

# AGAPE UPDATES

January-June 2017

## YEA... IT'S CHRISTMAS AGAIN!!!

"Well, it's Christmas time again, Decorations are all hung by the fire, Everybody's singin', all the bells are ringing out, And it's Christmas all over again, yeah, again..."

Yea... It's Christmas again!!! Time of joy and time for Christmas boxes giving that joy! It's so hard to describe what those mean for the kids ... and not only the kids of Kashatagh region. Everyone in the family is looking forward to getting those, as the joy of the child is the joy of parents & grandparents, many of whom cannot afford buying Christmas gifts for their children. Even those who somehow can, are also happy, as they say that their children do not want what are sold in stores, they want only ... AGAPE Christmas boxes. "It's not just one day joy, you may not imagine, what

those gifts mean for us. There are so many school supplies my child uses school year round. And the socks, the toys, the games, everything in the box... Kids are happy for the toys and games, parents are happy for everything ... for the joy of their kids and for all the items in box that help them save money to be able to buy food for the family." These are the words of one of the parents - Hakobyan Vahanush, who is raising her only son alone.

Like most of the Christmas Event days that day was a nice and sunny day. God was good to the kids as always and the relatively warmer day made it possible for the kids to sing and dance and have fun along with getting their Christmas boxes. Unlike other Christmas events this time the delivery of the Christmas boxes started simultaneously with the performance of the kids who had prepared an interesting show of singing, dancing and entertaining the huge crowd of children and their parents who occupied the huge AGAPE Center making it too small with their presence.

We wish you all could meet all the kids there to see how grateful and happy they are sharing the love of people like you, halfway around the world, who put their love and heart into those boxes along with the nice gifts and send to our children to make their Christmas joyful and their life a bit bearable...

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### GOALS OF PROJECT AGAPE

Develop humanitarian and benevolent activities  
Provide housing and livelihood through partnership with Fuller Center for Housing & Heifer International  
Develop intentional spiritual partnership with those who travel to Armenia

Stand with Armenian people in their service to God;

a. Through partnering with:  
-AGAPE hospital

-AGAPE Children's Home

-AGAPE Christian Education Center

b. Through partnering with: local Armenian community

c. Through partnering with Armenian Apostolic Church

## FEBRUARY-HELPING THE FAMILY OF THE KILLED SOLDIER



The first information appeared in the media was that on September 2, 2016 at approximately 11:30pm soldier Arayik Ordubekyan (born in 1997) received a mortal gunshot wound as a result of the ceasefire violation by the enemy, in one of the military units in the eastern direction of the Defense Army of Artsakh.

Arayik's pregnant mother was informed of her son's death on September 3, and she immediately was taken to hospital, where she gave birth—with a Caesarean section—to a baby girl, the eighth child in the family, on the evening of September 3rd.



Arayik Ordubekyan was from Sonasar village of Kashatagh Region in the Republic of Artsakh. The young soldier was drafted into the army in the summer of 2015.

During the 4-day war in the beginning of April 2016 his father went to protect the motherland and his son as a volunteer and stayed there for several months to make sure his son is safe... A month later after he left the tragic news reached the family...



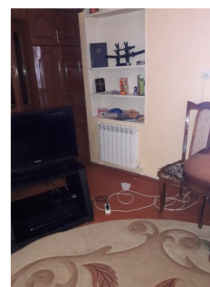
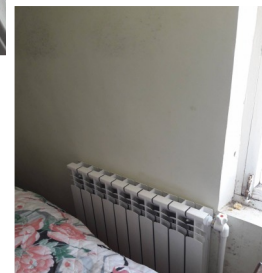
Arayik's last picture with his parents, his youngest brother & his army friend before his death

On September 3rd President Bako Sahakyan signed a decree according to which serviceman of Artsakh Defense Army's N division Arayik Ordubekyan was posthumously awarded with the medal "For Service in Battle" for bravery shown during the defense of the Artsakh Republic's state border.

Recalling 2016 Updates, let's remember the visit of the joint team of the AGAPE Boards members to Ordubekyans family: "The team had also a sad experience visiting Ordubekyans' family, whose son was killed at the Line of Conflict. A donation of \$100 was made through Allan Van Meter by a United Methodist in North Carolina. The team members took into consideration the request of the family to build a heating system in their house."

