

Travel Journal
Compilation of emails sent

AMAA Medical Mission Trip
in Vanadzor and
Gyumri, Armenia

with additional days in
Sisian and Yerevan, Armenia

December 6 – December 18, 2024

by
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Pre-Trip Email

Thank you for following along on our AMAA medical mission trip this past summer. We were grateful for your prayers and believe the impact was due to your prayers.

At our Zoom team debrief meeting in August, led by Dr. Al & Sue Phillips, Dr. Chris Tashjian shared that he felt led to take a small crew for clinical work in December. As Bruce and I prayed, we felt led to join Chris. We mentioned it to our children, and our son Matthew and his wife Laura, and our daughter Catherine wanted to join as well.

Much planning has gone into this, and it will be a full week. I would ask for your prayers as we leave this Friday. I am unsure if I will be able to send any updates. I am thrilled to be sharing this ministry with my family members and Chris. This is our itinerary:

- 12/5 Thurs Chris departs from Wisconsin
- 12/6 Fri Momjians depart Philadelphia
Chris arrives to Yerevan
- 12/7 Sat Momjians arrive to Yerevan
- 12/8 Sun Worship at the Evangelical Church of Armenia on Baghramyan in Yerevan
Lunch with Christine's family
Drive to Vanadzor, set up clinic at the Armenian Evangelical Church in Vanadzor
- 12/9 Mon Clinics in Vanadzor
- 12/10 Tues Clinics in Vanadzor
- 12/11 Wed Clinics in Vanadzor
Break down the clinic, drive to Gyumri
Set up clinic at the Armenian Evangelical Church in Gyumri
- 12/12 Thurs Clinics in Gyumri
- 12/13 Fri Clinics in Gyumri
Break down the clinic, drive to Yerevan
- 12/14 Sat Bruce & Christine and Chris drive to Sisian
Visit Lena's family and pastor & his wife at the church. Keeping this flexible to see how the Lord will lead.
Matthew & Laura and Catherine stay in Yerevan
- 12/15 Sun Matthew & Laura and Catherine depart Yerevan and arrive in Philadelphia
Bruce & Christine and Chris worship at the Armenian Evan. Church in Sisian.
We're keeping this time flexible to see how the Lord will lead.
- 12/16 Mon At some point, Bruce & Christine and Chris return to Yerevan
- 12/17 Tues Morning left open to see how the Lord leads
Bruce meets with some tech people in Yerevan, speaks at a gathering
- 12/18 Wed Bruce & Christine depart Yerevan and land in Philadelphia
Chris departs Yerevan

Friday, December 6, 2024

Our flight to Montreal kept getting delayed. No way we'd make the connection and we'd be stuck in Montreal. We delayed getting to the airport to think of our options.

As we were headed to the airport, we got a text message from Air Canada that our departure from Philadelphia to Montreal has been delayed by one hour due to mechanical errors. At the moment, we are unsure if we can make the connection in Montreal since it will only give us 25 minutes.

I told Bruce & Catherine that I'm emailing for prayer support. Catherine said, "the prayer warriors". Thank you for your support.

Got to the Philadelphia airport. Air Canada sent us to United. United booked us through Newark. We now are waiting for an Uber to get from Philadelphia airport to Newark airport. Flight departs at 19:00. The Uber driver's GPS showing us arriving at 18:15. He has a full tablet set up in the middle dashboard playing a playmix of pop-rock, and disco. Full with video. The word takeaway from that is "funkeytown". Unsure if we'll be able to get on our flight.

You know how you're doing something and the door closes and you don't know if you should persevere or not? Well, we were there.

We got to Newark at 18:04, the kiosk would not issue the boarding pass since it was within the 1 hour window. We went to the United agent, she tried, I even gave the story that we're on a medical mission trip, she tried some more, but no.

We regrouped and asked the question. Is the Lord closing this door? Or were we to persevere? Did the enemy not want us to go since it would be an impactful mission? We considered a few options, and got in line. The one that made the most sense was a Lufthansa flight at 20:10, out of - wait for it - JFK! It would be JFK to Frankfurt to Yerevan. Gets us in at 03:50 Sunday morning. The agent rebooked us. Got e-tickets. He advised that we go to terminal B by rail to check in. We did that, but the agent at terminal B said no, we could not check in.

