

# AMAA INTERNS GET CONNECTED TO ARMENIA

It was very hot in Yerevan, Armenia, during July this year, but that was no reason for the interns to lose enthusiasm. On the contrary, they were excited to follow their busy schedule of internship/work camp in Armenia organized by the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA).

Nine interns participated in this year's program. They met AMAA Field Director, Mr. Dikran Youmshakian in Munich, Germany on their way to Yerevan, Armenia. The purpose of this program was to encourage Armenian youth be actively involved in AMAA and get connected to our homeland Armenia.

The interns came from three areas - San Francisco, CA; Cincinnati, Ohio and Paramus, NJ. They arrived in Yerevan, Armenia on Tuesday, July 8 at 4:00 a.m. Even though exhausted from a lengthy travel of almost 36 hours, they were eager and ready for action. AMAA's representative in Armenia, Rev. René Léonian, welcomed the group and gave a short introduction to life in Armenia. For most of the interns, this was their first pilgrimage to the motherland, and they were eager to see, learn and serve.

The group spent six days in Yerevan, Armenia. They were housed in the guestrooms at AMAA headquarters on 22 Nigol Douman Street. The first part of the program included four seminar sessions in Yerevan. The day started with a time for devotion and prayer. The interns sat on a balcony facing the historic Armenian mountain Ararat. Both the



The interns visit AMAA's new headquarters on Baghramian Street, Yerevan.

beautiful scene of snow covered Massis and the prayer of the day energized the interns and prepared them to work

The first session was led by Dikran Youmshakian (AMAA Field Director), who gave the history of the AMAA and the objective for its creation. AMAA was established in 1918 with modest means but great vision to help Armenian both spiritually and physically. He described the many services the association provides in 22 countries around the world including various religious, educational, social and relief programs. The participants were really amazed to learn how numerous and various were the projects and how active the organization was around the world.



Rev. René Léonian describing AMAA Programs in Armenia.



AMAA interns at work in Vanadzor.

The second session was led by Rev. Rene Leonian (AMAA Representative in Armenia), who described AMAA services in Armenia, Karabagh, Georgia and Russia. He emphasized how crucial it was for Armenians in the diaspora to be involved in Armenia and keep the lines of communication and cooperation open. Even with much services provided by various Armenian Church and Charitable organizations, Rev. Leonian pointed out that much more should be done, and Armenia will appreciate the continued support of all Armenians from around the world.

The third session was led by Harout Nercessian (AMAA's Operations Director, in Armenia). He spoke in general on technical and financial issues and described how the programs are run, highlighting the quality assurance and emphasizing the efficiency and effectiveness of the work. He introduced some of the key members of his staff who help oversee the operations. He also gave a tour of the headquarters explaining how each department operates. One program that impressed the interns most was the child sponsorship program, through which more than 2800 needy children are supported.

The fourth session was led by Rev. Hamlet Gureghian, Pastor of the Church in Yerevan, who spoke in general about spiritual life in Armenia. He underlined the preaching of the Gospel and its impact on people as they try to overcome daily challenges and difficulties they face. Along with meeting the physical needs of people, he said, it is also important to bring God's message of love and hope.

All four sessions were concluded with a long question/answer period. The interns were curious to learn and devise new methods of service. They pledged to do their utmost and through their involvement in the AMA help their brothers and sisters in the homeland.

While in Yerevan, the group participated in youth activities and joined in worship on Sunday at the Evangelical Church in Yerevan. Mr. Dikran Youmshakian was the guest preacher.

On Friday the interns visited Echmiadzin and witnessed the Holy Place where Armenian Christianity was born. They learned how Sourp Krikor Lousavorich, helped King Drtad be cured from a rare disease and how Armenia became the first nation to accept Christianity. The group also visited the city of Armavir. There at the Evangelical Church, children participating in Vacation Bible School were



**AMAA Interns and Hankavan Camp leaders after their soccer game.**



**AMAA Interns at work in Vanatzor.**

packed in a small and overcrowded church hall. They were praising God with their songs as they welcomed the group with cheerful applause. On Saturday, the group went to the famous Vermisage market to buy souvenirs and visited historic churches around Ashdarag.

On Sunday afternoon the interns visited Camp Shoghig in Hankavan where they met Rev. Albert Paidian who is the director of Christian Education in Armenia. Camp was in session and children were gathered for singing. It was such a moving experience to see cheerful children participating in camp activities. The interns donated soccer balls to the camp and had an exciting soccer match with the leadership of the camp. The game ended in a tie – each team scoring five goals. Later that evening, the interns visited the beautiful Lake Sevan where they enjoyed swimming in its clear and cold water.

Early Monday morning the group traveled to Vanatzor for the second part of the program.

Vanatzor is about 120 kms. from Yerevan and is a beautiful mountain city to the North. Weather in Vanatzor was very comfortable except for a few days of rain and one hail-storm. The Evangelical Church of Vanatzor is housed in a beautiful church complex which was built in 2002 by the AMAA. The building needed some repairs which the interns had volunteered to do. The interns repainted the surrounding metal fence and built a much-needed sidewalk. Local volunteers including the pastor of the Church, Rev. Samuel Kiragossian joined the five interns to the repair work. The other five interns helped lead the Vacation Bible School with 150 children attending. In Vanatzor the interns were hosted at homes where they enjoyed the warm hospitality of the church members. The excitement of the children and the hundreds of church members was evident throughout the week. The church is like an active beehive with many services provided to the community. Daily Vacation Bible Schools, musical programs, theater, computer classes, knitting and woodwork, painting and sports make this church a center of activities. The interns were so much encouraged with all the ongoing activities. They pledged not only to help, but also come back next year. The interaction with the local community and especially with children was so great that the interns were always surrounded by people and children, who would never leave to go home.

The culmination of the program in Vanatzor was on Sunday, July 20 when the entire congregation, the Sunday School children and those participating in Vacation Bible School gathered all in the sanctuary performing, singing and praising God. Even at difficult times they had always enjoyed God's love and this was another great occasion. Much credit should be given to the Pastor, Rev. Samuel and his wife Narine, and to the many volunteers who do not spare any effort and time and they dedicate their talents to serve the Lord and the community in Vanatzor.

During their stay in Vanatzor, the interns had the opportunity to visit remote villages including the Village of Tsegh, which was the birth place of the famous Armenian Writer Hovhanes Toumanian. They also visited Toumanian, a village further north on high mountains where they met with the congregation of the Evangelical Church. The Toumanian

Church provides valuable services to the community in addition to the preaching of the Gospel. AMAA missionary, Sister Hannah (originally German) operates a soup kitchen in the basement of the church, where over 70 elderly and children enjoy nutritious food.

On Sunday evening, July 20, the interns returned to Yerevan. On Monday the group paid their respects to the martyrs of the Armenian Genocide, as they visited the Genocide Monument in Dzidzernagapert.

The sad moment of leaving Armenia came on Tuesday, July 22. The internship program came to an end, but not the excitement and willingness to continue to be involved in Armenia. The interns had exchanged phone numbers and e-mail addresses with people they met in Armenia and promised not only to be in touch but also to support each other. They look forward to next year's program, which probably will include a larger number of participants.

This was indeed a sacred pilgrimage to our homeland Armenia and definitely will impact the lives of the participants and will keep them connected to their roots.

Those who want to participate in next year's program, which will be in a larger scale, should contact AMAA office and communicate with the Field Director, Dikran Youmshakian at 31 West Century Road, Paramus, NJ, 07652 or call 201-265-2607.



AMAA intern Lorig Kalfayan with children in Vanatzor.