The project of heating system construction started as soon as funds were available in February of 2017. The funds shared equally by both North Carolina and Western North Carolina Conferences made it possible to buy all the necessary parts of the heating system including the natural gas heater for two floor house granted to the family by the government and pay the specialist to build the heating system with the assistance of the AGAPE staff.

The gratitude of the family is boundless: they appreciate so much the help of Project AGAPE... This is the smallest thing AGAPE can do to let them know how much the sacrifice of their son means to those who would not be safe and even alive, if not the brave soldiers like Arayik Ordubekyan, who give the most precious thing they have - their life, to protect this [last bastion of Christianity](#) in this part of the world - [Armenia + Artsakh](#)...





## MARCH-STILL DELIVERING THE CBs



The delivery of the Christmas Boxes was a long process like it was in 2015 and in 2016. AGAPE staff again faced an uneasy but pleasant task of delivering thousands of Christmas boxes to the children living on the area of about 2111 miles<sup>2</sup> (3,377 km<sup>2</sup>). Like in the previous two years, the Christmas boxes were delivered in two main stages: first - to the children of Berdzor and the nearby communities, second - to the children of rural communities.

The first stage was delivering the Christmas boxes to the kids of Berdzor (the administrative center of Kashatagh region of Republic of Artsakh/a.k.a. Karabagh) and the closest communities during the Christmas event in January and in the week following that event. The special ID cards prepared by the AGAPE staff for each child in 2016 made it much easier to avoid hours of waiting in the crowd, as children knew they could just have fun during the Christmas event and go back and get their gifts any time in a week period they could. Although the question was, how long they could wait to get so much awaited gifts...

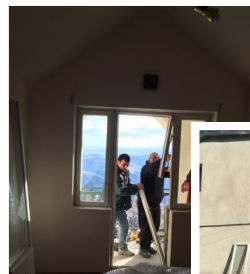
All the children of the region received Christmas Boxes full of nice and necessary gifts. Even those kids who missed a box in 2015 or 2016 for any reason received an extra box, as the data base kept for each year immediately shows whether any of the children missed their Christmas box. The 1943 Christmas boxes sent by Western North Carolina Conference and one 40' foot & one 20' containers with 4550 Christmas Boxes sent by the North Carolina Conference were enough to not only provide the kids with 2017 Christmas boxes, but also to recover the missed by the kids Christmas boxes in the previous two years. 5176 Christmas boxes were delivered to the children of Kashatagh region during the Holy Season of 2017. The Christmas boxes were enough to meet the request of an NGO operating in Yerevan which was started by a woman who had lost her son in the war. The name of the NGO is "Don't mark me absent" and it seeks ways to help the families who have lost fathers, brothers and sons in the Karabagh war and in the last 23 years while protecting the borders of Armenia and Artsakh. Almost hundred kids from families supported by that NGO received Christmas boxes.

As always, the excitement of the kids and their parents who came to get the Christmas boxes for all the children in the family, was boundless, endless and indescribable. And it's not amazing, as their dull and difficult life is getting colors through those gifts, the Christmas Boxes that give the children joy and cheerfulness.

*"Blessed is the influence of one true, loving human soul on another." George Eliot*



## AGAPE CENTER RENOVATION



"The most important project of 2003 was the reconstruction of the burned building of AGAPE Christian Education Center in Lachin (now Berdzor). The construction was completed by June of 2003. A donation of \$34100 was provided for this project. The actual construction expenses were \$37648 plus \$3490 for furnishing the building. The reconstruction of the burned building was very symbolic for the people of Lachin (now Berdzor) because they regained hope for AGAPE's presence in the region which is very vital for them. They regained their "burned hope"..."

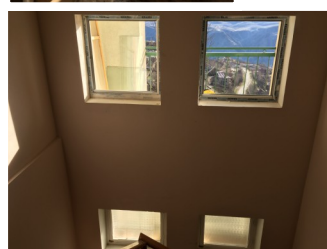
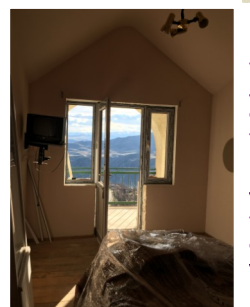


This is a quote from Project AGAPE's 2003 Updates. Right before the building burned, Project AGAPE

had started the construction of the second building of the Christian Education Center because the first building (which burned in February of 2000) didn't have enough

space to host the teams and provide space for the Christian Education Center. After the reconstruction the building was/is used solely as a guesthouse for hosting VIM teams from North Carolina both Conferences and the guests of the region visiting with different missions, as there is no hotel in Berdzor. And the second building of the Christian Education Center has enough space for all the classes at the Center. In 14-17 years both buildings have perfectly and fully served their purposes - the guesthouse hosting countless people, sometimes teams/groups of up to 20 or 30 persons at the same time, and the CEC building serving as a center of spiritual enlightenment and vocational education.

