

Travel Journal
of the
AMAA Medical Mission Trip
in Sisian, Armenia
and
AMAA Camp Shoghig
in Hankavan, Armenia

Additional days in Oxford, England
for Catherine's commencement

July 10 – July 30, 2024

by
Christine Momjian

Wednesday, July 10, 2024

Disclaimer: reflections shared on these emails are personal and do not reflect the full team of 55 individuals coming from all over North America to serve. For blogs on behalf of the team, visit AMAA.org or check out AMAA's Facebook or Instagram posts. These emails are a result of many who are praying for us and wanted to pray specifically.

Aside from those coming from North America, staff and translators from Armenia will join us.

Here we are again. We are going in greater numbers this year. Since we are a large group, the directors - Dr Al and Sue Phillips - have split us over three regions. One team will be west of the capital (Yerevan) in Gyumri, one team in north in Vanadzor & Stepanavan, and our team in the south, Syunik region, the town of Sisian.

Matthew (our son) is unable to join this year due to just recently starting his medical residency. Laura (his wife) is returning, her third year, as her parents Scott and Nancy are joining for their first time. The five of us will serve in Sisian along with Dr Chris Tashjian, the Dr who was instrumental in getting Mari to the US to be evaluated by Drs for her knee issues.

We are going two days earlier to visit family in Yerevan.

A few months ago my cousin Vartan in Yerevan half-jokingly suggested that Wilma auntie (my maternal aunt, and these days everyone's aunt) join us for the travel so she could see her brother. My uncle, Kegham, left Syria with his wife and they live with their son and family. Auntie and Kegham Keri (Keri=Uncle) have not seen each other since 2018. I see this as a God thing, and we're so happy we can make this work. We're thankful to Laura for volunteering to escort auntie for the return flight since Bruce and I will be staying longer.

Our flight was at 17:00 on Tuesday, with a connection in Paris. We chose to fly out of Newark, NJ airport. Bruce loves to tease auntie, that's one of the ways he shows his love to her. She always prefers the aisle seat, and he was teasing her the last few days that we got her a middle.

The flight from Newark to Paris, CDG airport was uneventful. We had an 8+hour layover, so Bruce got a hotel room and we actually slept for several hours. The airport is large and even though it was an airport hotel, it took us 70 min to get there since we had to walk a bit, take 2 airport trains, also go through customs + immigration! Auntie is doing well on keeping up. 🙌 Mariam, seeing Bruce with auntie reminds me of our trip to the Holy Land. We arrived, in time for breakfast and I enjoyed the chocolate croissant! The sleep in a bed was wonderful.

Our flight from Paris to Yerevan was a bit delayed due to traffic. Two women who are going on the mission trip are on this flight! Caitlin + Karen. It was good to see them.

The row in front of us is an Armenian family. They have a 2 year old boy named Arek, he was born in Armenia, but now they live in Toronto. They're coming for 2 months to visit family. All

their family lives in Yerevan. I'm sure the family is very excited for this visit. Arek has a T-shirt with a 9 grid dinosaur print. He keeps turning around and growling like a dinosaur to play with me.



Our driver on behalf of the AMAA medical mission team is here and takes the 5 of us to our hotel. We arrive at 2330. Tired. Looking forward to sleep.

Praise - our safe arrival along with two other team members.

Request - the 50 others coming over the next few days.

Thank you! ❤️

Christine

Thursday, July 11, 2024

Slept solid. Thank you Lord.

Bruce and I are on the second floor, while auntie is on the ninth. We connected for breakfast, which to Bruce's delight is a huge variety in their buffet. I enjoy the lebneh, parag hatz (բարբադլ հաց) and fresh apricots.

Kegham Keri and Dalo auntie (his wife) arrive around 10a! What a joy to see them together! Auntie used to go every year to Lebanon & Syria, but has not been able to since 2018 for a few reasons.

Dalo auntie and I went out for a quick errand. It's hot outside, high 90s and the sun is very strong. Upon our return, the electrical power just went off. A God thing, if we had arrived a minute earlier, we would have been stuck in the elevator.

So that means no water to 9th floor. No AC. Dalo auntie and I did the stairs to the 9th floor. Impressive. I think I should say I kept up with her!

Lots of laughs in auntie's room.

Bruce had a business meeting and on his return, we run some errands. On one of the shops, I started talking to the worker. We ended up talking about Jesus. I was excited that she was quoting Scripture. As we talked, she mentioned she's from Aleppo, Syria. Turns out she is a Jehovah's witness and she mentioned that there's around 10,000-12,000 in Armenia. Her name is Shoghig (Շողիկ).

On our return to the hotel, we were happy to see power was back up.

There is a Jehovah's witness stand/desk in our hotel lobby that is generating traffic. It's manned by three people. We're unsure how they get to have a booth there.

Dinner with auntie and Kegham Keri at Sossy's cousin's restaurant in Yerevan - Tabouleh. The food was so so good!

Walk back to hotel through Vardanyan Park. It's a newer park with many water fountains.

Bruce has a live presentation tomorrow morning for China. Will need to get up early.

Here's a link to the photo album. I'll be adding pictures regularly.

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/1fAYd8CWBmPxYL496>

Praise - seeing Wilma auntie and Kegham Keri together. Thankful we were able to do this.

Request - the Jehovah's witness issue is concerning to me.

Friday, July 12, 2024

Forgot to mention yesterday that the hotel is full to capacity. Caitlin + Karen who were on our flight had to stay elsewhere for their extra nights since there's no room here. During breakfast yesterday, we had trouble finding a table and the place is massive, like a huge ballroom.

Mostly Russian. Also met

a large group from Rome, and mother/daughter from Portugal.

It's 07:30, Bruce is giving a half hour live talk to an audience at a conference in China.

"Making Postgres Central in Your Data Center". 😊

Hard to believe we've only been here one day. Feels much longer already.

After Bruce's talk we went down to breakfast. It's emptier today. Laura and her parents arrived and it was a sweet time of sharing about our recent days.

Auntie stayed behind while the rest of us walked towards Gum (large indoor food store) to buy some food items, various dried fruits, etc. We stopped by Vernisage so Nancy & Scott could get an idea of the open market before more merchants are added on Saturday/Sunday.

At this point, Bruce separated (he had a business meeting in person) and Dalo auntie came with us to Gum. (Wilma auntie and Kegham Keri stayed behind). It is very hot. I purchased several fresh figs, each one the size of a small orange, enough for each person to have one. I would love to eat more, but don't want to take a chance.

On our return we stopped at the new church, St Gregory the Illuminator Cathedral. They were setting the church up for a wedding. So many huge white bouquets along the pews along the aisle.

We then returned and had a bit of down time, but together. In my devotional today, the text was from Matthew 10:16-23, the part that stuck to me was that I can be ready to speak on whatever topic that is "abundant in my heart". So is God's word abundant in my heart? What do I need to change so that it is? Would like to think about that some more. Laura and I returned to Vernisage, she wanted to look at something. On our return, it was still so hot, we stopped at the corner juice stand, that Bruce and I had found last year, and got a fresh squeezed pomegranate/orange juice to split. It was so delicious.

We walked to dinner and went to a restaurant owned by an Armenian from Aleppo, Abu Hagop. Kegham Keri and Dalo auntie know the owner. They used to have a restaurant in Aleppo, but relocated to Yerevan at the start of the civil war in Syria. The food was delicious, but we left room for dessert. Bruce had another dinner meeting, so he had to leave us. These meetings were not prescheduled, but once people were aware that he was here, contacted him to meet. He's been asked to speak on Monday as well. The Monday after our mission.

Linda, you'll be happy to hear that auntie (and the rest of us) had ice cream. We walked to our favorite gelato place, Sorriso, on Tamanyan St. I don't know who's happier, Laura or auntie. The street was packed with people. It was 21:00 and there were families, teenagers, older people, all types. Out, enjoying the gentle breeze.

While we were enjoying the gelato, Vartan called. They had arrived at the hotel area. It was a joy to see them, Vartan (my cousin), his wife Sevan, and their 8 year old daughter Paleny (means cherry in Armenian). I got to hear all about her recent world ice skating competition when she represented Armenia in Dubai. She's excelled so much that she has now qualified for a full scholarship! This is a huge relief to Vartan & Sevan. She's also a student at the AMAA Avedisian school (pre K-12th grade) where she's dearly loved by the principal and is a strong student. She's studying Russian, (obviously Armenian), will start with French next year and English in 5th grade along with her other subjects.

We sat in the hotel lobby and enjoyed being together. It's like a dream.

Tomorrow we start with our mission team. 09:00.

Praise - Laura and her parents (Scott & Nancy) arrived. Seeing Vartan/Sevan/Paleny.

As of this morning the large JW.org booth in the lobby is gone.

Request - as I write, the majority of the team is arriving late tonight/early tomorrow. That they feel rested for our first team building day.

Thank you!



Christine

Saturday, July 13, 2024

Today's personal devotional, Matthew 10:24-33. It's a call to imitate Christ. I ask myself, Am I imitating Christ?

It's a very hot day again. At breakfast, I introduce myself to Dr Barb, Dr Chris' wife.

We start with a team meeting at 09:00, which starts with a devotional and some more information. We have two buses since we're a large group. Our driver is Armand, and our guide is Hripsime. ❤️ to Mariam.

10:15 Dzizernagapert Armenian Genocide Museum until 11:30. My third time here, each time something else gets my emotions. Beautiful handwork pieces in the bookstore. I'm glad the Armenian handwork is still being worked and remembered. I found similar pieces to what we have at home. We place carnations at Tzitzernagapert.

On the bus ride Barb and I talk. She's very easy to talk to.

Stopped at Mother Armenia statue in Victory Park for about 20 min. Bruce also checks the WWII museum at the park. It's too overcast, so we don't have any views of Mt Ararat. 😞

Around 14:00 we arrive in Garni. Have lunch, beautiful views of Garni temple and the mountains. A couple who are on the mission team from CA sat with us and we get to know them. On the walk over to the temple, the woman, Ani and I talk. I'm thankful for these pockets of sweet conversations.

Bruce and I take Laura to the bath portion and along the fenced path to see the gorge and river below. The scenes are stunning. We purposely walk through several sprinklers so we can cool off. Our clothing dries almost immediately.

There's a professional duduk player playing in the temple. He plays a moving rendition of Grung. If you're unsure what a duduk sounds like, check this out:

https://youtu.be/RrL6wGsUTUM?si=a3Ecq9g6qHs_z06C

There's a young couple with a little girl sitting on the grass. The dad is maneuvering a drone and as the drone gets closer to them and hovers close to them, the little girl, she must be around 14 months or so, squeals in delight while repeating the same word. Can't make out the word, but she could not be happier. The parents take delight in the child. It ends with the dad landing the drone near them, (smooth landing I might add), and the mom and daughter are rolling on the grass. So pure and beautiful.

My mind goes to my sons. Curious if any of them are interested in getting a drone camera. Leave Garni at 16:30.

