forward to meeting, interacting, and learning with their fellow Armenian peers, and visiting the iconic centers of New York City and the metropolitan area.

True Ungeroutiune

"Jerusalem is home. The convent has always protected us," they said almost in unison, reminiscing about their life at the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and at Sts. Tarkmanchatz Armenian School, a special institution renowned for top level education, small classes and personal concern.

"The Vank is a happy, safe place. Everyone knows each other," related Sarin, and Sts. Tarkmanchatz is our second home. From the very first day when my family took me, the school gave me life, culture, caring. I should be lost without it. It is a place of true *ungeroutiune* (friendship)," she declared emotionally, with the other three students nodding in agreement.

The teachers "are like family," chimed in Armine. "They ask us about our problems, our condition, how to help us," she said, pointing out one particular teacher who taught Arabic, and who recently passed away. Remembrances of her brought the four young ladies to several minutes of sobbing.

Armine whose father first came to Jerusalem to renovate the St. James Armenian Cathedral, called her teachers and classmates as "more than a family. Together, we are a big, happy family." They all voiced special praise for the principle of Sts. Tarkmanchatz, the Very Rev. Fr. Norayr Kazazian who has installed many renovations and instituted new programs in the school.

Armine who plans to study linguistics at university, has spent all her summers in Armenia, and "would love to live in Armenia. After all," she said proudly, "our roots are there."

Shoghig whose father, she revealed "is the Patriarch's right hand", said that Jerusalem has been "my home since kindergarten. All the students there are my brothers and sisters." She plans to study art at university either in Jerusalem, or in Armenia which she has visited twice.

A True Education

Nadia who is of Armenian and Palestinian background, before coming to Sts. Tarkmanchatz, had attended a Catholic school with more than 30 in a class. She came to Sts. Tarkmanchatz three years ago where "they genuinely care about raising a generation, with the special goal of making each student a good person. The school really embodies what a true education should be."

Without hesitation, Nadia stated, "I truly love Sts. Tarkmanchatz!" She is interested in furthering her education, either in the fields of science, technology, or mathematics, and making her home in the holy land.

All four students expressed their unbridled enthusiasm for their special ten-day learning and living experiences with their Armenian-American peers and instructors at St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, and in New York City, and New Haven, Conn.

Father Mardiros Chevian commented, "This year was especially gratifying to host four students from the Sts. Tarkmanchatz Armenian School of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem and to have all of them participate in the high school summer conference with enthusiasm. I am grateful to all of the donors who have supported, and continue to support, this great endeavor. Their attendance was also supported this year by Canon Nicholas Porter and the Jerusalem Peacebuilders organization of New Haven, where they attended a ten-day, interfaith service-learning program."