



HISTORY OF THE CATHEDRAL

FROM A SMALL 19TH-CENTURY CHAPEL TO A
REMARKABLE PLACE OF WORSHIP AND GATHERING
ERECTED IN THE HEART OF BEIRUT DOWNTOWN

SAINT GREGORY THE ILLUMINATOR AND
SAINT ELIAS ARMENIAN CATHOLIC
CATHEDRAL

● 1860-1952

THE SMALL FAMILY CHAPEL OF THE KHOUKAZ FAMILY

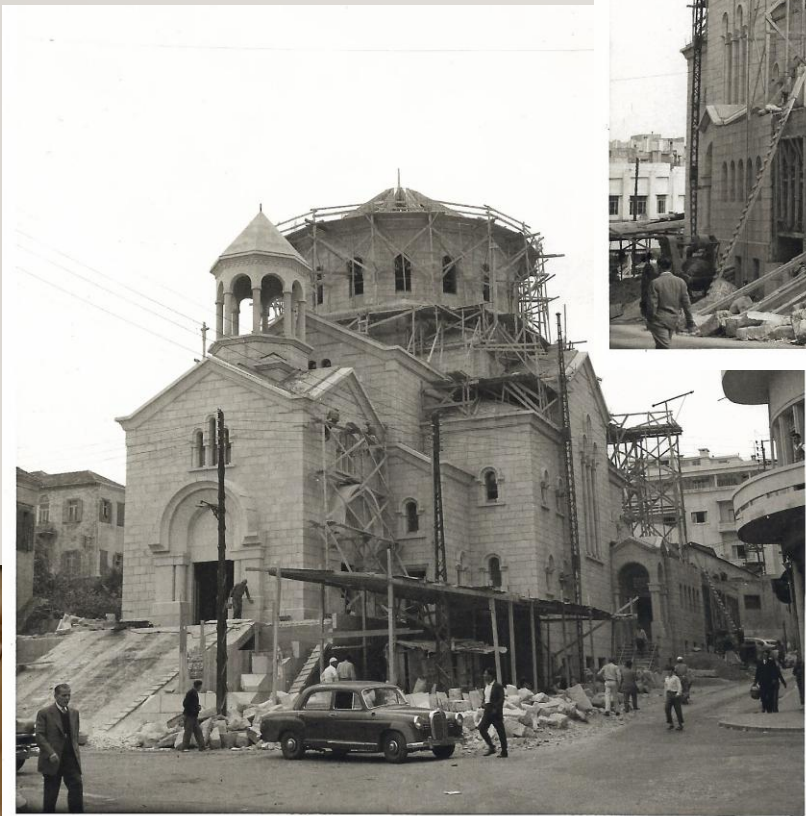
- In the mid-19th century, the Armenian community gradually organized itself around the small chapel belonging to the Khoukaz family. Many parishioners worked and/or lived in the vicinity of the small chapel in downtown Beirut.
- The Khoukaz chapel, almost a hundred years old, was in constant need of repair and was no longer large enough to accommodate the many parishioners.
- It was imperative to replace the small family religious building with a place of worship that could bring together a growing community and occupy a more prominent place in downtown Beirut.



● 1952-1959

REPLACE THE CHAPEL WITH A LARGER PLACE OF WORSHIP

- Patriarch Agagianian (1895-1971) tasked a committee with proposing this transition, and the Khoukaz family donated the land. Pascal Paboudjian's plans were approved in 1952.
- The small church was demolished and construction began: the first stone was laid four years later, in 1956.
- Imagine this construction site in the middle of the downtown: the arrival of materials, the noise of the workers, the carpenters, the stonemasons and so many others.
- All these people worked side by side, in the shade of the wooden scaffolding, under the direction of engineers Paboudjian and Khoukaz.



INAUGURATION OF THE CATHEDRAL

- This major architectural project took more than seven years to complete, using 1950s techniques (stones were cut on site using chisels) in the bustling, turbulent downtown of Beirut undergoing rapid change.
- Another sign of 1950s modernity is the majestic white cathedral, which also houses reception rooms and a theatre.
- The result is exceptional, with the typically Armenian architecture enhanced by the choice of luminous white stone. The Cathedral stands out for its traditional, timeless and unique character, built to shine in the heart of the capital and serve its parishioners.
- In 1959, without waiting for the work to be completed, Patriarch Agagianian decided to inaugurate the Cathedral with great pomp and ceremony, in the presence of the President of the Republic, General Fouad Chehab, and all the influential civil and religious figures of the country.