Arrive at Geghart monastery. I love this place. Each area is stunning. At 17:45 there's a mini concert of a 4 member a capella group (3 women, 1 man) who sing four pieces of sharagan. Must be in the DNA, since I didn't grow up with it, but when I hear sharagan, I get chills.

The one hour ride back to Yerevan was quieter. I think between the strong sun, and the day, it's getting us.

We have dinner at Kharpert Restaurant in Yerevan. We see Armen Kherlopian in the hotel lobby! What a sweet surprise! I'm sitting next to Allie, and Barb, Allie & I have a great conversation. Bruce has to leave around 20:30 since he has another business dinner. By 21:00 dinner is done and most start dispersing, some back to the hotel, some to Republic Square to see the fountain light show.

We check out tomorrow and depart at 08:30.

Praise - everyone's safe arrival!

+ Dr Barb's suitcase was full of dentistry stuff and it was held back. Customs released it.

+ One Dr for the Sisian team has not arrived yet since he's sick. Unsure what will happen there.

+ We have expanded to South America! A mom from Brazil and her daughter, who's currently doing residency in CA, are on this trip.

Request - 3 members don't have their luggage. Please pray that it arrive before we leave tomorrow morning.

Pictures:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/1fAYd8CWBmPxYL496>

thank you,



Christine

Sunday, July 14, 2024

This is the third night I'm not sleeping well. This morning at 04:00, I had a few messages concerning the shooting on former president Trump at a rally in PA.

I resigned to trying to fall asleep. I can't really turn on lights to read, etc since that would disrupt Bruce. I got my earbuds and did what works for me at such times, listen to Scripture being read, Matthew starting at chapter 5 is a favorite. I love those chapters since it's basically Jesus talking. Looking at the text now, the last memory of text that I have is Matthew 8:13.

We were to leave at 08:30 this morning, having checked out of our hotel room. Unfortunately, we're having to leave behind 5 team members who tested positive for covid. Drs Barb and

Chris had brought many test kits with them, and they're getting used. This is disheartening for them as well as us. One of them is the mom from Brazil! 💔😞

I'm reminded of the passage from Judges 7. Sue prayed and I read that text to our busload. May Jesus be glorified through this. It doesn't make sense to us at the moment, but we're called to trust.

We drive about an hour and we spend an hour at Ghor Virab Monastery. Some of us go down to the pit.

<https://g.co/kgs/pAFji4C>

Another overcast day, can only make out a faint outline of Mt Ararat.

Did I mention it's very hot?

We then drive an hour to Etchmiadzin (mother church of the Armenian Apostolic Church, think Vatican for the Roman Catholic Church). As we walk the grounds, we see two young boys who are dressed to be baptized? Probably first communion? at John the Baptist church in the complex. One of the boys is very upset and the mother is telling him to hold a certain pose for pictures, facing the other boy. Laura and I wonder if they're twins.

40 of the group go to the museum, in two groups of 20. Those of us who saw it last year stay behind.

Lunch at the restaurant on the premises. The Armenian team joins us for lunch.

It's great to see Dr Gor and Dr Levon and his wife. We met them last year. These Dr.s serve at the AMAA clinic in Yerevan.

At 15:00 the three buses are ready to depart. One goes to Gyumri, one to Vanadzor/Stepanavan, and our bus to Sisian.

A few months ago, Dr Al & Sue asked us to lead the Sisian group with Drs Chris & Barb. Sue placed us in Sisian without us requesting! Such a God thing. We'll get to see the family in Sisian as well as the Badveli (pastor) Arman and his wife Saida. We got to know them well since we spent a week in Sisian last year after the medical mission finished.

We are 13 from the US, and 9 from Armenia headed to Sisian.

We're close to Sisian. The temperature is close to 40 degrees lower than Yerevan! 🌈 64° we were in the high 90s.

The drive is around 3.5 hours. We arrive at the church, it is so good to see Badveli Arman Martirosyan and his wife Saida. The church staff helping were all dressed in Linda's favorite shade of purple. 💜

It takes us quite a bit of time to get the flow of the church turned into a clinic, but we're hopeful it's will be a smooth flow. Everyone is working so well together. I'm so thankful for everyone's great attitude and willingness to help.

The church ladies had prepared dinner for us, we eat and then finish up a few things and our driver takes us to our hotel. Melanie volunteers to give her testimony tomorrow morning. We're a bit later than hoped, to get to the hotel.

Praise - the 3 people who's luggage was lost made it in time.
+ The dentistry items were released from customs.

Request - for the 5 members who were left behind. One of them was one of the leaders for the Vanadzor/Stepanavan group.
+ First day of clinics for all teams.

thank you,



Christine

Monday, July 15, 2024

It was a restful night. Praise God. Left the window open and there's a wonderful breeze. It feels like we're in the country, surrounded by mountains.

We had decided to meet for breakfast at the hotel at 07:30. It's a simple breakfast.

At 08:30, we gathered in a circle for our devotional + song + prayer. Sue had asked me to write the devotional for all the teams. So the three teams are reading the same passages. We're united in that even though we're not together. For today I had picked John 9:1-7 and the thought was (shortened thought) that Jesus made time, He was never in a hurry, He was intentional. Our song was Open the Eyes of my Heart by Michael W. Smith.

By 08:40 we were on our way. Badveli Arman had asked that we be at the church by 08:50. We gathered in the sanctuary, we found the container that had the translator units and the service started.

Two of our local translators left since they found out our mission was Evangelical. 😞 We moved some people around and praise God, it should work.

Our worship service ended at 09:30, and we moved to our stations.

We have the following stations in this order: vitals, urine (can check a multitude of things), triage, lab (can check A1C, hemoglobin and glucose), EKG, ultrasound, pharmacy. Lab, EKG and ultrasound is on an as needed basis.

Bruce served in lab with a young woman named Mari, who is 15 years old. Nine adults were baptized at the Sisian church on Sunday (yesterday), Mari was one of them. She was such a joy to work with. She also just jumped in wherever needed if she did not have any patients. This Mari is a

different Mari than the 8 year old with the medical issue who stayed with us.

I was overseeing, helping where needed, praying with those who seemed to need it / or want prayer.

We took care of 65 patients from 09:30-13:00. Lunch was from 13:00-14:00. Our team members went upstairs to eat as they were done.

The afternoon started with worship service at 14:00. The clinic then started at 14:30. We treated 60 patients from 14:30-17:45.

There's three patients I will share about.

One was in EKG when I was asked to come for translation assistance. She's 60 years old. Her husband died when she was 45. She had two children with him, and one died. When she married him, he was a widow with three children. She has several issues. She walked one hour to come to the clinic.

Janna - We have four Drs, two Armenian, and two who need translators. The ultrasound Dr asked if I'd go get the Dr who asked for the script so they could discuss the case. I got the Dr, and the Dr doesn't know Armenian and the ultrasound Dr does not know English. I was asked to interpret, so I did. Janna has very advanced breast cancer. Her next step would be a biopsy so that they know what type of surgery she needs, if that would help, and what medication or radiation would work for her. She can only get this done in Yerevan, which is 3.5 hours away. This is very hard to process and have to tell Janna.

The Dr asked if I'd go with her so we could discuss this with Janna who was waiting in the exam room. Remember this Dr does not know Armenian. I have never been in a situation as this. We explained the situation to her. I asked her if she had any family for support. She has a husband. They had one child who died at 19 days. She will not be able to afford the biopsy she says. She mentions that she attends the church but does not want to share this news with Badveli. She cries. Understandably. I ask her if I can pray for her, she says yes. I place my hand on her arm. I pray. The words just come out. It's certainly not in my strength, but the Holy Spirit. All praise to Him.

I have a chance to talk to the Dr during dinner about this. How does she handle having to tell patients news like this. It must be very hard.

Olya - 35 year old. Triage nurse calls me and fills me in on her background, and asks if I'll pray with her, for her. She has an 11, 9, 8 year old. Her husband left when her youngest was 1.5 years old. Her parents are elderly and need help. Her only other family is her sister who's husband died in the 40 day war with Azerbaijan. She works as a postal worker delivering mail by walking all day long. She's the sole supporter. She mentioned how much she makes in a month and what she pays for rent. Barely anything left to take care of all those depending on her. Her situation is desperate. She's basically in for depression/stress. I spend some time to hear her story, and I pray for her. I try to point her to the source of hope. She's local. I ask if

she comes to church. I would like to talk to Badveli to see if there's anything that could be done to help her.

These are just a few stories.

We have dinner prepared by the church ladies. It is delicious.

The team is fabulous. Everyone has such a great attitude and they're so happy and willing to serve! ❤️

We need to do something light for the team. Badveli Arman and his wife had taken Bruce and I to Vorodnavank last year. It's a beautiful monastery that's no longer used with panoramic views. I ask Badveli if he thinks we can make it in time. He agrees. We leave at 19:15, sunset is at 20:30.

This was so worth it. To see the team enjoy the beauty of the Syunik region.

On the ride back Karina asks if she can use the bus microphone, and of course! She gives a shout out to three people.

We get back and people slowly go to their rooms.

Praise - for our first day with the emotional highs and lows.

Request - for those who need healing.

+ Our five team members back in Yerevan are stable. Not better. Not worse.



Thank you,
Christine

Tuesday, July 16, 2024

Forgot to mention yesterday:

We have a dental station for children. Dr Barb from the US, and Dr Evelyn from Armenia.

They have an education portion for the children explaining proper dental care; how to brush & floss, what foods to avoid. Each child also receives fluoride varnish treatment and walks away with a dental kit. Monday's children, all but one had cavities.

Another night of listening to Matthew chapters 5-8...

The morning devotional that I had prepared was from Mark 5:1-13. A few of the thoughts was that Jesus went into unclean situations: Now the disciples are facing this man who is by Jewish standards unclean: He is:

- * Living among the tombs

- * Pigs nearby - unclean animal for Jews

* Demon possessed

So no one would want to approach him. But Jesus does not stay away.
Our song was "Chain Breaker" by Zach Williams.

There are many women of the church doing various jobs in the clinic as support + three women cooking. There are also many youth helping in various capacities. All are very eager to provide any type of help.

There's a young person who's job is to make Armenian coffee and tea upon request. 😊☕
Then she's washing those cups and saucers and doing it again!

Badveli Arman is very available with the helpers as well as those coming in. His wife Saida is also helping. They are a fabulous team.

Lena's family stopped by this morning to say hello. They were in Yerevan yesterday for Haig's (their son's) medical tests. Mari ran towards me as she saw me. It was great to hug her. It turns out in all the children the dental team has seen over the last two days, she's the only one that does not have cavities!

During the morning worship service, Melanie gave her testimony and we were all in tears. She's 24, and she was adopted as a baby by a strong Christian Armenian couple from CA. Her passport says she was born in Yerevan. When she got placed to serve in Sisian, two months ago, her mother told her that she was actually born in Sisian but was sent to an orphanage in Yerevan. We all marveled with her at God's hand in so many things in her life. Her testimony was so impactful that Badveli Arman said there was no need for a message from him!

