



*Zhanna Grigoryan*

## ATC Students Visit Orphanage

*Written by Zhanna Grigoryan, 3<sup>rd</sup> Year Student at ATC*

*Edited & Photographed by Pamela J. Karg, Individual Volunteer in Mission at UMCOR-Armenia and ATC teacher*

At the beginning of February, Agribusiness Teaching Center students visited Special Kindergarten Orphanage located near the Mother Armenia Monument and the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) office, Yerevan. The idea for the visit grew out of coursework 3<sup>rd</sup> year students did in their Public Speaking class during the fall semester. They were assigned to do informative speeches on various non-government organizations (NGO) operating in the South Caucasus region. Those organizations included UMCOR and its micro-lending program AREGAK; Habitat for Humanity Armenia; Heifer Project International (HPI) South Caucasus; Human Dignity and Peace; and AGAPE, a project sponsored by the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

After learning about what others are doing to help the region's countries through their transitions to become free and open societies, the students decided they wanted to do something, too. A few students spent a day helping lay a floor at a HFHA house and distributing UMCOR school, hygiene and sewing kits to the families. Another student attended HPI training to prepare to become a volunteer when she returns to her native Republic of Georgia this summer. Then 3<sup>rd</sup> year students decided to go to an orphanage, and some 4<sup>th</sup> year students joined in the day.



*ATC outside the orphanage*



*Lilith with the kids*

The Special Kindergarten Orphanage was a very comfortable place where children can live and learn. The ATC students decided to buy the children clothes, candies, some toys and also buy the orphanage some vertical blinds to continue building renovations. ATC students donated money during the month of December and several students also donated toys to give the children. In addition, ATC students used money donated by Marcia Evans and Faith United Methodist Church in Ft. Myers, Florida. Evans served as an Individual Volunteer in Mission (IVIM) at UMCOR's AREGAK program in Yerevan during which she also befriended many ATC students. After her 9 weeks in Armenia, Evans saw the needs in various orphanages and entrusted ATC students to make decisions on how to help Armenian children. When Evans left Armenia, she then served 7 weeks as a volunteer at a youth house in Tbilisi, Georgia, before returning home to America.

The children were very happy seeing the ATC students. There are approximately 82 children at this orphanage. They are divided into 6 groups and there are no children at the home older than 9 years old. The staff takes them to the theater and the circus often.

The children are brought to the orphanage for different reasons. Parents have abandoned some of them. There are children who do not have parents and, it is hard to say, there are children whom don't even remember their parents. ATC students agreed they felt lucky to speak to the children and to draw them out, making their day full of fun and laughter.



*Lusine & Nana teach counting*

ATC students said the children were very smart, beautiful and clever. They agreed the visit was a very big chance for ATC to communicate with the children, and the ATC students have decided to visit them and to speak with them again because it was a pleasant for both.

After bringing smiles to the children at the orphanage, ATC students shared in their own smiles of doing something nice for others while eating at Pizza di Roma in the Yerevan center.



*Ararat & toddler*

ATC is part of the newly formed International Center for Agriculture Research and Education (ICARE) NGO and a department within the Armenian Agricultural Academy. It prepares both Armenian and Georgian students for careers in the region's number one industry—agriculture—and does so through an American style of education with all classes taught in English. Support for the department comes from Texas A&M University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as well as grants and public and private donors. Dr. Daniel Dunn of Texas A&M heads the department, which includes both American and Armenian faculty. During the 2005-06 academic year, Pamela J. Karg is teaching Public Speaking and Business Management Ethics. The Wisconsin native is an IVIM at UMCOR-Armenia and became acquainted with ATC, the faculty and the students during a previous six-week IVIM experience at UMCOR-Armenia in Autumn 2004.



*Dr. Dunn & infant—all smiles*



*Martiros & Gaga give pachiks and puchiks (kisses and hugs) to one of the infants.*



*Anahit has fun with kids before their lunch and then candies, while Armine (below) makes funny faces for the children.*



*Besides gifts for children, ATC students such as Haykaz (red coat) and Armine (right) used the money from Faith UMC to buy vertical blinds for sleeping area renovations*



*A POSTSCRIPT FROM PAM KARG:*

*This was a HUGE project for the students and the money Marcia left behind from her congregation as an impetus to helping make it possible. The students organized themselves, collected about \$11,000 drams (almost \$30 US), selected which orphanage, figured out transportation options, got discounted clothes from the maker, met with the drapery people, etc. etc. These were good skills for the ATC students to learn and I am very proud of how well they did in accomplishing all the tasks.*

*But I also mean it was a HUGE project because both the Armenian and the Georgian students are not used to helping complete strangers. They have so many extended family members as well as friends that they have to worry about that they rarely fathom helping anyone else and never complete strangers. So the donation from Marcia and her church had a double impact -- it makes life a little better for the youngsters and it helps build capacity within the ATC students about social responsibility (something I'm teaching this Spring semester to 4<sup>th</sup> year students in the Business Management Ethics class.) For several of these students, I think the experience is something they will remember many years.*

*So THANK YOU, Marcia, and Faith UMC for leaving this contribution. It made a difference many times over!*