We ordered an Uber and are on our way to JFK.

At gate!

Thank you for your prayers! And your encouragement.

Saturday, December 7, 2024

Bruce got a hotel at Frankfurt airport since we had an 8 hour layover. We slept, ate at the lounge. Hard to believe it's only been 24 hours since we left home!

A God thing that this last flight has all five of us sitting all together! We were separated by couples on the last portion.

Sunday, December 8, 2024

[Pictures](#)

Long day on very little sleep.

We woke up to attend church service at the Armenian Evangelical Church on Baghramyan St. It was a full house, and we heard their choir. In the summer months, their choir does not sing. The service was wonderful, and the sanctuary was decorated. My uncle got emotional in seeing me, since when we said goodbyes in the summer, he thought he may not make it to summer 2025 to see me.

The [schedule](#) was to have lunch with the Armenian team members at the AMAA office attached to the church. Fortunately, my uncle and his family were able to join us for lunch. It was a quick lunch, since by 14:30 we were to leave for Vanadzor.

We were welcomed with the Badveli (pastor) and those who would help us during the week at the Vanadzor church. We set up the clinic. Gor wanted to try a different format, skipping triage. So Laura would be on vitals, Bruce with a translator would be on lab, Catherine would be on urine, Matthew and Chris would be seeing patients along with an Armenian Dr., Dr. Laura, and I would be traffic flow.

There's 13 in the team including the Armenian members.

Headed to the hotel after a delicious meal prepared by a few ladies of the church.

Much to praise God for.

Monday, December 9, 2024

[Pictures](#)

We are a total of 13 on the medical team, six of them being from the US. On top of that number, we have additional helpers from the church for various tasks. For example, one was helping Catherine at urine station.

Last night Dr Gor asked who from our team would be giving their testimony Monday morning during the worship service. We were not prepared for this, since we thought that was a summer thing only. Bruce volunteered. He said Scripture says be ready to give a testimony at any moment. 😊

A few times Matthew needed Catherine to run more extensive tests on a urine sample. He contacts her via a walkie talkie. Reminds me of their childhood days when they used to play with each other, the four children, with walkie talkies. 😊

We saw 91 patients today.

Since it's dark when we're done by 19:00, it's harder to plan outside activities afterwards. A few will go for a walk tonight. Debating if we'll join.

I mention your prayers and encouragement to the team. Thank you! They are very appreciative.

Update for Monday, December 9, 2024

This is such a God thing.

Seven of us met to walk to the center of Vanadzor. During the summer mission trips, the team goes out to get some ice cream. Since it's December, I was thinking maybe we could find a place that had hot chocolate. We started walking, and as we approached the city center, I noticed a shop that was well lit, a coffee shop. We crossed the street and went in. Such a God thing. It's a coffee shop that operates as a Christian bookstore, and a place of prayer and worship on the second floor. The owner is a young man who is working on his PhD in engineering, and just opened this shop beginning of November. He came to faith through Young Life. Goes to a brotherhood church. We knew some of the same people. His schooling is in Yerevan, he was born in Vanadzor. He felt led to come back to Vanadzor. You'll notice the table, it's in the shape of the map of Armenia. We purchased some items. The place is called Altar. Bruce and I felt led to pray for him afterwards. We were so excited how the Holy Spirit led us to this place. And by the way, he had almond milk, oat milk, and cow milk! We were able to enjoy the tasty hot chocolate and the Arabic coffee. What a fabulous night.

Added photos from the coffee shop.

Tuesday, December 10, 2024

[Pictures](#)

Chris gave his testimony this morning during the worship time. The assistant pastor, David, gave a beautiful message as well on Matthew 9:1-10.

Dr. Gor told us that 80% of today's patients were not from the church. So today would be a huge evangelism opportunity. That's why Badveli David's message was on that passage. I love seeing the pictures I was able to snap of the Drs praying with the patients. (I didn't get to catch Matthew).