Forgot to mention, he gave a wonderful message yesterday. I marvel at the type of work they (with his wife) are doing here in this community.

Morning clinic we see 62 patients.

Some stories:

Man in his 40s, 75% of his body burned in the gas explosion fire on the forced evacuation from Artsakh. French Drs did many surgeries on him, and he has many scars on his arms, chest, back, upper thigh. He still has special fingerless spandex gloves on his hands to prevent infection on his hands/fingers.

A 16 year old helper, who's name is Vahe, his dad's body was 85% burned in the same explosion. Vahe had to drive the family out of Artsakh.

Sister of postal worker who I mentioned yesterday has cancer. The one who's husband died in the 40 day war with Artsakh. Their children, the two sisters, total 5, are sponsored by the AMAA. I'm so thankful for this. I found out this information when I spoke with Badveli. They're aware of the situation.

Dikran, another 16 year old helper, has an older sister and younger brother. The father has died, mother left them when he was very young, before father died. He has some medical needs.

They have cooked chicken and the tastiest potatoes for lunch. And the fresh tomatoes, which are available at each meal are so red and so flavorful.

Afternoon starts at 14: 30, we see 58 patients.

I notice the male patients are not very happy about being asked to provide a urine sample.

As I've been releasing stations at the end of the day, I'm going around letting team members pick a sticker to add to their name tag. Everyone seems to look forward to this. 🥰

A bit after 18:00, we went by bus to the Shaki waterfall. It is a beautiful waterfall that Sevag and Lena took us to last year. The bus is unable to get us close to the path, so we walk 2 km after he drops us off to get to the park. The mountain views are stunning. The waterfall is spectacular. All who went are delighted. Bruce leads a smaller group to the top of the waterfall.

We return to the church/clinic around 20:00. Thankful for the youth and ladies who have prepared our dinner of 'ishghanatzoog' which is the most popular freshwater fish in Armenia.

The team has really bonded. I'm so thankful for each one and the team work that we have.

Around 21:00, we drive back to the hotel. Some plan to stay up to play cards.

Pictures:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/1fAYd8CWBmPxYL496>

Thank you for your prayers,



Christine

Wednesday, July 17, 2024

This is our third day of clinics.

Dr Shelby has entered a blog entry on the AMAA website on behalf of our team. You can also read about the other teams. The AMAA Facebook page also has activity.

<https://armeniamedicalmissions.wordpress.com/2024/07/16/amaa-medical-mission-sisian-team-day-1-2/>

<https://www.facebook.com/AMAAInc>

I believe we forget all of the conveniences we have in the United States. How do we nurture that? Please join me in pausing to give thanks to the Lord. It is not anything of our doing, but His mercy.

Mari, Bruce's helper in lab, moved to Yerevan with her mother last year to start high school. She hopes to be a medical doctor. She's phenomenal. They come back to Sisian to be with the rest of the family when she's not in school. Such sacrifices.

Our team devotional this morning is on Matthew 8:5-13. We talked about the faith the centurion must have had. He had faith that called him to obedience even if he could not understand all the details. He understood that Jesus was greater than him. Our song was "Haven't Seen it Yet" by Danny Gokey.

On the bus, Dr Chris shares the joke of the day:
What award do you give to the dentist of the year?
A little plaque. 🦷

He's created a team cheer for us that we will say to the others when we regroup on Saturday.
"We're team Sisian
strong and true.
Sharing faith
is what we do."

We arrive at the sanctuary at 08:45. As we get ourselves settled I look up, and I see Badveli Greg & Sossy Haroutunian from First Armenian Presbyterian Church in Fresno, CA! They have come on their own to help their sister church in Goris. It was such a delight to see them. We hug with excitement. Badveli Greg is a marker in my faith journey.

Badveli Sarkis Ochinyan from Goris has brought a busload from Goris to be seen at the clinic. He gives the message at the worship service. I find out afterwards that he is the father of one of our local doctors who is serving with our team, Dr Anna. Nancy shares her testimony at the worship service. She reminds us that even through difficult times God is faithful to us, and He loves us.

We start receiving patients at 9:30. We start with number 248 and end with 314 for a total of 66 patients.

Today is a real busy day for EKG. Karina's kept busy. At times she has nine people in queue. I suggest that Mari be trained in EKG so that Karina could do another station. Dr Chris agrees.

Andrew is at vitals today. He's so good and quick at it, that it's creating a backlog in the next station which is urine. I ask him to slow the pace a bit, and pray with each patient. He is so willing, and does so. Turns out his mother is very close friends with Sossy and Badveli Greg. They are thrilled to see Andrew in action.

Bruce continues on lab, and sometimes feels frustrated when an A1C result fails.

Dr Jeff and his son Edward who were stuck in Yerevan with covid were able to join us mid morning. We're glad they did not miss the full week. Edward is helping out in vitals, that frees up Andrew to shadow the dentists. Andrew is going to dental school. In the afternoon, Mari is ready to do EKG on her own, so that frees up Karina to shadow a Dr.

The team was very straggled for lunch today.

For the afternoon we saw a total of 65 patients. That gives a total of 131 for the day!

During the afternoon Badveli Arman said he needed to provide some statistics for the medical office in Yerevan. Dr Chris and I discussed that I would need help to gather that. Andrew helped me. We had to go through the patient sheets to get some statistical data from Monday up till today. Well need to do that for tomorrow as well.

For tonight Dr Chris, Dr Barb, Edma, Bruce, Laura and I were invited to Sevag and Lena's home for dinner. We arrived there, a little bit after 18:30. Sevag's parents, Lena's parents, her sister and husband, were also there. We saw Sevag's advanced system for wheel alignment. He got a grant from the UN, added some personal funds for it. It is really helping him to stand out in the type of work that he does. That allows more customers to come. He has finished the work on the waiting room for his clients. Basically building the walls (3 sides), ceiling, laying a mud floor then stone flat tiles. He was working on that last year when we were here.

Chris did an exam on their 16 month old son Haig, which I served as the translator. So the clinic continued at the home. 🍕

They had set multiple tables together and Barb said it was like Thanksgiving. Lena understood that since she was with us at Thanksgiving in 2021.

Sevag's dad did a grand toast, I was seated next to him so I translated. After a few minutes, Chris was across from me, I mentioned to him that he should say a toast and he should "up" the toast. He did. Then Sevag's dad did another toast. I mentioned to Bruce sitting next to me that it was his turn. So Bruce followed with a grand toast. I was the translator through all the toasts and conversations. We (medical team) keep a dry week, so we toasted with water or fruit compote (juice). There was much joy, thankful hearts and laughter around the table.

Sevag knew that Bruce likes tea from a samovar, so we went outside with him to make it. Sevag had worked on perfecting his skills. Last year he used a lighter and hair dryer. This year, he learned the proper way from his brother who lives in Goris. (We went there last year and remember how easily he lit the fire for the samovar and kept it going). They use wood to boil the water and it gets a smokey flavor. It is delicious.

We came in for the table set with fruit and dessert. There was fresh fishneh (small sour cherries) on the table as well. I don't remember having them fresh. My grandmother would always make fishneh jam to make fruit compote. Mari had made a delicious jello full of fruit.

They would have wanted us to stay longer, but we left around 22:00. Sevag insisted on driving us back, but we needed the walk. He drove Edma and Barb back, the four of us started walking. On our way back, we happened to see our team and walked back to the hotel with them.

After the team dinner at the church, they went to the cemetery. Bruce and I thought they should visit since it's very impactful. It's full of headstones with carved images of faces. Mostly 18-20 year olds from the last war with Artsakh. Turns out Dikran's father is buried at that cemetery. Dikran is the 16 year old youth from the church who I wrote about yesterday. His mom left when he was young. The team ended up saying a prayer there. ❤️ Then they went out to visit an area that has some water something and had ice cream.

Praise - Bruce, Dr Chris and I were discussing what a great team we have and how well everyone is working together with such a wonderful attitude. The team has really bonded. Thank you for all your prayers! I know they are working.

Request - Lena and Mari's son, Haig.
+ Last day of clinics tomorrow. We will miss the local team.

Pictures:
<https://photos.app.goo.gl/1fAYd8CWBmPxYL496>



thank you,
Christine

Thursday, July 18, 2024

Thank you for following along and praying for us. You are part of this team.

Everyone was a bit sluggish today. At breakfast I asked for a volunteer to share their testimony, but no one volunteered. (Having a testimony ready is something each team member is asked to do a few months back. So this is not something new I'm asking). To give the testimony at worship. I said think about it, I'm sure the Holy Spirit will nudge one of you.



This morning's team devotional was on John 5:1-9, with a focus on How am I a paralytic? Do we give excuses instead of allowing Jesus to heal us? Our song is "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" by T4G Live IV.

After the devotional I ask who will give their testimony? And Karina hesitantly said she would. I was so thankful! I'm eager to hear.

We start on our way in the bus at 08:40. Dr Chris' joke of the day:
Dr says, "I have bad news and worse news. The bad news is you have terminal cancer."
Patient asks, "What's the worse news?"

"You have Alzheimer's."

Patient responds, "At least I don't have cancer!" 😊

We practice our cheer. Before we know it we arrive. It's about a 5 min drive.

Everyone is eager to see us. Hard to believe it's our last day.

Mari, who's the 15 year old helping Bruce in lab gifts me a necklace she made. She said she made one for each of the women on our team. ❤️

Karina's testimony was about her uncle's strong faith, even through 8 years of hard, painful cancer. What a legacy that has left on her, and how that has helped her to trust in God even when things don't make sense. 😭 !

It's interesting how the Lord connected her to me. Maybe I'll get to share that on a light day.

In the a.m. we start with patient #381 until #463. We certainly feel it. At times I ask vitals to pause since there's a backlog in triage. That's 82 patients! It was very clear that we were such high numbers. All sections were full all morning long.

A cat I've seen strolls in since the door is open to patients coming in. We have a challenge getting it out.

Dr Jeff, our orthopedic surgeon was able to look at Dikran's hand. He says he needed an x-ray. Lucine from the AMAA came today and she was able to arrange an x-ray in Goris for Dikran. Dikran is a very active youth in the church whose father has died and mother has left them. I've mentioned him 2x. Badveli and Saida take good care of him. Good news is that he did not have a fracture. He will need some therapy but he should be good. He does have an issue with one of his kidneys though.

Dr Barb, dentist, mentioned a common situation in the pediatric dentistry. Apparently when a baby tooth decays, to the point where the tooth separates from the root section and falls off, but the roots stay in the gum. So they have extracted several of those roots from gums since they will stay in there and create problems later on with adult teeth.

We had an amazing case with one woman who came with severe leg pain. I wasn't sure if she was exaggerating the pain, which can happen sometimes. But when the bandages came off they saw that due to her high glucose counts (it's in the 400s) she had a large open wound on her right leg. Pharmacy fortunately had the proper medication, in injection form, and between pharmacist and the Dr they were able to help her.

