

Nazirian, Manoug Ohannes (1928–2012)

SYLVIA MANOUG NAZIRIAN KIRAZ

Sylvia Manoug Nazirian Kiraz holds an Associate of Arts degree in Office Administration, and is a full time registrar's assistant at Middle East University, Lebanon. Born in Beirut, Lebanon, Sylvia is the oldest of four daughters born to Pastor and Mrs. Manouk and Sella Nazirian. She is married to Raymond Roupen Kiraz, and they have one son. Sylvia loves to travel, cook, entertain, read, and play the piano. She speaks Armenian, English, Arabic, and Farsi.

Manoug O. Nazirian was a pastor, a missionary, a leading evangelist, a church administrator in various capacities, an educator, an author, and a college president in the Middle East Union.

Early Life and Family

Manoug O. Nazirian was born on February 21, 1928,¹ in Jounieh, Lebanon. His parents, Ohannes and Victoria Nazirian, were Armenian immigrants from the region of Hadjin, Turkey. Manoug was born and raised in an Armenian Orthodox family and was the second-born child. He had three brothers, Guiragos, Dikran, Yeprem, and two sisters, Ogenie and Araxi.²

In 1938, a six-grade church school was opened in the district of Khalil Badawi in Beirut, Lebanon.³ The school was founded by Miss Yebraxy Gomig,⁴ an Armenian Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) woman born in Turkey. She was a dedicated, competent, and spiritual school teacher and principal. Nazirian's neighbor, Mrs. Haygouhie Maksoudian, was a member of the Armenian Seventh-day Adventist Church, and she helped him to attend the Armenian Adventist School in Khalil Badawi. Years later, she became Nazirian's mother-in-law when he married her daughter, Sella Maksoudian. Manoug and Sella had been classmates since the fourth grade, and they continued their Christian education together.

In the church school, Nazirian was exposed to the Adventist message. The truth of the soon-coming of Jesus captivated his soul, and he wanted to make sure he was ready. In 1942, at the age of 14, Nazirian was baptized in the Mouseitbeh Seventh-day Adventist Church by Elder Shukry Nowfel, the first Arabic-speaking, Lebanese ordained minister.⁵ Following baptism, Nazirian felt a strong urge to be a gospel minister.

During his teenage years, soccer was Nazirian's favorite game. He joined one of the first category (major) soccer teams in Lebanon and was the center forward of his team. A key player in scoring goals, he participated in many tournaments, leading his team to victory. Manoug became one of the most popular and admired players in Lebanon. People knew that he was a Sabbath-keeping Christian because he refused to play soccer on the Sabbath.

Education and Marriage

After completing high school at the Adventist College of Beirut, Nazirian was unable to continue his education due to financial reasons and rejoined his former soccer team. Nazirian soon became dissatisfied with his growing fame and decided to give up soccer in order to pursue his dream of becoming a minister of the gospel. The sponsors of the soccer team strongly urged him to change his mind by offering to provide him free education through the doctoral level if he remained with the team. However, Nazirian remained firm in his decision to attend the Adventist-operated Middle East College even though he had no financial means to cover his expenses.

Before this time, the Middle East Union Mission, in collaboration with the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, decided to move the Adventist College of Beirut from Beit Meri, Lebanon, to its new site on the



Manouk O. Nazirian

Photo taken from <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/colton-ca/manouk-nazirian-5206209>, accessed September 25, 2019.

picturesque hill of today's Sabtiyeh.⁶ Construction of college buildings began immediately. Nazirian requested to work at the new college site, hoping to earn enough money for college registration for the coming fall quarter. He was hired and worked all that summer. In September 1946, he was accepted as a regular student at the newly named Middle East College (MEC).

Nazirian was present when the foundations of MEC were laid. Throughout his college years, Nazirian was able to pay for his education by doing manual work, often under adverse circumstances. He dug and hauled heavy stones in a wheelbarrow and helped build campus sidewalks. Later, he served as assistant dean of men under Elder James Russell, who was the dean of men.

Nazirian's college years were one of the most rewarding periods in his life. Although the college had limited facilities, he lived in a warm Christian atmosphere where he was instructed and guided by spiritual, caring, and competent faculty. Here Nazirian became acquainted with many Adventist young people who later became workers and leaders for the church. He enjoyed singing in the college choir as well as providing solos for church services and special occasions. Nazirian was the number one athlete of the college, placing first in the running events as well as the long jump and pole vault. At MEC, he received a solid, holistic education that equipped him for his life work.