We helped a total of 98 patients today! It felt like a smoother day. We made some adjustments in the flow.

Bruce is thrilled that he's mastered the A1C test. 😊 I will add, after he's seen so many high numbers in glucose, he's become more aware of sugar.

Before we left home Catherine was saying the station she'd least likely want man is urine. It ended up she's been placed there since the beginning. She's really mastered it quickly and is helping elsewhere when needed. I love how she'll show up asking where else she can help when there is no one at her station.

Bruce and I believe the team has started to connect/bond more. We had to be intentional about it. Thank you for your prayers.

Due to the time of year, by the time we get out to walk at night, it is dark. Hard to see much.

11 of us walked to the Altar coffee shop again tonight. After my update last night, I heard back from three separate people saying they knew the owners of the Christian coffee shop in Yerevan called Altar. I talked to the gentleman working there. I told him I was aware that there was a coffee shop in Yerevan called by the same name, owned by Peter Telian (who is from Fresno area) and his wife Shoushan from Armenia. It turns out they own this shop as well! Tigran whom we spoke with last night is actually the manager, not the owner. So I guess things are going well for them to open a second location.

Thank you for your prayers.

Wednesday, December 11, 2024

[Pictures](#)

We took care of 50+ patients in our half day clinic today. We then needed to tear down the clinic, pack up, have lunch, said our goodbyes and then headed towards Gyumri, which is the second largest city in Yerevan.

The church also has an [AMAA Shogh Day Center](#), which is an after-school program for children, complete with a hot meal. The 60 children who attend are scholarshiped through the AMAA. This shogh center and church is six years old. It is beautiful. We set up the clinic, and had a big surprise for dinner. You'll have to watch the video!

The hotel is the most charming I've ever seen. Each room is different with a focus on a prominent Armenian, and decorated accordingly. Ours is Sayat Nova so we have a "library". Chris' is Gomidas, so he has a piano, (needs a tuning badly). 😊

Nine of us walked around each other's rooms and then the town center and had a pastry. See the pictures!

We'll be a full day tomorrow. If you look at the picture with the stats you'll see we're going to be taking care of many patients tomorrow and Friday.

Than you for your prayers.

Thursday, December 12, 2024

[Pictures](#)

I did not get much sleep last night. Not an ideal day for it. Today would be a full day.

We saw a total of.....ready? 130 patients today + 60 children (mostly from the Shogh children!) that's 190!!!

Everything worked smoothly. Laura gave her testimony at the morning service, encouraging us that God has a good plan for each of us. Badveli Aram gave a great sermon. The associate pastor's wife plays the piano and leads the singing.

Bruce and I have enjoyed talking with both of the pastors of the church, and the gentleman who's in charge of the Shogh center.

We had many helpers from the church.

Matthew's translator/scribe is a neurology resident working in Yerevan, she's originally from Gyumri. Matthew had the idea to have her see her own patients this afternoon since we had so many patients. Chris approved, so that was another Dr available who did not need a translator. I served as Matthew's translator/scribe which was a huge joy for me. 🥰

Patients are younger in both locations than our summer patients.

Catherine trained two church women to do urine station, she helped Laura with vitals. They then did triage once they were done to speed the Dr. They used a room with a plaque that has a familiar name! (See pic) Bruce trained a woman from the church to be his helper in lab.

It snowed today!

One of the children Chris and his wife Barb sponsor through the AMAA came for a check up. He's 14, and he's not as little as we thought! You'll see a picture of them by the Christmas tree.

You'll see pictures of some of the artwork of the children at the Shogh center.

Some from the group went out tonight. Bruce and I stayed behind. I need to pack again since we head back to Yerevan tomorrow. Suitcases need to be ready when we leave early in the morning for a day of clinics.

Since we've arrived, we've been in 4 hotels. It hasn't been a week!

Thank you for your faithful prayers. Thank you for your encouraging comments. You're serving alongside us!

