

THE MISSION

By Hovel Shnorhokian

My elder son Hovan was invited to Beirut as the godfather at a Maronite child's baptism. That was last year in June, when I joined and stayed with him at a flat we rented in a popular Armenian neighborhood. At the foot of the building was the "Armenia" Café Trottoir, which with its only table and plastic stools took up half of the narrow street. We arrived late afternoon on a Saturday, and while we were waiting for the landlord at the famous café, we heard one of the shisha smoking youngsters tell about the fight he and his three Armenian friends had with a hoard of about 20 Muslims from the nearby Karantina neighborhood, how he had hit an opponent on the head with a meter long iron rod, how the guy had fallen on the ground with his head "open", how all the others had run away, how they had come out of the police station after spending the night there. Hovan, who by profession saves lives and has had an evangelical education, was stunned. He could not imagine that we, Armenians, encompassed such a social class.

The following morning, we attended the Sunday school graduation ceremony at our Ashrafieh church. And while we were watching the kids line up, շէնքով շնորհքով, recite verses, sing and pray, Hovan whispered "none of these kids will hit anybody on the head with an iron rod when they grow up".



I was impressed by the Sunday school kids and was very satisfied that “we” had maintained our values. Had I been given the responsibility of the existence and future of hundreds of kids, I would have been anxious. Yet teaching is a vocation rather than a career and it must be very rewarding to contribute to the awakening of a kindergarten child, to the building of character, transmitting courage, diligence, knowledge and values.



In September of the same year, I was privileged to assist to an official ceremony where the President of the Republic of Artsakh Mr. Bako Sahakyan honored the AMAA by decorating its executive director Mr. Zaven Khanjian with the Medal of Gratitude, for its involvement in various social and educative projects in Artsakh.

The following Sunday, accompanied by my cousin Harout Nercessian, I was further privileged to worship the Lord in a small chapel in Armavir. At the end of the worship, Mr. Khanjian stood up and in a gesture which reminded me my late father “Albert Yeghpayr”, took his leather-cover New Testament from his jacket pocket and delivered a short, spiritual message. Armavir reminded me of Aley, a town near Beirut but far from its spotlights, where my father had spotted a small inter-confessional Armenian community and where he conducted worship every Sunday, in a small local church he rented.



People are more or less rational versus emotional, spiritual; in this perspective, I have always thought that I was not blessed with spiritual gifts. Yet in Armavir and while the parishioners stood up one by one to pray, exactly as I witnessed in Aley half a century ago, I had a unique experience of being moved to a point where I found myself tearing abundantly. Whether it was the message or the parishioners' prayers for their children on the front, their husbands and sons working in Moscow or their daily bread, the place was filled with His Spirit

I grew up in an Armenian Evangelical circle and was linked to the AMAA from both sides ([Shnorhokian](#) and [Bezirganian](#)) of my family. I have perceived the AMAA as an institution with an impressive structure which has played a major role in education and social welfare. Over its century-old history, it has contributed to the building character of tens of thousands successful Armenians, transmitting them knowledge and values.

"Faith without works is dead". In Armavir, I realized that besides its deeds, the AMAA has not put aside the core of its Mission.

May God bless the AMAA and its servants.