1959-1975

FEASTING AT THE CATHEDRAL



- During Lebanon's golden age of prosperity in the 1970s, St. Gregory the Illuminator and St. Elias Cathedral, located in the heart of downtown Beirut, hosted major community and cultural events.
- Its architecture already stood out in a capital city turning towards modernity and innovation in its urban planning.

● 1975-1991

THE CATHEDRAL MIRACULOUSLY INTACT AND PRESERVED DURING WARTIME

- The civil war from 1975 to 1991 raged for more than 16 years and divided the capital into two sectors. The dividing line, called 'the green line' because of the wild grasses that grew there, ran alongside the Cathedral. Successive priests sought to protect it in the midst of the battlefields, while trying to maintain contact with their parishioners, who were forced to move to areas far from the city or abroad.
- While the immediate surroundings of the Cathedral and downtown Beirut in general suffered massive destruction, miraculously, the Cathedral managed to survive the decades of civil war relatively intact.
- At the same time, the Armenian community managed to survive by maintaining positive and neutral ties with the various warring parties throughout the stages of the conflict.



1992-2020

THE CATHEDRAL REVIVED AND IN FULL SOLIDARITY WITH THE LEBANESE PEOPLE

- **From 1992**, when the civil war ended, restoration work was undertaken to repair the cathedral and make it fit for worship once again. This period of peace saw a revival of parish and cultural life around the cathedral.
- **In 2005**, with the popular movements of 14 February and 14 March, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators gathered in the large public spaces of downtown to demand an independent, autonomous and just Lebanon. Several dozen of them found refuge in the cathedral. The cathedral also made its rooms available to a Lebanese Red Cross first aid center, thanks to the various parish priests who succeeded one another.
- **In 2006**, thousands of tents were set up in downtown for several months. The streets were blocked and cordoned off. Shops, restaurants and private buildings closed their shutters. The Cathedral, however, kept its doors open and remained welcoming and attentive to the people, thanks to the priests who were always present and who, at the same time, secured the premises.
- **In 2019**, the Cathedral continued to show solidarity during the major demonstrations in November 2019 calling for a new government free from clientelism and at the service of its citizens.
- **On August 4, 2020**, the Cathedral witnessed one of the worst tragedies ever to hit the capital: the pseudo-atomic explosion in the port of Beirut devastated the city center and suburbs, killing hundreds and injuring thousands of innocent people. Faced with the gravity of the situation, the Cathedral mobilized, despite its doors and windows being blown out and its glass and furniture shattered. The priority was elsewhere: those affected had to be rescued. The walls could wait until the emergency was over before being repaired.

