

## YOU Do Make A Difference – November 20, 2005

When we sit in America or Wisconsin or even Baraboo and North Freedom, we may wonder whether what we do or say makes a difference anywhere. At times, we can think the world revolves around us because we're so important or so busy...in our own spheres of existence. At other times, we gaze at the stars in the sky or a bright orange moon rising to loom over the horizon, and we may think that we are so tiny, so inconsequential that we cannot possibly make a difference in the whole, huge, gigantic world.



*Habitat House for about \$7,200*

Welcome to the world of missions!

That's right! Whether you think you're so important or you're so tiny, you are experiencing some of the emotions a person feels when they are so strongly called by God to leave the comfort and security of the known to serve in the unknown. You are both absorbed in trying to make a difference and in being overwhelmed by all there is to do.

So you call on faith, and it's this faith that pulls us in one direction or another. In my case, it pulls me to this place, to these people.

Through faith, I serve with as much joy in my heart as I can possibly muster. Some days, I'm all smiles. Other days, it's all I can do to smile. Throughout it all, I rely on faith in God to guide me.

Yesterday, Saturday, was a day of awe and wonder. It was a day when faith was all I had to rely on. I was all smiles, though there were times when I could feel tears welling in my eyes and a heaviness in my heart because of what I lived. And all I can do as a result of these emotions is to tell you that YOU—in Boaz or North Freedom or Bay View or Prairie du Sac or Denzer—can make a huge difference in people's lives. And all you have to do to make a difference is to give a little bit of your time or a little bit of your money.

Let me explain further.

In Armenia and around the world, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) implements a lot of programs out of Christian love to help people re-build their lives after famines, earthquakes, hurricanes, wars and other natural or man-made turmoil. It relies on the gifts—talents as well as money—of church-going folks likes you and me.



*One view inside the Habitat house.*



*The other view inside the house.*

UMCOR also becomes a clearinghouse, of sorts, for all the mittens, pieces of cloth, tubes of toothpaste, washcloths, blankets and a million other items donated every year by church members and their friends. We drop them off at church or we give them to a United Methodist Women's group. However we do it, we give and give again. Then sometimes we wonder what ever might become of all those items.

Sometimes, we wonder whatever happens to those things. Let me tell you exactly what is done...and how it feels to be a "representative" of all the Americans back home who give and give again.

Well, in the case of Armenia, those donated items are assembled at the Sager Brown depot in Louisiana and shipped out in large, cargo-vessel-type containers. They're put on a boat, arrive at a port and get hauled by land to a customs house in Armenia. Warehouse Armen (we have three Armens at UMCOR, so Armen Khnkoyan is called Warehouse Armen) talks to the agents and gets the items cleared...without any kind of duty or bribe. They go to the warehouse where Vardan and Harutunyan "Harut" carefully inventory the items.

Meanwhile, groups such as Habitat for Humanity Armenia make requests to UMCOR for items to give to the families they work with to build homes.

As we handed a sewing kit to Gohar, a village girl who stays at home to help her parents since graduating "high school," I recognized that "country" print of light and dark green. There were also a few hygiene kits. Someone sent all these supplies from my favorite store (factions comment, I know.) At the next home, where the mother of five was completely overwhelmed by our visit, we handed her another sewing kit as well as some hygiene kits that included those little bars of hotel soaps, washcloths, toothbrushes and paste.

UMCOR Armenia had allocated several hundred sewing kits, hygiene kits, school kits and blankets to Habitat. A couple volunteers from the UMCOR staff and a couple of my Agribusiness Teaching Center students joined together to do a little work at Gohar's home and then stop at the second home.



*Gohar's dad, UMCOR Aregak loan officer Arminuhi Hayrapetyan, Gohar and UMCOR auditor Alek Tamaryan with gifts donated from Americans.*

You would have thought that we were bringing pots of gold, heaps of jewels, wagons of diamonds. All we actually had were ourselves, a bit of our time and some UMCOR items donated by giving Americans.



