

How Is It With Your Soul?...January 8, 2007

By Pamela J. Karg

I promised I'd do a better job updating my website in this new year, and I'm sticking to that resolution...as long as I can! However, searching through all my experiences thus far to try to decide what to share in is a bit daunting.

Do you want to know about the first pouring of gold bars at the Australian-owned mine near the Iran border? All the delicious food I've shared at people's tables these past few weeks? The grand re-opening of the room worked on by the Ohio United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) team at the Gavar Special School? How well this year's students did in public speaking? What my public speaking or ethics students from last year are up to now? Or, should I answer the proverbial question John Wesley, founder of Methodism, put to people: How is it with your soul?

Actually, my soul is very good. Excellent! I still feel my call is here to serve in whatever way I can—whether that means being the unofficial counselor for students or staff at the Agribusiness Teaching Center, tediously sifting through thousands of websites in hopes of finding potential donors for programs operated by the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) or begging friends and family to send this item or that thing which is hard to find here, yet people could really use. This doesn't mean that everyday is great. Like any human

being, I have my ups and downs. However, right now, I know my place is here.

Many of my Armenian friends say my job is “to be nice” or “to smile.” When Carol Van Gorp, my UMCOR-Individual VIM contact in New York, came to visit me in Yerevan, she assured me my job is neither. Yet, that's how some people here view it. And every wise person knows that perception is reality. So while I go through times of desperate loneliness or personal torments when I feel neither nice nor like smiling—and I battle a language barrier that sometimes pushes me to over-reacting—I do my best to let the best, most positive aspects of my character shine through. I do my best to let God shine through me, my attitude and my actions.

To sustain my soul, I spend some time in prayer and reading. While not here to proselytize my faith, I share when people ask about it. In sharing, I affirm my own faith. I've even taught a few people to say a simple table grace before meals and I'm glad I brought along a few used Bibles I picked up at the Baraboo Public Library used book and bake sale.

Like many people, I also need to remind myself of the joy I do have in my life rather than dwelling on the things I think I ought to have in it. I need to pause to take another accounting of how much God has given me. I have several good, close friends who I can turn to when I need



translations, to find something, to talk to, to share a meal with or just the soothing feeling of sitting and reading with another person in the room. From back home, almost daily I get little emails from family or friends that help me stay connected to life there. This holiday season, a couple surprise packages even arrived through the mail or they were hand-delivered by people coming back from the States. All of these blessings are constant reminders that I am not alone. God and you are with me!

And like many Americans I know, work is an important part of myself and, as usual, I pour my heart and soul into trying. I was disappointed and saddened when UMCOR announced lay-offs while other people went part-time because programs ended as donor funds to this region become scarcer. I was touched by the ending of a moment in UMCOR history, the loss of a job for some people, and I continue to search for funds for excellent, necessary programs. People kept saying that a door closing means another door opens. I pray this is the case in a country where unemployment runs 30 percent in the capital of Yerevan and 40 percent in rural areas. How odd it is to be the only person with a guaranteed job—because I am an unpaid, self- and family-supported volunteer!



Now a million more ideas are running through my head that I should share with you. Before I lose the momentum, I will close this by asking you to answer the proverbial Wesleyan question: How is it with your soul as you begin this new year?

*Story and Photos by
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