Before Nazirian graduated, he received a call from the Iran Field to work in Iran. He graduated on Sunday, May 28, 1950,⁷ with a B.A. in religion and a minor in history. Dr. Frederick Harder, MEC president, not only conferred the degree but also performed the wedding for Manoug and his childhood classmate, Sella Maksoudian, on the same day just three hours after the graduation ceremony.

Sella Levon Maksoudian was born in Khalil Badawi, Lebanon, on February 15, 1927, and was the first child of Levon (d. 1953), who was a skilled shoemaker, and Haigouhie Maksoudian (d. July 17, 1987), who was a housewife. Her childhood years were spent in Khalil Badawi attending the Khalil Badawi Armenian Adventist School and being involved in church activities. At age 15, Sella accepted Jesus Christ and continued her education at the Adventist College of Beirut, in Beit Meri, Lebanon. In 1949, she accepted the invitation "to continue her education at Middle East College."⁸

Sella later served as the principal of the Armenian Adventist School in Bourj-Hammoud for 35 years and, at the same time, was a competent math teacher.

Ministry

On Monday, May 29, 1950, the day after their wedding, Manoug and Sella, along with two other missionaries, Robert L. Mole and Grover C. Winslow Jr., both college workers, began their journey by car to Iran. They stopped in Baghdad, Iraq, for a short visit and were entertained by fellow church believers.

Nazirian's first place of labor in Iran was Julfa, Isfahan, where there was a vibrant church under the leadership of Pastor Daniel Kubrock and a local Iranian-Armenian church member, Senior Sarafian. Nazirian itinerated with Elder Kubrock and succeeded him as pastor of the Julfa Church. He spent two years, from 1950 to 1952, in Iran and was greatly blessed by the association and fellowship with the Iranian-Armenian church members. He encouraged the young people to attend Middle East College just as he had done. Abruptly, however, the Iranian government ordered all non-Iranians to leave Iran, so Manoug and Sella returned to Lebanon, where he was appointed pastor of the Armenian Seventh-day Adventist Church in Khalil Badawi in 1952.⁹ In 1958, a new lot was bought in Bourj Hammoud, east of Beirut, for the Armenian Seventh-day Adventist Church. He continued as pastor of the new church, named Bourj-Hammoud Evangelistic Center, until 1966.¹⁰

In 1953, Nazirian was ordained to the gospel ministry at Middle East College.¹¹ Elder R. H. Hartwell led out in the ordination service. Nazirian received extensive evangelistic training at Middle East College by Roy Anderson, Andrew Fearing, and Walter Schubert, who were some of the leading SDA evangelists associated with the General Conference.¹² Through the years, Nazirian held many evangelistic efforts in the Bourj-Hammoud Evangelistic Center, where on January 10, 1965, he drew "what may be the largest evangelistic audiences for Adventists in the Middle East."¹³ He also conducted evangelistic efforts in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Armenia, Cyprus, Syria, Jordan, Kuwait, Sudan, and Georgia. As a result, a significant number of souls joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Nazirian had the privilege of serving on various field, union, and division committees for 40 years, including twice serving on the General Conference Nominating Committee.

While engaged with all these efforts, Nazirian was furthering his education at Andrews University. He graduated with a master of arts degree in applied theology in 1967.¹⁴

In 1966, Nazirian was appointed as Middle East Division Youth and Lay Activities director, a position held until 1970. He conducted many summer junior camps in Lebanon and led out in investiture services in which hundreds of young people received Missionary Volunteers (M.V.) insignia. He himself was a Master Guide. On August 7, 1969, Nazirian went to Libya to help organize and train in what came to be known as the "Historic Camp." Never before had a Junior Camp been held in Libya.¹⁵

As a result of the Arab-Israeli war in 1967, thousands of Arab refugees entered Lebanon. With the help of the Palestinian workers, Nazirian and fellow church workers set up two campsites, one in the Jordan Valley and the other at Jerash.¹⁶ This act of kindness built a bridge of friendship between the Adventist Church and the Palestinian refugees and provided opportunities to share the gospel truth with them.

In 1970, The Afro-Mideast Division was organized, and the Middle East Union became a constituent part of it!¹⁷

Under the newly organized division, Nazirian, appointed as the Middle East Union secretary, initiated and implemented three important projects:

1. Organizing a special evangelistic team of expatriate and national workers to develop and to implement an outreach program geared toward non-Christian communities.
2. Reopening of the gospel work in Sudan.¹⁸
3. Establishing of a food factory (Adventist Health Education Foundation) in Cairo, Egypt.¹⁹

In 1976, Nazirian was appointed as the first national president for the Middle East Union,²⁰ and he continued to serve in this capacity until 1982.²¹ During the early years of the civil war in Lebanon (1978), there were plans to close Middle East College and transfer it to Africa.²² Nazirian did not support this plan and was instrumental in keeping MEC in Lebanon.