Friday, December 13, 2024

[Pictures](#)

I did not mention in yesterday's email, Bruce and I sat with Badveli Aram during dinner. We covered many topics. As we were talking about faith, I mentioned to him that I was surprised to see a Jehovah witness stand at the Hotel Ani in July. He was not surprised. There is a large playground across the street from the Gyumri church. He said there are Jehovah witnesses there every day, morning until nighttime. The church has the Shogh center daily and there's church activities throughout the week and on the weekends. It's no coincidence that the JW people have a strong presence at the playground. Please pray against their affectiveness.

As I lay in bed last night, I was unable to sleep until 02:30. I ended up taking a sleeping aid. Many things were going through my head, and I just prayed. One of the many items was an overwhelming awareness of God's grace over me. There are so many things He has done for me and how He continues to bless me. This is outside of His redemptive love for me.

Matthew gave his testimony at the morning service. He shared about our experience getting here and the point her made was "if God wants you somewhere, He will make it happen". Badveli Grigor have a message on how all things work together for good. All things, the good and the bad. You'd think they had planned the testimony to match the message. 🤔

Saying goodbye in Gyumri was hard.

We took care of 460 patients over 4 full day of clinics.

Arrived at AMAA center in Yerevan. We got an Airbnb for our one night and M&L and Catherine's two nights. The house is two floors at the top floor of the building.

We had the celebratory/Christmas dinner with the AMAA staff tonight. They surprised Chris and me with a gift.

Saturday, December 14, 2024

[Pictures](#)

Had some drama with the Airbnb in Yerevan.

Had a perfect breakfast of mene-ish and lehmejun.

We said our goodbyes to Matthew & Laura and Catherine. They would spend the day in Yerevan while we traveled to Sisian, about a four hour car ride. Our driver is a friend of Chris, Ara. Chris calls him his Armenian brother.

We saw small Masis (Sis). Masis' peak was in clouds.

We're staying at the same hotel that we stayed in 2023 when we spent a week here. Even the same hotel room, #1. 😊

The three of us spent two hours with Badveli Arman (pastor of Sisian church) and Badveli Sargis and his wife and their daughter Anna, who's a cardiologist in the villages of the Syunik region. Badveli Sargis serves at the church in Goris. Anna served with us this summer whole we were in Sisian. All of these churches are part of the [Evangelical Church of Armenia](#).

Then we had dinner at Lena and Sevag's home. It was a long evening of lots of translation on my part, and many toasts. 😊

Sunday, December 15, 2024

[Pictures](#)

This morning we attended worship service at the Evangelical Church in Sisian. We saw some of the helpers from being here in the summer with the medical mission team. 🥰

After lunch with Badveli Arman, we visited the Evangelical Church in Goris, which is about 30 minutes away. We spent time with Badveli Sargis, and his daughter Anna.

We happened to be there at the end of the youth group meeting. We met the group, and Badveli asked me to say a few words. (See picture).

Afterwards the six of us sat and had some great discussions. Lots of translation again.

Evening back at Lena's home. Another long night.

Matthew & Laura and Catherine left Yerevan this morning at 05:10. As I write, they have 2.5 hours left until they land in Philadelphia.

Monday, December 16, 2024

[Pictures](#)

We had breakfast with Lena's family this morning. The children did not go to school so they could see us again.

Sevag (Lena's husband) brother's three year old daughter has been hospitalized for a few weeks now in a hospital in Yerevan. The family lives in Goris. She contacted [visceral leishmaniasis](#) from a mosquito bite. It's pretty serious and she will continue to be hospitalized for a few weeks. Please keep her in your prayers for a full healing.

The scenery on the drive back was magnificent. God's creation is breathtaking. It was very hard to limit myself from taking too many pictures. We stopped a few times along the route so that we could admire the scenery and take pictures. We saw Mount Ararat cloudless at one point. The Syunik region was so beautiful in the summer, but there's a different beauty with the snow. The drive is about four hours.

We arrived in Yerevan, dropped off our luggage, and took a Yandex taxi to a hospital to visit a friend. (Not Sevag's niece). We needed to get there quickly. We walked back on our return and then said goodbye to Chris for the time being since Bruce and I were going to have dinner with Aren, Anahid and Nareg from the AMAA. Tried to encourage them in their work in Armenia.

I'll let the pictures speak for themselves for the dinner.