That somebody thought enough of these people to donate these items was overwhelming to Gohar, her father and the mother of five. Especially since there was a sense that maybe some of these folks didn't even think enough of themselves to accept these gifts.



*ATC students Haykaz Danielyan, Nana Olgesashvili from Georgia and Anahit Hayrapetyan with the twins.*

One little boy, a fraternal twin with red hair and light eyes, could hardly even look up from the kettle lid he had tied to a string and used as a toy. He was five or so, and shyness, shame and low self-esteem made him cast his eyes to his feet and the lid. Even after a few words in Armenian from me, as well as some encouragement from my students, he really didn't want to raise his head.

And my heart cried.

What does it take to put together a flood bucket for hurricane victims? To gather a few extra bars of soap or a couple extra toothbrushes to send to UMCOR? Can we ever find two hours to ring the bell for Salvation Army? Does a couple extra boxes or Hamburger Helper or tuna really cost so much that we can't drop some off at the local food pantry? Are our old shoes so worn that they aren't new shoes for someone else? Couldn't that too-little or out-of-style winter coat go to St. Vincent de Paul for someone else to wear as new?

But, it's all somebody else's problem, right? I don't think so. It's our problem if we profess to have faith in God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit. We don't need to preach Christianity so much as we need to show our faith as Christians.

I'm not here to preach. In fact, UMCOR is a non-governmental organization here. It is non-proselytizing. That means it's not here to preach or to convert people to Methodism. Rather, my role and the role of UMCOR as well as the gifts we send are to show Christian live. I try to walk the talk everyday without necessarily preaching.



*The house they're building.*

Now, if someone asks me to pray for them or with them, I do. But I see my role as conducting myself in such a way that people will understand what it means to be Christian...not hear what it means to be Christian. I mean, I'm serving in the first Christian nation in the world. About 95 percent of Armenia is Christian and they've suffered dearly for taking such a stand. So I don't need to convert anyone.

But what I see myself as doing is demonstrating how Christian love plays out in real life. And I try to make it real for you at home.

So I want to tell you that **YOU Make A Difference**. Your prayers and donated items and gifts of money and time ringing the Salvation Army bell make a difference in someone's life.



Where they currently live—"rail car" with addition.



*Haykez with the two sisters.  
The fifth child is mentally  
and physically disabled.*

When you serve as a missionary through a team or as an individual like I'm doing here, you might see the difference you make while serving. Or, you have to live on faith that your time here—sometimes cold, lonely and frustrating for you personally—does light a fire to heat the hearts of those lives you touch.

As I listen to Christmas carols this Sunday evening, I write all of this from my heart. If you really want to make a difference this holiday season, forget about spending money for the newest gadget this year. Instead, make a difference...and do it in the name of a loved one who really doesn't need another gadget (even though they might want it.)

Here's what you can do:

- Ring the Salvation Army bell at a kettle near you.
- Donate blood.
- Pray that the Kashmir earthquake victims don't freeze to death nor the children starve.
- Clean your closets and donate that stuff you have and don't need or use to charity.
- Give a little extra in the church plate.
- Buy two of everything at the supermarket and drop off the second ones to a food pantry.
- Collect items for UMCOR and send them off.
- Write a check to UMCOR.
- Spend a day with your local Habitat or attend its Souper Bowl fundraiser in January.

I'm spending Thanksgiving in Tbilisi, Republic of Georgia, with fellow volunteer Marcia Evans, who is serving there until Christmas eve. As we break bread together a final time over here, I'll pray you find it in your heart to thank God for all you have and then give to others because He did give us his only Son....

Peace!

Story and Photos by

Pamela J. Karg, Volunteer through the United Methodist Volunteers in Mission

Serving at the United Methodist Committee on Relief NGO Armenia

14 Karapet Ulnetsu St

Yerevan, Armenia

Tel: +37410 248141 or +37410 282977

Fax: +37410 249215

[www.dwave.net/~pjkarg/](http://www.dwave.net/~pjkarg/) and [www.umcor.am](http://www.umcor.am)

[pjkarg@baraboo.com](mailto:pjkarg@baraboo.com)