Our lunch is supposed to be from 13:00-14:00. At 14:00 some of us are still busy with patients. I end up going to around 14:10, Bruce stays behind until pharmacy finishes. We're back down at 14:30 for the afternoon rounds.

We were supposed to visit Lena's family one last time at lunch time and drop off all the gifts. But didn't make it. Bruce went quickly, they're a 2 min walk away, to apologize and say we'd come later.

The clinic ends with patient #531 a bit after 17:00. 68 patients! We were also able to take care of the local staff. Dr Chris saw Badveli Arman, and asked me to interpret. What an amazing and exhausting day.

We need to tear down the clinic. Pack everything back in the large plastic containers. They'll go back to the AMAA clinic in Yerevan. For example, one container has two of everything for vitals. You get the idea. Everyone works together.

Andrew comes to help me with the stats sheets. We find a huge pile from a previous day and finish out today's. Edward and Karina join, and I leave it to the three of them. They're showing my love language and are being very detailed with the data needed. That frees me up.

Once everything is packed, we then can go up to eat. Tonight they've cooked khorovadz (bbq) cut up pieces of pig meat with the bones, and potatoes. Have I mentioned how delicious the potatoes are over here? They use a lot of it, and it's always so tasty.

Dr Evelynna (dentist) organizes a surprise birthday celebration for Dr Barb after dinner. (Birthday tomorrow). What a great way to finish.

I'm impressed by the willing work of the young people and some women of the church. It's really beautiful!

I had called our bus driver and he comes. Some want to go back to hotel. The younger group go for a walk. Chris, Barb, Laura, Bruce and I walk to Lena's home. It's 20:30.

We have a lovely visit. They have a table set with cake, ice cream, fruit. And tea. We give them gifts which we've brought. Barb & Chris have gifts as well. Chris also answers some questions to Sevag on his feet pain. Prescribes some exercises which will help.

We walk back. About 15 min walk. The air is so crisp and lovely. I find the traditional bench in Armenia that says Sisian, need a picture.

I need to go to the front desk to ask if they'd have breakfast ready at 07:30. The young members are in the lobby playing cards. They get excited thinking I'll play with them. I'm tempted, but there's much to do before going to sleep, one of them is writing to you faithful praying team members! 🙏



thank you,
Christine

Friday, July 19, 2024

I wake up much earlier than the set alarm. We've been sleeping with the window open, since it's so pleasant. There's a symphony of birds, just like home.

What a week! We were a small team but through God's grace an efficient team. Over 4 days, we saw 531 patients, did 164 EKGs, 78 A1Cs, 83 ultrasounds, 493 patients walked out with one year's prescriptions. Pediatric dentistry educated and treated (fluoride varnish as well as some extractions) 143 patients. We helped Lucy (she was stationed in another team) with a study she's doing by 20 people participating in the study. Our total patient count was **674**!

I've also had many conversations with our pharmacist who's from Yerevan – Dr Shushan. She was born in Aleppo, educated in Yerevan, worked in Beirut, her dialect is western, so we have some good conversations. She took charge of the group the Wednesday night we were at Lena's.

I really appreciate my ինձամիս (in-laws) Scott & Nancy for being on this trip. They've grown to love the land, the history, and the people of Armenia.

I pack up our two suitcases. I had brought two checked bags so I'd have room for gifts and then empty space for Catherine. I had a lot of space, but then Lena gifted us two boxes of Grand Candy. One for our family, and one for our family at AMCC.

Breakfast was going to be ready for us at 07:30. On my walk to the front desk area / eating area, I saw the manager of the hotel sitting outside with a few men. It looked like they had a pot that you use to make Armenian coffee. I thanked him for their hospitality and how much we enjoyed our stay here, at the Basen hotel. I asked him if it was possible to have a cup of Armenian coffee he said **ա՛նշո՛ւշո՛ւն** (of course). I then asked if he would you make a few extra for my group and he said **ա՛նշո՛ւշո՛ւն** (of course). In a few minutes he came with three cups and saucers. ☕

A breakfast, Nancy and I agreed that the team meeting that started Saturday, July 13th morning, felt like ages ago.

I'm not saying this out of obligation for you to reply, but I do appreciate any replies to my emails. It is encouraging. I have told our team how we have many people who are praying for us. They are encouraged and blessed as well. I do believe the unity we have had is a result of so many prayers.

Few random things:

* You have to always remind yourself to not put the toilet paper in the toilet, but in the trash can right by the toilet. This is not the case in Yerevan.

* It's been a challenge for my brain to switch continually on whom to speak English with and whom to speak Armenian with. 😊

* I realized this morning after a conversation with Dr. Argisht, that a few of the people on the Sisian team I had difficulty understanding was not because they were speaking Eastern

Armenian but they were speaking the Artsakh dialect. Those from Artsakh also sprinkle in more Russian words in their conversation. A few of our older female patients only knew Russian. I'm wondering if they were refugees from Artsakh.

We have a guide today, her name is Natella. We leave at 08:50.

Joke of the day by Chris:

Patient says to Dr, "Everytime I eat cake I get heartburn."

Dr replies, "Next time, take off the birthday candles."

We stopped at Zorats Karer. (also known as Armenian Stonehenge). The views are stunning.

Back in bus at 10:00. Yesterday, Andrew asked me if there would be a time to share his testimony. I suggested on the bus ride this morning. As we were getting on the bus, he mentioned that his uncle's testimony was more powerful/interesting, could he share that instead? I said no, we would be more blessed by hearing yours. And we were! He shared about how his parents did devotionals while mom was pregnant so the word of God was heard in utero. He gave his life to Christ at a young age. As he's gone through high school, then undergrad, he's had to grow in trusting God through situations. He also shared about his time of studying for the test that you need for entrance to dental school and the process. He's learning to surrender more and more.

When he finished, I privately thanked him, and shared how I'm still learning to surrender more and more. Bruce agreed. We encouraged him.

We're driving towards Datev monastery. I can't say enough about the stunning scenery. At a certain point, I have to stop taking pictures. It's so beautiful.

We arrive at the lookout at 11:15. So amazing. We then get back on the bus for a few minutes and we have until 12:45 to look around. We break up into small groups. It's fun to show others around since we were here last year. In the sanctuary, women need to have their head covered. Bruce doesn't miss this opportunity to tease me.

We get on the Wings of Datev (Տաթևի թևեր) a 5.7 km (3.5 mi) cableway between Halidzor and the Datev monastery. It is the longest reversible aerial tramway built in only one section, and holds the record for longest non-stop double track cable car. Construction was finished in October 2010.

We get on the 13:00 tramway, it's a 12 min ride. I was unsure if we'd all fit, but we do. What fun to have our own tramway. We can squeel as we want. 🤗🚡 We are now in the town of Halidzor, to have lunch. The views are beautiful. We have our coffee/tea in the outside area of the restaurant.

Apparently there's a major Microsoft crash. Many systems are affected. We hear this since Matthew sends a message that there's no computers working at the hospital. Bruce finds out that a massive tech outage swept the globe, knocking out operations for banks, media

companies and emergency services and forcing airlines to ground flights. We're wondering how this will affect team members flying home. Some start leaving Saturday evening.

Dr Jeff tells us about a podcast he listens to called Podmootyoon. 😊 (badmootyoon = story) He highly recommends it.

I have some more conversations with Dr Shelby. And Dr Shushan. And Dr Kohar. Separately.

We take the 15:00 tramway back to Datev, and by 15:20 back on bus.

Our driver is a master driver. There are so many turns that are a horseshoe. I don't know how he does it so smoothly. The roads are in great shape. Much better than last year.

We then drive 2h50 min to Noravank a 13th-century Armenian monastery, located in a narrow gorge made by the Amaghu River, near the town of Yeghegnadzor. The gorge is known for its tall, sheer, brick-red cliffs, directly across from the monastery.

We stop here for 45 min. There is an artisan shop at the base before the last walk up. The works of many artists are for sale. There is a gentleman, who is carving into the local limestone making խաչքար khatchkars. (crosses carved from stone) Such detailed work. All of the pieces are beautiful. A few of us buy a few.

Bruce goes down the pit as well as a few others. There are many doves. The walkway to the entrance has flower petals. I wonder if someone got married today.

We're then scheduled to have dinner at the restaurant which is a very short drive from the monastery. None of us are hungry. It's called Restaurant Arpa. The highlight for many is a fresh made bread similar in shape to a round ka'ak. We leave at 20:15. We have a bit over 2 hours to Yerevan.

It will be hard to leave this group tomorrow.

I had asked Ari (who's a music major) to create the melody for our team cheer, so we would not sound robotic. Earlier we had talked and I had wondered that it should not be in a minor key, since most Armenian music is in a minor key. He still didn't have anything, and everyone was looking at him in the bus he said, half jokingly, "I only have two lines. What do you want from me?" The cheer is two lines. We all chuckled. But he did it! We practiced a few times. Let's see if anyone will remember the tune tomorrow evening. 😊

We arrive back at the Ani Grand at 22:10, and Bruce with a brilliant plan to get all the luggages to the lobby. Gayane is there with our keys. By 22:20 all the suitcases are off of the bus and we're in our room. Room 222.

Long great day.

Pictures

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/1fAYd8CWBmPxYL496>



thank you,
Christine

Saturday, July 20, 2024

Got up on my own at 05:30. My voice is very crackly and hoarse. When I get this, Bruce teases me and calls it my Brenda Vaccaro voice.

I slowly got ready, answered some emails.

Thank you Yvonne for sharing the YouTube link for Matt Silverman's memorial at Calvary church of San Francisco. Will watch. In conversation with Karina later in the day she mentioned she watched and one of her siblings also spoke. 💔

At breakfast we see members from the other teams. It feels like so long ago we had seen them. I tell Gayane, our overall guide, that the Sisian team was the best. She tells me each team thinks their team is the best. 😊

While we wait in the lobby for all to arrive, Ari asks me some hard faith based questions. I thank God for this opportunity.

We drive over to AUA, American University of Armenia, for a tour. I'm a little unsure why we're going, but by the midpoint of the tour I suggest to Bruce that maybe he should teach a semester or two here. First guide is Nareg until 10:30. He's from the US , came for two years from the Bay area, but it's now 7 years. He works here. Second guide, Masha. Very impressive place. 2,300 students. Interesting history of its founding by two Armenian Americans. One of them is Mihran Aghababian of UACC. My parents knew them (with his wife) from the Middle East. I serve on the AMAA board with his son Bryan.

Thank you Sevan for mentioning about Nerses' relative serving on this team. I found Sabeen during the tour and we had a sweet conversation. Turns out she was at the biennial in San Francisco in June, but I did not meet her then. I do love all these connections.

11:45 we leave by bus to the AMAA office. Aren Deyirmenjian gives an overview of the work of the AMAA, and then there are many questions.