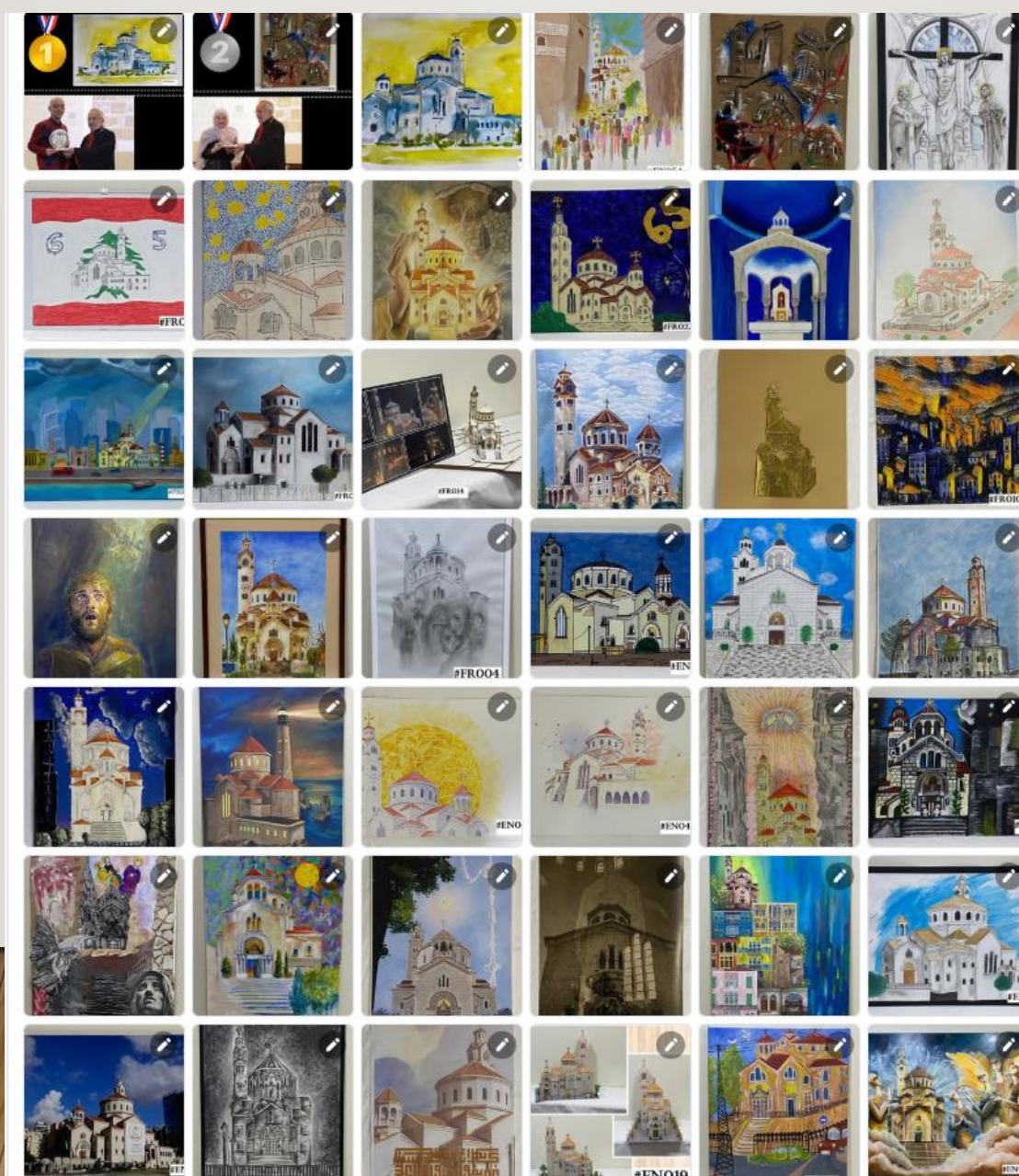
Nowadays

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS OUTREACH

With the aim of sharing and opening up to all Lebanese citizens and foreigners, the Cathedral has organized, and continues to organize, various cultural events that touch and captivate the public.

In addition to religious and pastoral events, the multipurpose rooms, theatre and church host classical and modern music concerts, exhibitions, competitions, comedies, conferences and round tables.

These activities highlight talents and cover societal issues that change mindsets, such as the modern history of Lebanon, its great men, and that of the Armenians of Lebanon and the region.





2024-2025

THE CATHEDRAL CELEBRATES ITS 65TH ANNIVERSARY



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كاتدرائية الأرمن الكاثوليك
القديسين غريغوريوس المنور والياس النبي
CATHEDRALE ARMENIENNE CATHOLIQUE
ST. GREGOIRE L'ILLUMINATEUR - ST. ELIE

- In **2024**, events were organized around the theme of the Cathedral's 65th anniversary.
- The Cathedral was also included in the official list of religious sites in Lebanon for tourism purposes.
- In **September 2024**, the Cathedral welcomed the remains of Cardinal Agagianian, who died in Rome in 1971, miraculously preserved intact.
- The year **2025** was marked by 'Peace and Justice', Cardinal Agagianian's patriarchal motto.





THE TREASURES OF THE CATHEDRAL

MOSAICS AND PAINTINGS

- The mosaic on the central altar, depicting the risen Jesus on a gold background, surrounded by St Gregory the Illuminator and St Elijah the Prophet, designed by Ariel Adjémian and executed by the Italian mosaicist Berlendis.
- The mosaic in the two chapels adjacent to the central altar, one dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the other to St Joseph.
- The exterior mosaic above the various entrance doors, the one on the right depicting St Gregory and the one on the left depicting St Elijah.
- The mosaic of the four evangelists on the central dome.





THE TREASURES OF THE CATHEDRAL

SCULPTURES AND RELICS

- The bronze bust of the cathedral's founder: Cardinal Patriarch Agagianian. It has been placed at the entrance on the left since 1996, the centenary of his birth.
- The relic of St Gregory the Illuminator, donated by Pope John Paul II in 2001, above the central altar.
- One of the few authentic copies of the Holy Shroud, which touched the original, placed since 2010 to the right of the entrance.





THE TREASURES OF THE CATHEDRAL

CARDINAL AGAGIANIAN CHAPEL

The chapel where Cardinal Agagianian (1895–1971) is laid to rest, whose mosaic was created by Father Elie Sader and donated by parishioners in honor of the return of the Cardinal Patriarch's remains to Lebanon in September 2024. His remains have remained miraculously intact since 1971.

