

AMAA NEWS

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Mrs. Lucy Janjigian of Franklin Lakes, NJ, AMAA's short-term volunteer missionary, directed the Art & Crafts Programs of the AMAA sponsored Summer Camps in Armenia and Karabagh (See related story on pages 10-11).

Touching the Lives of Armenian Children

by Lucy Janjigian

"The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few," said Jesus in Mathew 9.38. These were the words quoted by the late Karekin I, Catholicos of All Armenians, in Echmiadzin four years ago, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Armenian Evangelical Church.

I can still hear these words reverberating and realize them to be as relevant as ever for our motherland.

After 70 years of communism, when the end justified the means, our people and land have finally been liberated. Since independence eight years ago, our people have been experiencing growing pains. This is the period when we need to educate the new generation in Christian morals and principles.

During communism, the people of Armenia had tribulations with security. Now, the independence and freedom of democracy has come with a heavy socio-economic price. We Armenians have the faith that with God's help, productive financial investments, proper education, prudent decisions and hard honest work, we shall overcome these challenges.

The place to start is with educating the new generation. With this premise in mind, I have volunteered for four to six weeks during each of the past three summers to work with the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) Summer Camps and Daily Vacation Bible Schools as Craft Coordinator.

AMAA Armenia Summer 1999 activities for children and youth were held from mid-June to end-August at various locations in Armenia, Karabagh, and Georgia. Over 7,500 children (8-12 years old) and youth (13-16 years old) participated in four summer camps, seven day-camps and 31 Vacation Bible Schools to hear God's Word, enjoy Christian fellowship, play, and have fun.

Most of the children come from very poor families, and many have little or no biblical knowledge. They come neatly dressed, with minimal change of clothing, usually carried in a small plastic bag. Many come in shoes without soles or without tops.

The 150 camp workers and counselors are dedicated and trained at the *Camp Leaders' Conference* preceding the children's camps.

These include older adolescents who in the past have attended these camps as children and are now assisting in the camps as trainees.

At camp, each counselor is assigned to a team of ten children. The team does most of its daily activities together, under the direct supervision of the counselor. The daily activities included morning devotions, exercises, worship service (songs, dramas, prayers), Bible lessons, afternoon games, Arts and Crafts activities, and evening variety programs (talent shows, music, games, and dramas ? the children love being on stage). We must not forget the three daily nutritious meals.

This year the theme of the camps was: "God loves, therefore I love, I care, I share, I give, I forgive?". Through dramas, group discussions and messages, the children learn the practical applications of love as demonstrated through the lives of their counselors and leaders, and through the prevailing Christian atmosphere.

These camps leave a permanent positive impact on the lives of the children, as the following story illustrates. Vahe, from Stepanavan, came to camp with no spare clothes and with torn shoes. When his clothes got dirty, realizing his need, the children in his group gave him some of their clothes. Since they had no spare shoes to

give, they prayed. During that week, the AMAA's Yerevan office sent to the camp a shipment of shoes received from France. Vahe had a new pair of shoes, God answered their prayers!

We sincerely hope and pray that the Christian principles learned here will be life-changing. These children embody our hopes for the future of the motherland. All investment of time, energy and money in them are golden. We plant the seed and pray to God to grow the harvest.

I have tried to sketch a brief account of what I experienced during a few weeks this summer in Armenia. If I can leave you with one thought, it would be this: much is being done, yet there is much more to do. This ministry is in need of funds and materials with which to operate these wonderful camps which give the children a respite from the hardships of their everyday lives.

A nation is being built, and if we do not structure it right, from the children on up, the glory of this new freedom will have been wasted. □



A young volunteer, trained by Lucy Janjigian, helps campers with their arts and crafts activity at an AMAA summer camp in Armenia.