Bruce and I are introduced to Nareg and his wife Anahid through Aren concerning our schedule after this. Wait for it. 😊

We then have lunch at the AMAA cafeteria after a tour of the building. Karina asks if we can sit together to talk. 😊 I enjoy getting to know her even better. The food is fantastic! Chefs are Armenians from Syria. They cook for the AMAA staff.

Karina and I continue our conversation in the bus back to the hotel.

This is our free time, and Laura, her parents Scott & Nancy, and Karina want to go to Vernisage, the open market. I join them from 14:30 while Bruce has a business meeting from 15:00-17:00.

Towards the end of our time it starts to thunder. Some of the vendors close their tables. But most stay. Nancy and Scott head back.

After about 30 minutes, the sun is back out. We realized that our free time is ending, so we start walking back. During our time there, we see some other team members. We see Shelby at the exit, so we start walking back together.

A lot of the vendors this year start talking in Russian first. I guess they think we're from Russia. I know there's many here since the start of the war with Ukraine.

The walk back is one block. Laura asks if we can stop by the juice shop. 🍹 The four of us get two to share. So tasty, the fresh orange + fresh pomegranate combo.

We see Bruce at the intersection.

We're back at the hotel and we have about 20 min before we need to gather to leave for the celebration dinner.

I lay on the bed for about 5 min. Could have napped. We need to change. Bruce pairs up his microphone/speaker unit to my phone so I can join the AMAA board meeting taking place in Paramus, NJ which starts at 17:30. I'm able to listen in for about 30 min, but once we arrive at the place it's too loud to continue.

It's raining. The place has an open section.

The area has been set for us for 68 people? Local leaders from each location are also invited. Badveli Arman & Saida arrive! Bruce and I did not know. It's over a 3 hour drive one way, and he has church tomorrow. We're expecting the church will be full since those who wanted reading glasses we told them they'd need to come back to worship on Sunday.

At some point the rain lets up, so the live music is able to play. Most of us dance. There's also a live fire show that tells the history of Armenia.

Hope you got to see the pictures of the cakes. One for each team. Such detail in the decorations!

Al & Sue have some acknowledgments. Very sweet.

Karina sits next to me on the bus back and we continue our conversation.

I hug our driver Arman. He was wonderful.

Very hard to say goodbye. Most are leaving on a 10:50 flight to CA with a connection in Paris. Bruce checks. Looks like it's almost back to normal after the outage on Friday.

I drop off some goodies to Karina to take back to the US. I get to see her sketchbooks of pencil drawing and watercolors. Wow. She had brought them along thinking she may have time to draw/color. 😊

We're all torn that it's over. Bruce made a comment when he spoke to the large group on the Saturday at the beginning of it all that you may be unsure now, but at the end you'll say to yourself what else could I have done this week that would be more impactful. Very true. Praise - that while we lost 5 at the beginning due to covid, they were able to join at some point, and no others got ill.
+ Intentional conversations that took place that bonded the individuals.

Request - all people of Armenia to be drawn fully to Jesus.
+ The incredible staff here with the AMAA and the ECA (Evangelical church of Armenia) which oversees all the churches.



thank you,
Christine

Sunday, July 21, 2024

Last night Bruce mentioned that it'll be nice to not have to wake up to an alarm this morning. I woke up on my own.

Jane asked when I write these. I work on it throughout the day. If I'm up before Bruce, I'll write. I'll add notes and fragments during the day. I add to it at night, then send.

The artwork in our room by the bed, only one piece in the room, is the exact one as our previous room at this hotel! I wonder if they got the same copy and just put that in the rooms. It's an impressionist piece of a street scene at night in the rain.

I checked in with the large group that's flying out today. At 09:00 they had just checked in their luggage.

The large group made it to the airport, but I hear some of their flights from Paris to the US has been delayed. Karina says that there are some Armenian athletes for the Olympics on her flight!

The dining area feels so empty. There are not many people at the hotel today. We're also missing the majority of our team members. I have breakfast with Lucy, Edma, Scott & Nancy. Bruce and Laura join as I finish up. We're going to be walking to church for worship.

We say goodbye to Lucy as well.

At 10:20 we (Bruce & I, Laura, Scott & Nancy, Natalie + Gina) start walking to the Armenian Evangelical Church on Marshal Baghramyan Ave. I had encouraged Chris & Barb to attend as well. They left before us with Edma.

As we arrive, I see Arpi & Sevag Sarmazian! They live in Toronto and are vacationing as a family!

Vartan, my cousin, is outside waiting for us. We go inside and sit with auntie, Kegham Keri & Dalo auntie. Sevan helps in Sunday school.

As I sit, there are four pastors at the altar! The pastor of the church, the intern, Badveli Harout Selimian (from Aleppo), Badveli Hovhaness Hovsepyan (minister to ECA)! Bruce and I are excited to see him and wave and he waves back.

The church is packed. Interesting since in the US in the summer, the Armenian churches seem to be emptier since people travel. Here, there's people who visit, so it's always full in the summer.

Badveli Harout gives a great message from 1 Kings 17:17-24. I feel badly for Chris & Barb, Scott, Nancy & Laura who don't understand any of the service. I think it would be wonderful to have the translator units that we had for our clinic days during worship for this. But then you need someone who will translate.

After the service, I find out that Badveli Harout's wife and family are here. I'm excited to see his wife since I have not seen her in 50 years! We were childhood friends in Aleppo when I would visit my մեծմայր (grandmother) for the summers. Her maiden name was Shoghag Apartian. There's a very long family history. I will simply say that her father Badveli Barkev Apartian, was like a brother to my mom and her siblings. Or he was like another son to my grandparents. We see each other and we quickly recognize each other and hug. Her mother is also here and when I see her and hug her I'm overwhelmed with emotions and start crying. Shoghag's two adult children are also here.

It takes a while to see everyone. We finally leave, order two Yandex cars (Russian equivalent of Uber) and Vartan drives his car. There's 12 of us. Vartan, Sevan, Paleny, Bruce, me, auntie, Laura, Scott, Nancy, Kegham Keri, Dalo auntie.

Vartan takes us to Jano. It's a restaurant that used to be in Aleppo and they've moved to Yerevan. We arrive at 13:30. There were a few things I had not eaten yet, or wanted to have again, and we got them all! It was so delicious. We were all so full.

We then head towards Victory Park. We get one large Yandex taxi. The steering wheel is on the right side! That's hard to drive if you're driving on the same side as everyone. There's a bust of my maternal grandfather's cousin - Aram Bey Cholakian, who led the Zeytoon resistance. There's also a Cholakian street. Auntie reminded that we've carried that name in the family. My uncle Aram, and my son Luke Aram.

We then walk through the park and the amusement park. Vartan drives a few, while the rest of us walk. It's still early in the day for the park to be packed, but there are some children on some of the rides.

We then see a monument Bruce and I had not seen before. The Cascade Memorial to the Victims of Soviet Repression, or "Cascade Memorial", for short, is a monument dedicated to the memory of the victims of Soviet-era murders and deportations. It sits atop the Yerevan Cascade, next to an obelisk that commemorates 50 years of Soviet Armenia. According to current research, the Cascade Memorial was designed by Jim Torosyan, Yerevan's chief architect between 1971 and 1981, and was constructed in the late 1980s and completed around 2008.

Inside the large concrete structure, a memorial slab has the inscription of "To All Your Souls on Fire", from the "Frenzied Masses" poem by Yeghishe Charents who himself fell victim to the repressions in 1937. Jim Torosyan's father, Petik Torosyan, also was arrested and executed in the 1930s. In the 1930s and 1940s, thousands of Armenians were deported and executed. As of 2023, the formal status of the Cascade Memorial remains unclear, with no institutions claiming responsibility or ownership. Currently, a group of activists are the main caretakers. The Cascade Memorial has a small memorial ceremony taking place on June 14, the formal day of remembrance for the victims of Soviet repression. Though it has been closed to visitors for years, it has recently reopened (confirmed on July 21, 2024), and is worth a visit. (This section from Wikipedia. We had no idea what it was so we researched while we were there.)

Mt Ararat is not really visible today. You see a faint outline. We then walk down the stairs of the Cascade. At this point it's just Bruce, me, Laura, Scott & Sevan. We stop at each level to see the artwork/galleries. At some point Vartan & Paleny join us. We come to the ground area where there's a beautiful garden and that's where the rest of the group is, waiting on a bench. We finish around 18:00, then walk towards the hotel. It's a 20+min walk, and the plan is to stop for ice cream on the way.

We pass through the artist portion of Vernisage. There's some beautiful paintings. If I could take some back, I would. Too difficult to take a canvas oil painting home. There's a painting that reminds me of Karina. The dress she wore to the celebration dinner, and the way she is dancing, so free.

We see a beautiful dalmatian dog as we're walking.

Shout out to Sevan, she suggests we go to Froze gelato with auntie to get some ashta, (Arabic ice cream). Six of us get it, while the other six get something else. It is delicious. The last time I had it was in Montreal many years ago.

We walk back to the hotel and I check auntie into her room. We say our goodbyes. Not easy. We are so thankful for this time together. Lord willing, auntie wants to come back next year if we come.

The driver will take them (Laura, auntie, Scott & Nancy, and Sabeen) to the airport at 02:00. Thankful to Laura for escorting auntie back.

We are in our rooms around 20:00.

As I finish writing, Bruce learns that President Biden has dropped out of running for president. That almost feels like a different world.....

Praise - such a packed memorable day.
+ Seeing Shoghag and Mrs Apartian.

Request - safe travels for team members.



thank you,
Christine

Monday, July 22, 2024

Not a good night for me. I slept 60-90 min, then was awake for a bit. I got updates from Laura. They got to the airport without any issues, as well as the gate. Their takeoff was delayed by 40 min, but they have time in Vienna.

At one of the times I woke up, I did my devotional. Beautiful teaching on John 20:1-2, 11-18. A few things I'll share. Like Mary at the tomb, have I ever felt that Jesus was missing? Where are you Lord? That's a tough place to be. Even though circumstantial evidence seems to show that Jesus is missing, He's not. He's not even dead anymore, but resurrected!

Also, the idea that the Roman soldiers may have done something to Jesus' body, as Mary feared, suggests that we can choose to put Him somewhere else, and control when to bring Him out versus being subject to Him. How do I live my life? Under the resurrected Jesus? Or under a Jesus that I control?

We will be checking out of the hotel today.

All of Bruce's Postgres community meetings that have taken place have occurred/ scheduled once we arrived in Armenia. A few days ago he was asked to speak today at the National Polytechnical University of Armenia. He will give a talk on "Data Horizons with Postgres". He will be leaving a bit after 09:00. I'll pack, check out and wait for him here.

Nerses & Sevan, one of the songs we sang at the service yesterday morning has stuck in my mind. It's called Քեզմէ Ի Չաւա. Any chance you have a recording of it?