Later Life

In 1984 Nazirian joined the faculty at Middle East College as an assistant professor in the Religion department. From 1990 to 1993 he was president of MEC.²³ Nazirian retired in 1993 after 43 years of service for the church. In 1995, he immigrated to the United States of America and resided in Loma Linda, California, until his death on August 15, 2012.

Contribution/Legacy

Pastor Nazirian's life had an evident impact on the lives of many, especially the youth. He is remembered as a man of prayer; an inspiring, guiding, steadfast leader and preacher motivated by his love for Christ; and for his passion for winning souls and his lifetime commitment to the church work in the Middle East. His family and friends remember him as a talented artist who left behind many paintings based on scenes from biblical locations.

Throughout the years of his service, many have been inspired by the life and sermons of Pastor Nazirian. His book, *The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Lebanon 1897–1997*, is a major source for researchers on the Adventist mission in Lebanon and the Middle East.

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NOTES

1. Although the personal service record (Middle East and North Africa Union Mission archives, Metn, Lebanon) recorded his birth year as October 1927 and the Lebanese Government ID as 1928 (without mentioning month nor date), Manoug was actually born on February 21, 1928, as reported by his immediate family.?
2. Unless otherwise stated, this article is based on Sylvia Nazirian Kiraz's personal knowledge of her father and that of her sisters, Christina Nazirian Khatchatourian, Sossi Nazirian Kevorkian, and Nora Nazirian Elalloway. Interviews were also conducted with Manoug Nazirian before he passed away.?
3. Manoug. H. Nazirian, *The Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Lebanon, 1897–1997* (Beirut, Lebanon: The East Mediterranean Field of Seventh-day Adventists, 1999), 26.?
4. Most probably, she's the daughter of Antronick Gomig, the first Adventist convert in Turkey. See Francis D. Nichol, "In the Footsteps of the Apostles John and Paul," *ARH*, April 20, 1950, 1.?
5. W. K. Ising, "From Our Lebanon Summer School," *ARH*, December 25, 1930, 21.?
6. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996), s.v. "Middle East College."?
7. Manoug Nazirian personal service record, (Middle East and North Africa Union Mission archives, Metn, Lebanon).?
8. "Around and About Our Schools," *Middle East Messenger*, August–September 1949, 2.?
9. Nazirian, *Adventist Church in Lebanon*, 26–28.?
10. *Ibid.*?
11. Manoug Nazirian personal service record, (Middle East and North Africa Union Mission archives, Metn, Lebanon).?
12. "In Brief," *ARH*, February 18, 1960, 24.?
13. "From Here and There," *Middle East Messenger* 14, no. 1 (January–February 1965): 5–6.?
14. Manoug Nazirian personal service record, (Middle East and North Africa Union Mission archives, Metn, Lebanon).?
15. Jon Green, "Historic Camp in Libya," *Middle East Messenger* 18, no. 4 (August–October 1969): 8.?
16. Chafic Srour, "Check List for War Relief!," *Middle East Messenger* 16, no. 4 (May–June/July–August 1967): 6–7; "Jordan War Relief Cargo Here; Orphanage Plan Approved," *Middle East Messenger*, September–October 1967, 1; Manoug Nazirian, "Adventists Aid Middle East Refugees," *ARH*, November 23, 1967, 16.?
17. "Afro-Mideast Division," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1971), 97.?
18. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996), s.v. "Sudan"; Charles D. Watson, "Report of the Afro-Mideast Division, Presented Thursday, April 24, 1980," *ARH*, May 1, 1980, 15.?
19. The facts presented were based on personal knowledge and interviews by Ranya Maher with Mokhtar Nashed, the current manager of the Adventist Health Education Foundation.?
20. "In Brief," *ARH*, December 23, 1976, 24.?
21. Watson, "Report of the Afro-Mideast Division," 13; Manoug Nazirian personal service record, (Middle East and North Africa Union Mission archives, Metn, Lebanon).?
22. Violet Wentland, *On the Edge of the Battlefield: A College Struggles in War-Torn Lebanon* (Enumclaw, WA: WinePress, 2012), 180, 232–33, 301; Watson, "Report of the Afro-Mideast Division," 15.?
23. Manoug Nazirian personal service record, (Middle East and North Africa Union Mission archives, Metn, Lebanon).?