We walked back via Republic Square. At one point we were surrounded by four Santas! A full day.

Tuesday, December 17, 2024

[Pictures](#)

For those who have commented on the picture albums, thank you! I apologize for not being able to reply individually. Perhaps we can follow up once I'm back home.

This morning we went to the [AMAA Avedisian School](#). My cousin's daughter [Paleny](#) is a student there. It is an academically strong Christian school, funded by the AMAA.

We first helped the students assemble Christmas gift packages for the church children, and also to other children. Similar to Christmas shoebox through Samaritan's purse. Please see the link for more information or if you want to give towards the [AMAA Christmas Joy](#) program.

We then visited a few of the classes with my cousin and his wife. I love how the children of all ages stand up as you enter a classroom, and also stand up as you leave, out of respect.

We also had a visit with the principal, Dr Melania Geghamyan. She is a strong Christian woman with a deep love for the children and passionate about their growth not just academically, but spiritually and in character.

We met my uncle and his wife at the food court near the school. That was a bonus.

We then made our way back with a few stops.

We met a young Armenian woman at the NY Postgres user conference in the fall of 2024. She was excited by meeting Bruce and when she heard that we would be in Armenia, she arranged the first Postgres user group meeting in Armenia. Bruce will be speaking at 7p on "Making Postgres Central in Your Data Center". My cousin Vartan is attending to learn more about who Bruce is. 😊

We marveled as to how the Lord filled every moment with opportunity to serve.

Need to sleep now. We'll need to leave for the airport at 02:45.

Wednesday, December 18, 2024

[Pictures](#)

As my alarm went off at 02:30 I was dreaming that our driver in Armenia, Ara, had arrived. He was going to take my family to the airport. We were going on a family vacation. Everyone was ready, but I wasn't. I had my clothes laid out, but not in the luggage. Catherine came to help me. I then had to pack for Bruce. 😊

I heard a gentle knock on our door. It was Chris. 😊 We had said our goodbyes last night, but he wanted to see if he could help us.

Side observation, Bruce and I have noticed that the Christmas lights all over the city blink at psychedelic intervals. I would think for someone who has a migraine, it would be unpleasant. Notice in short video.

We're pulling away from the gate and people are still getting settled in their seats?! People have just boarded and are trying to get in their seats.

Our flight is around 05:00 and Chris' is around 09:30.

I didn't get a chance to share in detail about our trip as I did this past summer. My emails have been shorter for a few reasons. I'd like to share two stories. In Sisian, a woman whom we treated over the summer, Melanie, her husband was MIA from the 40-day war with Azerbaijan.

We arrived in Sisian on Saturday afternoon. Badveli Arman had just visited Melanie. During the war, they had sent unidentifiable remains of a body to Europe for identification. She just found out that it was her husband. 😭 Her father is also in the hospital. She has health issues, since she was a patient in July. There are so many challenges here. I thank God for His grace over me. Please join me in prayer for her. I'm thankful she has the support of her church family.

We also heard the story that Badveli Arman and his wife Saida of Sisian have been going to a neighboring village to share about Jesus. The mayor of that town surrendered his life to Jesus! They will be bringing him and anyone else interested to church in Sisian on Sundays. They are an amazing couple. (Someone else told us this. They out of humbleness would not.)

Lots of turbulence on the flight from Yerevan to Frankfurt. One hour in the flight, they asked if there was a Dr on the flight for a serious situation. Where are you Matthew and Chris? Six rows ahead of us. Finally someone came.

Our second leg was a 9 hour flight, which is hard for me. After about 3 hours, I'm ready to get out. 😊

We've landed!

Thank you for your time in reading my emails, your prayers, and words of encouragement during our trip to Armenia. It was a true joy for Bruce and I to go and serve as the Holy Spirit led.

I wish each of you a very Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year. In closing I wanted to share this portion from a devotional: This Christmas, don't watch the face of the one opening the gift. Catch a glimpse of the joy on the face of the giver as he watches the one they love open the gift. And so it is with God. His gift to us was costly. It is conditional. And it is calculated — to benefit and bless you. Claim this promise — and receive it gladly — through faith.



Christine