Bruce had set the alarm, so we're up. We have breakfast with Chris and Barb. We find out from Chris that as of this year, the Armenian government, as a result of pushback from pharmacies, is only allowing three months supply of prescriptions. 😞 We, the AMAA medical mission team, used to be able to give a year's worth. 😞x∞

Bruce needs to leave. I get to visit with Chris & Barb a bit more. They leave to do some walking around Yerevan. Tanya, they're delighted that you've connected with their daughter!

As I get a plate of fruit, (apricots and a special type of plum have become daily favorites) Gina who served in Vanadzor & Stepanavan asks if she can join me. She had walked with us yesterday morning from the hotel to the church. We have about 30 minutes together getting to know each other. This is her first time in Armenia. She's a speech pathologist, working in the San Diego area.

Around 10:30 I'm back in our room to pack.

Yesterday Lucy thanked me for having those hard faith question/conversations with Ari. I'm thankful that she noticed, and encouraged me.

I don't know if I mentioned, but my phone has an eSIM and it's very easy to communicate locally if you buy a local physical SIM card. You can switch easily from the eSIM to the SIM. So I would suggest that for anyone coming to visit Armenia. You can get the cards at the airport. 30 day plan is very cheap. The company we went with is VIVA. The internet is very fast, even in the Syunik region with all the mountains.

Trying to connect with Nanor over the last few days, and then in a matter of 20 min or so all falls into place. I rush to check out, leave our luggage at the hotel and get a taxi to her address. Turns out one of her past graduated student (from Hidden Road Initiative), is getting released from the military and there's a "red carpet" reception when this happens. He served for two years.

I arrive to her street, and then from there we drive to the home of the soldier. She's a good driver. We get there, the place is decorated, you'll see from the pictures. The family and friends are waiting for him to arrive.

In the meantime, Bruce has finished his lecture. It's actually at the Philip Morris Science international, R&D center. He takes a cab directly to the soldier's home.

Turns out the mom has two sons, the older one finished his service four years ago. Now her second son is coming home. Their father left them years ago. It doesn't need saying that she's super thankful that her sons are alive and not hurt physically. They insist that Nanor and we go upstairs to their apartment, but we need to keep moving.

Nanor has to be at her office by 14:00, first day of the year for HRI. We drive back to her shared office space which is by the train station. We have lunch together. She will be teaching

freshman seminar at AUA starting this fall! We pray for her as she will start her new year. Her dog, Coco, has been with us the whole time. We're glad we got to see her. Lorelei had sent a gift to the 13 year old boy she tutors via zoom for HRI. Gift passed on to Nanor.

We then take a taxi to Ani Grand to get our luggage and be picked up by Anahid, director of AMAA Camp Shoghig in Hankavan with driver Asatur. It will be a 70 min drive. We will be serving there in whatever capacity they need us.

<https://amaa.am/en/programs/summer-camps/>

This site used to be a pioneer camp during the Soviet years. AMAA had purchased and renovated. Arrive at 15:40. Stunning views again. Many mountains, but these are covered with trees. We're in room #14. I make the beds. They have sheets + towels! I did not know what to expect.

After I make our beds, etc, we go to the lobby of our building to meet Anahid. We find Badveli Vartan Apinyan in the lobby as well! He's the pastor of the Vanadzor church and we had served there last year with the medical mission trip. We sit down, the four of us, and they give us some general information about the camp. Due to construction, camps are five weeks this year. Each week there are 185 children and 40 helpers. Groups are broken into sets of 8 children to one helper. The cabins are 89beds (4 bunk beds) and single bed for the helper.

When the people from Artsakh came as refugees, they quickly accepted 200 people (max capacity) from Sept - June. They also worked an agreement with the Young Life camp next door to house some.

There are some additions to the campsite. It's hard to visualize all this from pictures and brochures. We're glad to be here to see this.

The Dr on staff is Nareg. He seems to be in his late 20s.

Anahid shows us around. At this time the children are doing their rotations. Smiling faces everywhere. The air is crisp. There's sun, but it's not hot. It's really stunning. I'm eager to see if we'll see stars tonight.

A few children are intrigued by us. One girl especially, named Angel (with a strong g as in lǵ) was very curious. She came over to talk to us.

We get back to our room around 18:30, and will hang out here until dinnertime at 19:30. We lay on the bed, and must have fallen asleep! Next thing I know it's 20:00! We miss dinner. I joke to Bruce that we just arrived and we've already failed. We quickly get outside and walk towards the dining room. We see Badveli Vartan and Anahid. We apologize that we've failed so quickly and they laugh and say it's common for people who come here in the mountains, elevation is 6,500', to feel the need to rest. Badveli sits with us as we eat our dinner.

At dinner Badveli asks of our testimony. We share. We also confirm the timing of camp. They run camp for six full days, the seventh day, the current campers leave, while the new ones come. The staff and some of the leaders don't get a day off. They do this for five weeks! He's the Badveli of the elementary age camps.

At 20:30, Bruce has a meeting he needs to attend via Zoom for one hour, I join the campers in the sanctuary for their evening games, songs, skits. I'm amazed at the energy level.

If I understood correctly, 60% of the children are from our churches, while 40% are outreach. There are many that need a scholarship which the AMAA provides.

At 22:00 we say our goodnights. The room leaders have left with the children. The staff and helpers are meeting. We start the day at 07:15 with a short devotional. Badveli Vartan asks if I would lead. I agree. I will pray and see what the Holy Spirit guides me to.

Praise: time with Nanor

- + The natural beauty of the campsite.
- + The ability to have the time to be here.
- + Ministry taking place in the name of Jesus at camp.

Request: Team members still traveling.

- + May I get a good night's sleep and hear the Lord's direction in what I should share tomorrow morning.



thank you,
Christine

Tuesday, July 23, 2024

Auntie, Laura and her parents have all arrived, each to his home. Thank you for your prayers.

We're tired when we go to bed last night, and I wake up in the middle of the night, but am able to fall back asleep with listening to Matthew 5 ➡.

We are ready to gather at 07:15 for the leaders' devotional, prayer time. As I lay in bed last night, I felt led to focus Jesus' character as He served and that's the model we should use. There's over 30 people in the room, and these are not the room leaders for the eight children, but over that. They stay 1-2 weeks. The Badveli, his wife, Anahid, kitchen staff, etc stay all five weeks.

After a few words, I ask if one of them would read Matthew 20:25-28, and Philippians 2:1-8. (I found out last year that when I read in Western Armenian from my Bible it was a bit harder for them to follow). I then encouraged us to serve as Jesus did. Humbly. As He modeled. I thanked them for what they are doing, by serving in unity and sharing Jesus to the children.

Badveli then said it would be a time of prayer, and asked me to close.

One of the leaders showed how to cut a paper to make a cross. The focus for today is that we are all հաղթական (triumphant) through Jesus. After that, there was coffee and some snacks.

Bruce and I had a long conversation with Badveli Vartan and he shared about his congregation and church life at Vanadzor. (3rd largest city in Yerevan). There's 300 members, church is growing. They have prayer time each day, Monday-Thursday every week! People come. Active men's group as well. 🥰 The church is thriving. Last year they took a week off from serving and just gathered to pray daily. They are repeating that model the first week of Sept and adding fasting. There's so much he shared. We should praise God for how the Holy Spirit is welcomed and working in that community. For a year now, he has an assistant pastor - Badveli David. There was a need. Badveli David is taking care of the congregation so that frees him to serve here for five weeks. He's thinking they may need to go to double service at some point in the near future.

We then join the children. They are separated by cabin and are reciting their memory verse of the day, Proverbs 12:19. (See video). Badveli puts us with one group of boys, and it's time for the Bible lesson.

Person who taught the Bible lesson is Esther. She's been coming as a camper since she was three. She's been serving as a leader for five years. This is the ideal model. Later I ask Anahid how common that is, she says it is. Esther's been here one month, will leave tomorrow.

Yesterday they wrote on a paper airplane their sins. Then scratched on top. But realizing that we continue to sin. Esther cuts the paper airplane, and when she opens it's a cross! (See video). The children exclaim in surprise. She then passes the cross and asks three children to say what comes to mind when holding the cross. It's evident which children are from churches, since there's a maturity. They're sweet boys.

Breakfast is at 09:30, they pray as a group before entering the building. Badveli's wife asks the children to keep their camp hats on while outside since the sun is strong. Each child is given a camp hat on their arrival. (They're asked to take off while praying and eating).

At breakfast, at 09:55, Badveli and Anahid ask me to lead the kitchen staff in a devotional at 10:20 for 15 min, including prayer. Gulp. Not all in the kitchen staff are believers. I really need the leading of the Holy Spirit. There's nine women. I read from the same passages and I did this morning, but what I share is different. These women have been working since July 1st. I look at their faces. Some look tired. Some smile and look eager. Some have a stone face. I thank them for their service and how they are serving Jesus. I also encourage them that when we are tired it's easy to get irritated with each other, perhaps not speak kindly, etc. I encourage them to forgive each other, give each other grace as Jesus has loved us and forgiven us. I ask if there's anything specific to pray for, and no one says anything, so I pray.

As Bruce, Badveli and I leave the women and walk towards the sanctuary, he marvels that is exactly what they needed to hear since there's been some minor issues between a few of the women. We praise the Holy Spirit for His leading.

Today's Bible character is Noah. How he was ridiculed/teased. We watch a cute animated short film (Pixar style) about a dog who attended a school to become a service dog, but he was small and was mocked and teased, then he saved the life of a blind girl. After that he was welcomed.

The children then had small group time with their cabin mates to do their Bible lesson. Badveli directed me to a woman and I was to follow her to the cafeteria. During the walk, I thought that if I was asked to speak to the women working in the kitchen tomorrow morning, that I read to them the story about the Samaritan woman. I then had the thought could we show them the scene from The Chosen? I mentioned it to Bruce. If we could play it in Russian with Armenian subtitles. He started to play around with testing that.

(Later on in the day when I had a chance, I asked Anahid and Badveli of their idea of showing The Chosen, and they thought it was a great idea. Anahid is very up to date with the episodes.)

We entered the cafeteria, and sat around the table. These are 12 youth helpers in games, crafts, skits, etc. they mentioned that they had spent the last few days reading through Romans and they had stopped with chapter 12 so chapter 13 would be next. So I looked at the woman who walked me over. She looked at me expectantly. I said you want me to teach? She said yes. I am so out of my comfort zone. I like to be well prepared. The Lord is showing me how to lean on Him more. Fortunately they all had Bibles. I asked them to give me a moment to read the passage. I read the chapter quickly in English so that I could familiarize myself with what's there. Romans 13 is not a simple chapter. Is any chapter in Romans simple? We took the passage in chunks. And I did what we do on Wednesday morning Bible study. After reading a section, I asked what we observe and then we talked about how that applies to our lives and I pressed them for personal application. We had some really good discussion. We were

transparent. I even asked Bruce to share a time when he did something but his heart was not in it. I think it helped them to see an adult be vulnerable. I translated for him. We had 30 minutes to go over the chapter and pray. All of the youth serving have gone through camp as campers. This is what we want to see. Those being served desiring to come back and serve.

The children are divided into groups, group of 8-9 children and called by country names. The Germany boys - Nareg, Robert, Hamlet, Nareg. Samvel is the clown. 30 children from their church. They ask if I will come back next year. They ask me to cheer for them when it's their time to play football. The games are 6 min long so each group gets a chance.

The children are not shy about coming over to practice their French or English. 😊 They assume I know French before English.

Angel, with a strong g as in the 2nd g in gigantic, keeps coming over. Something there.

Two college age women come over to practice their English. They are helping as small group leaders. They are from Artsakh. One lives in Yerevan and one in a village. We talked with them for a bit.

We then have lunch and today's dessert is ice cream on a stick. They're by Grand Candy, and I have one as well. They're so creamy!

After lunch, there's quiet time in the cabin. They encouraged all to take a nap. You don't have to say that twice to us! It's 15:00. I sleep an hour and half! 😊😴

Bruce is still asleep. I leave and let him get up on his own.

There's another camp next to us. Owned by a rich man. There's a camp going on now and they're always playing loud western style music. It feels out of place. You can hear it from our camp. We can see/hear the children from our room window.

I come out seeing Anahid working for the next age grouping. Currently, we are in 8-12 year olds, 6 full days, travel on 7th day for 5 weeks.

13-16 year olds start on 7/31, for 4 weeks, 5 full days.

17-30 year olds start on 8/20.

I then start walking towards the open courtyard with the green cover. As soon as I'm approaching Robert and Nareg run towards me and they pull me. They say come we're starting a game in a few minutes you must watch. They grab the single chair that's available, put it in a spot on the grass and they surround me. I say wow this is such a high honor you're giving me. They start just surrounding me as they're talking. Each one wanting my attention. They're such sweet boys. Another Nareg did his talent two days ago. I ask him to sing. He has a voice that is really powerful for such a young age. I encourage him to continue singing. He says the Lord has gifted him with his voice. I find out the duduk player who played last night is Hamlet. I tell him how much I enjoyed his playing. He's been practicing for five years. I encourage him to continue.

They have a team game now. They receive their instruction and then start their game. They go to different stations, and each station has a different timed challenge. Very clever games and the children are fully enjoying them. When the whistle blows, they run to the next challenge. Either the station holder or the team wins in each station so they get points per station. Yvonne, I think Paul would enjoy seeing these games.

When they're done the eight stations, they come back to the open area with the green cover. Their points for each game station get tallied up. There were a total of eight games. Based on their score, they get a clue in the form of a paragraph. The ones with the lower score get their clue a minute later. The final prize is a watermelon for that team. We did have watermelon at lunch, but I guess it tastes better if you're the only team eating it. 😊🍉 This game/activity only happens on the fifth day of camp.

We have 30 minutes for dinner. The tables are already set by numbers so they sit together as a cabin group each time. By the end of the week I'm assuming they all bond really well. Bruce and I get the routine and by breakfast today we're already helping to clean up.

I've lost track of what day it is.

We then go to the sanctuary for the evening songs, skits, stories, talent show.

As we finish at 22:00, Anahid says Nareg (yes, another Nareg), her husband who works for the AMAA is on his way and would like to see us. He's leaving early morning. We wait a few minutes. He arrives. We had a good conversation, the five of us (another colleague) in the open air. We finish up. I ask them about their prayer requests. The main request is for funds so that they have a building for activities when it rains, which is often up here in the mountains. When it rains, the children only have their cabins to hang out in. We pray for them.

It's 22:45, time to shower and get to bed.

Pictures (same link):

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/1fAYd8CWBmPxYL496>

Praises: a beautiful day

Requests: Stamina for those who are here for many weeks.



thank you,
Christine

Wednesday, July 24, 2024

Forgot to mention earlier from the time of the medical mission trip. Dr Argisht is from Yerevan, he joined our team in Sisian. Very sweet young Dr, doing his residency in cardiology. He has one year left.

In Armenia, you don't get paid while doing your residency, but you pay them!!! The hospital or wherever you're doing the residency. To support himself, he's also working as a Dr on an ambulance.

Also, yesterday Bruce and I had a long talk with the Dr here, Dr Nareg (yes, another Nareg). He's a pediatrician and he's serving as the camp Dr his first time. He does not know much about the AMAA and/or the medical mission. He does know Dr Gor (pediatrician who works at the AMAA Yerevan clinic and helps us at this end with the medical mission trip.) Anyway, the point with Dr Nareg was, I

told him about the children's teeth at Sisian, and last year in the other regions we served. The lack of dental hygiene even for adults. Many who are in their 60s+ have many missing teeth or some gold teeth. I'm sure for the elderly it's due to being under Soviet control. But, now that's not the case, could he as a pediatrician encourage his patients and the parents in good dental hygiene? He realizes this is an issue and says that is something that has not been corrected yet with all of the people. Education is needed in this area.

And Lisa, and perhaps others to answer your question about camp. Bruce and I came two days early to have time with family. We also wanted to stay a few days extra to help by supporting/encouraging in whatever way possible. Last year we stayed a week extra in Sisian to visit Lena's family and we met Badveli Arman and his wife Saida.

Before we left, I was in connection with Badveli Hovhaness (head minister of ECA) (please see <https://amaa.org/the-evangelical-church-of-armenia-in-eastern-armenia/> for more details, if desired) and Aren (charge of AMAA Yerevan) as to where they saw a need. After a few emails back and forth, it sounded like we'd be at Camp Shoghig, but we really didn't know for 100% until we saw Aren at the AMAA tour on Saturday with the medical team. I didn't want to mention our after days in my emails until I knew what they were.

While I'm a detail person and Bruce and I like to plan, or know the plan ahead of time, you have to keep yourself very fluid while you're in Armenia. I believe I can add the Middle East as well to that fluidity. But it works. God is stretching us.

So here we are. Even when we arrived I was unsure what we'd do. I told Anahid & Badveli Vartan, "let us know how to help. We want to serve." We're serving! That was the goal.

Oh! Also, I mentioned yesterday that Bruce and I were helping to clean up after the meals. After the devotional time with the kitchen ladies yesterday, I noticed at lunchtime when I helped they were surprised and smiled at me, and some even said, ոչ, ոչ (no, no) as in you should not be doing this. I'm thankful for how the Holy Spirit led to discuss what I did yesterday, since it matched in me serving. And Bruce also helping, that's even a bigger ոչ, ոչ: A male guest helping! I know Badveli wants me to lead the devotional with them today. I'm eager to see if some of the stone faces will soften. I'm not judging. These women are my age and older. I don't know if I had been in their situation(s) what type of face I'd display. 🙄 It's only through God's grace I've had this path. Everyone has a story, there's ministry to do with all ages. Not just the children, but the adults as well. What a privilege to serve.

Time to get ready for the day.

At 07:15 we are in the gathering area for the morning devotional time for the staff and team leaders, this is the large group. I have something prepared in case Badveli asks me to lead. We sit down and he comes in, we say good morning to each other. And then I think oh he's got this today. But then a moment later he approaches me and he says would you like to lead? I thank him.

I felt led to share the John 5 passage on the healing of the paralytic. I read John 5:1-9, and then shared some thoughts on that passage. There were a lot of nods and a uhuhs within the group. The points I wanted to make was that it's odd that Jesus asks the man if he wants to be healed. Obviously he's been trying to heal himself. He cannot heal himself. Only Jesus can, but He won't force Himself on us. We all have some type of paralysis either physical, emotional, spiritual, we need Jesus to heal us. We have to invite Him to heal us. The second is that the man was obedient and picked up his mat on the Sabbath which would have been a sin. But he placed being obedient over what the world said to do. And also realizing that since he was a paralytic for 38 years his muscles would have been non-existent, yet Jesus must have also created instant muscle tone because he was able to stand and carry his mat. His legs and arms now had muscle tone. What an amazing God we have. We then spent some time in prayer and Badveli had asked me to close our time in prayer.

I should and should not marvel at the work of the Holy Spirit. He always leads. We need to be still and listen. Lately He's showing me to be listening to Him as He speaks in a whisper.

Afterwards we have a few minutes for coffee/tea. Four small group leaders approached us, and it was good to get to know them a bit. They are college graduates, live in Yerevan, and attend the House of Hope Church.

I thank Badveli for the opportunity to share the two mornings. I mention that not all would be willing. He thanks me and says we learn from each other. He is so thankful for us being here. He says it is a tremendous encouragement. 😊

At this time the children gather under that large area with the green cover, to go over their theme song. It's a really catchy tune and it has stuck in my head. I've asked Anahid for a copy of it. She will send it to me. It's not on YouTube yet since they want to keep it as a surprise for the following campers.

It's about being on a flight, get yourself seated on a journey with the Lord. It's a sweet song, I'm hoping I can share it at some point with you. As they sing there are body motions, and I love seeing not just the children engaged but all of the teenage and young adult, middle-aged adults, my age adults participating with all of the movements with such energy. (See videos).

Then they break off into small circles with their leader to learn and memorize the verse of the day. The boys from the Germany team see me and they call "Christine". Bruce and I go over to them. Apparently there was some misbehavior last night in turning on the lights when it shouldn't have been so they lost some of their points. Their points are in the form of an airplane stamp in their country passport. They're hoping they can make it up today. I believe they were in first place before they lost those two points.

Now it's time for their Bible lesson. I purposely don't join the Germany group because I'm concerned Bruce and I may be a distraction. As they leave there's another small group of girls who come over, and they ask if they can recite their memory verse in English. They do it so beautifully (see video). It turns

out these children are from the Avedisian school. Some of them are even classmates with Paleny! I decide to join their group and there's a group of girls and there's a group of boys. Bruce and I sit with the boys as Anahid, this is a different Anahid, teaches them the Bible lesson.

She gives the example of when we have a plant in order for the plant to thrive you need to prune it, water it, and need some light etc. Just like a plant our parents take care of us, nurture us, give us the proper education. Part of that education is so that we can grow in our knowledge of who God is. We learn to read so we can be in His word, the Bible, (Աստվածաշունչ) so that we know how to live. We allow Him to prune us. It's really a beautiful way to explain to children that God prunes and it's good that He prunes. And the purpose of our growth is to be in His will and to glorify Him.

The word for Bible in Armenian is literally 'breath of God'. I've always loved that.

After the lesson is done and the children run towards the cafeteria for breakfast, Anahid shares a little bit about her background. Turns out she left Artsakh in 2020. She has one daughter named Sona who has written a book and it's been published through the Avedisian school. Her daughter is 15. At one point when Anahid first left Artsakh, there were 21 people living together. Her brother's wife died at the age of 39 from lung complications from covid. She took care of his children for a few years. She has three children. I later found out she was the principal of a Shogh center in Artsakh. That was funded by the AMAA. <https://amaa.org/shogh-day-centers/> I'm thankful she has a position in the Avedisian school, and is continuing serving in the gifting that she has.

After breakfast I will do the devotional for the kitchen staff. We start at 10:15. I thank them for their service, I smile. All but one smiles back. They saw Bruce and I serve yesterday, so that helps. I first read about the Samaritan woman from John 4, and stop at times to talk about it. A few of the women are nodding along and uhuh-ing. Bruce then has his laptop ready, with the additional speaker which we had brought for the mission trip devotional time, and we play the scene from The Chosen. Season 1 episode 8, of the interaction of Jesus with the Samaritan woman. (Anahid, call director, loves The Chosen, and I also got green light from Badveli to share this scene). It's about 7.5 min. Bruce plays it in Russian with Eastern Armenian subtitles. At the end, almost all are crying. I pray for us, and I'm crying.

We then have about 30 min before I lead the teenagers who are helping at stations. We will need to cover Romans 14. We have 30 min with them. Bruce and I pray for the Holy Spirit to speak through us, and praise Him, He does!

One teenage helper is from a broken home. Mom is an alcoholic, Dad is abusive.

Another young child comes from a single parent home where the mom is very promiscuous.

Bruce goes to our room to check us in for our flight, I go to the meeting area where we meet at 07:15. It's really a spot for leaders to work and hang out, if they need. Anahid (director) is

there. I share the picture with the kitchen women with her, since a few asked for it. She then suggests we talk. I don't want to keep her busy, but she seems to want to talk. We go for a walk, all the way to the entrance of the camp. I ask her to share her testimony. We stop and talk. We talk for over an hour. I'm so thankful for this time we had for me to hear from her heart a few things. She is an incredible woman!! I'm so thankful that she's in our community. Her work is Christian education. She married Nareg in 2019 and he works for the AMAA. She writes with a team the curriculum for camp for all three age groupings. She also writes the Sunday school curriculum for all the churches in Armenia so the children are studying the same thing!

We walk back towards the sanctuary area since they're doing some ground work where we were. We join Bruce under the old Soviet camp circular area. We just start talking together. As we're talking, in the natural transition of the conversation I ask will there be a camp picture? She looks at the time, and yikes, the picture was happening now! She realizes she's ignored some messages. She quickly lets them know we're on our way. The group is waiting, all arranged, in front of the cafeteria.

Anahid insists that we be in the group picture since we've been part of camp. At lunch, Christine, Vana, and another young woman who all served in the AMAA medical mission trip in Vanadzor are here for a short visit!

We take a nap. So do the children.

I find Anahid, the one who was from Artsakh. I want to hear more of her story. Oh, so so difficult. 😞 She and her immediate family were spared and they came to Armenia in 2020. She told of some horrific days. How she tried to take care of the families who came to the Shogh center that she was principal of.

18:30 it starts to rain. Everything needs to stop. The children run to their cabins. I head to the common area for staff. This is a request Anahid shared with us last night. When it rains they really have no place to go outside from their cabins. Funds need to be raised for that. One week of camps this summer, it rained for several days.

Bruce has returned. He was playing soccer with the children. He's soaked. In a few minutes, it's pouring.

At 19:40, the rain stops. Bruce calls me. There's a double rainbow. 🌈🌈 We're excited, since we don't get to see them that much. We tell the staff walking by, they're so used to it it's not a big deal for them. After all, we're not that far from where the first rainbow appeared. ❤️🏕️

After dinner we head to the sanctuary for the last time. It is the last full day for the children. Buses/cars will arrive at 09:30 tomorrow for pick up.

I'm amazed at the amount of fresh material they've prepared each day. The evening time is 90 minutes long of non-stop material. The theme song is stuck in my head.

At one point Anahid says, Երեխաներ, դուք գիտեք, որ այս մի քանի օրերին մենք մեզ

հետ հյուրեր ունենք: (children, you know we have some guests with us these past few days). They all turn around and look at us, we're seated at the back. Some children from the Germany team stand up and wave and blow kisses. ❤️ Anahid calls us to the stage. We go up, children clapping and cheering. 🥳 The ones on the end have their palms out to give a high five to as we go up. Anahid shares

some very kind words about us, and thanks us for being there. They gift us each with a fuse bead cross keychain, the craft they were making the day we arrived, and give each of us a baseball hat. She asks Badveli Vartan to pray for us. This was so unexpected, and so sweet.

At the end, many children come for hugs. Some leaders as well.

We are back in our room around 22:20. I had done almost all of my packing earlier in the day. We will sleep until 00:15. Since it's foggy, the driver wants to leave at 00:30 for Zvartnots airport in Yerevan.

For those who are interested: Catherine's degree ceremony is this Friday, July 26. It'll be at 8:30am EST. Here is the link, if you want to watch. Most of it will be conducted in Latin.
<https://www.podcasts.ox.ac.uk/odc-livestream>

Pictures:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/XWUmtibqBtt42tmG8>

Praise: for a memorable time in Armenia. It feels like a dream.

+ The Lord stretching Bruce and me.

Request: good dental hygiene education for all ages in Armenia.

+ The children as they go home. May they share about Jesus with their family, and may their families be open to hearing them.

+ Energy for those continuing to stay.



thank you,
Christine

Thursday, July 25, 2024

Not our finest moment. I set my alarm for 12:15 instead of 00:15. At one point I woke up thinking, this is the longest almost two hours! I thought about getting up to see the time on my phone (not close to bed) but thought better if it. We woke up to a knock on the door. It was Badveli. It was 00:35. Our driver had wanted to leave at 00:30. Oops. Fortunately, there was very little to add to luggage and close things up. Everyone (leaders) were up. We said quick goodbyes.

Anahid Simonyan is the camp director and got her Christian education degree from NEST in Beirut, Lebanon. I also found out that she's a musician, and has recorded several faith based songs. The theme song of the week, I think it will be for all the youngest age camps, is written by her and Viktoria Hamb!

Got in the car at 00:45.

Our driver is Samuel Mughisian. Moved to Armenia from Aleppo in the 1940s. An older man, he's been working for the AMAA for 27 years.

The road is foggy, so he has to go slow. We are also at high elevation. 6,500'.

We arrive at the airport at 02:20. Our departure is scheduled for 04:45 to London with a connection in Vienna.

After two gate changes and two delays, we're boarding. We land 45 min late. Our connection to London was 1h15min, now we have 30min to make our flight. Saving you drama, we get on a bus to be driven to the plane. Last ones on. Europe is a bit of a mess with delays, the captain said the Frankfurt airport is closed, has been for 4 hours (at that time) due to climate demonstrators glueing themselves on the runways.

We land. Our luggage does not make it. I have never seen so many bags waiting on the side that have arrived late and need to be delivered to owner.

We fill out the claim form, and he says it's scheduled to arrive on the 19:30 landing, probably won't get to us until tomorrow. I tell the gentleman my daughter is graduating from Oxford, I can't go dressed like this. Literally, there's a dress code. I'm not being particular. He puts a note to try to rush it.

At 11:30 local time, 2 hours 10 min after landing we're on the Blue bus to Oxford.

We arrive at the hotel and as we're checking in, I hear, "hi mom" behind me. It's Catherine and Nathan (her finance)! Oh it's so good to see her. I hug her a long time.

We have a late lunch together. Walk around Oxford together.

Tomorrow will be a long day with the four of us attending a fancy reception starting in the morning and then commencement.

Thank you for following along on our journey. We're scheduled to fly home Tuesday.

Pictures:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/1fAYd8CWBmPxYL496>

Praise: seeing Catherine

+ Drs Chris & Barb made it home. They left Yerevan Tuesday and had delays, slept in a city, lost luggage. But they're home!

Request: for Bruce to have a ticket to attend Catherine's commencement. She's been trying to get an extra ticket.

+ For luggage to arrive before commencement. Everything starts at 10:30.



thank you,
Christine

Friday, July 26, 2024

Today's the big day for Catherine! We're very proud of her accomplishment. We're thankful we can be here to witness this day.

I'm wearing one of her dresses. A good friend of hers lent me shoes (I only had sneakers). 🥰

We got the final figures for the medical mission team. Amazing results. (See picture) Our smaller team was on par with the larger teams. 😊

There was a reception for the graduates of Wolfson College at 10:30. Catherine had been trying to get an extra ticket for commencement since April, and had been praying. Right at the end of the reception, another student had an extra ticket and gave it to Catherine! An answer to prayer. Thank you Lord. Bruce can attend versus watching Livestream from the hotel.

The commencement exercises were at The Sheldonian Theatre. It's a stunning building, inside and out with a pipe organ which we heard while waiting.

What a day! My heart is so full of gratitude for God's goodness over her.

22:50, luggage arrived.

Pictures:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/1fAYd8CWBmPxYL496>

Praise: the number of people we were able to serve with the medical mission. May they grow in their faith.

+ Catherine's accomplishment

+ Extra ticket for Bruce to attend in person.

+ For our community who has prayed over Catherine through this stage in her life. Thank you!



thank you,
Christine

Tuesday, July 30, 2024

Bruce and I are on the airline (blue) bus from Oxford ➡ Heathrow airport. It is now 09:50. The bus is running late.

At our hotel, we had a buffet breakfast each morning. Bruce and I fully enjoyed the plain/chocolate croissants. 🥐❤️ They were very fluffy.

Three weeks, four hotels. When we get home, we have 36 hours at home and are off for a week to western PA, Ohio & Kentucky. We're very thankful to Bruce's boss - Michael - who insisted that Bruce still go on the medical mission trip.

It has been a lovely five days with Catherine. We covered a lot of ground. Did some new things for all of us.

The weather was sunny & mostly cloudless all days except the day we landed. We had some light rain, off and on that day. Thankful for the weather as well.

Nathan left Monday morning and arrived safely. Lord willing, Catherine's flight is Thursday.

We've noticed internet is faster and more reliable in Armenia versus England!

During some of the down times, I thought about our time in Armenia and Oxford. Almost all that we've experienced during the last three weeks has been what one may say "once in a lifetime experiences". I was thinking of the joy of the ordinary/routine things back home. A cup of coffee in my mug. Doing laundry. How to fully appreciate & be thankful for those things and not put them at a lesser value to what we experienced these three weeks. How to fully live the verse in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." I also came across this article a few days ago about cultural genocide taking place in Artsakh. 😞

<https://www.christianpost.com/news/azerbaijan-destroying-armenian-churches-heritage-sites-report.html>

Our bus not only was late, but was delayed en route. I just kept repeating the surrender prayer.

"Oh Jesus, I surrender myself to you,
Take care of everything."

We arrived at 11:51, from the central bus terminal, we ran towards the bag drop shortcut and the agent saw us running, we told her we had a 13:00 flight, she said you have 9 min for the bags. She undid some roping and let us to an open agent. Kindness. The agent quickly got our bags. Even with Catherine's extra items, I was way underweight for both. We then ran towards fast check due to Bruce's United airlines status.

Quickly through security.

The terminals said our gate area was another 15 min with the walkways. We walked through them all. Got to our gate.

Landed at Newark airport on time. Now the drive home.

Pictures, same link:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/1fAYd8CWBmPxYL496>

thank you for reading my musings,



Christine