Each facility undergoes a certain wear and tear throughout the years and these two buildings are not an exception, especially if considered the years when they were rebuilt - the Christian Education Center in 1998-2000, that was 4 years after the ceasefire and the burned guesthouse in 2001-2003, not long after it. The issue of finding a good quality construction material at that time was a hard task, and sometimes there was a need to buy refurbished materials to complete the construction. Even the new windows and doors weren't good quality as the economy was just starting to revive after the shock of the well known circumstances. This happened in the case of the windows of both buildings.



In 2016 and 2017 all the windows of the guesthouse were replaced by new modern windows and it was possible thanks to the donations of the teams who "adopted a window" and the skilful staff of Project AGAPE.



## THREE CONTAINERS RECEIVED IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE YEAR

In the first half of 2017 Project AGAPE received three containers from North Carolina and Western North Carolina Conferences - two 40' container and one 20' container.

North Carolina Conference sent one 40' and one 20' containers in January full of 4550 Christmas Boxes for the kids of the region. There were also Welcome-Home-Kits, new bedding, clothing, household, kitchen and sewing supplies, mainly for Syrian refugee families and the people in need.

Western North Carolina Conference sent one 40' container full of bedding, clothing, shoes, health & hygiene, household, kitchen, school, sewing and medical supplies, tools for the warehouse to be used during the house renovation projects and partition panels for organizing the warehouse. There were also Mother's Day Gift Boxes donated by the Armenian Apostolic Church in Charlotte.

The arrival of each container raises contradictory feelings: on one hand it's joy that people in need are going to receive so much needed items, and on the other hand it's worry because of the continuously changing customs regulations and the difficulties related to unloading the boxes in Yerevan warehouse and loading again in the trucks to send to Berdzor. One of the difficulties is the lack of appropriate heavy duty hydraulic pallet hand truck and hand forklift in both warehouses. One of



the two hand trucks in Yerevan warehouse is dead (no one knows how old it is...) and the other is almost dead and the staff continues using it through possible repairs and sometimes with the help of additional means like a rope to "persuade it" to collapse. The boxes in the container that are organized so well wrapped with plastic sheet as one piece on each pallet have to be unwrapped to be moved to the warehouse in Yerevan. The process of loading those back in the container to be shipped to Berdzor becomes more challenging, as the boxes should be organized in the container so, that a space between them becomes another "box" to stuck the Christmas boxes in-between.

Having the hand forklift will enable unloading those pallets in one piece and loading back in the container in one piece.

The Project AGAPE Board of Directors is looking for ways to obtain these important devices. They may be shipped from North Carolina or purchased locally in Armenia if the funds are available.

Nothing shipped to Project AGAPE is wasted and even the plastic sheets wrapped around the boxes find a use: during the distribution of the Christmas boxes they are used to cover the floor in the office to save the flooring, the rug, and most importantly, extra efforts of the busy staff members to clean the floors.





## MARCH-APRIL-MAY - DISTRIBUTION OF HUMANITARIAN AID



Along with distribution of the Christmas Boxes until March the small staff of Project AGAPE managed implementing distribution of humanitarian aid to the socially vulnerable families of Berdzor and several villages. The distribution of humanitarian aid started in March continued in April and May.

Although Project AGAPE is moving towards giving much preference to focusing efforts on long-range development in a variety of fields like housing, cattle & chicken project, Christian & vocational education at the CEC, the immediate assistance in the form of humanitarian aid is still essential in this socially most vulnerable region of both Armenia and Artsakh. The 4-day war in April that destroyed dozens of communities near the boarder which had been recovered in the last 23 years, continuous blockade of 80% of boarders of Armenia & Artsakh, the flow of Syrian refugees and the tension with the neighboring countries on both sides of Armenia and Artsakh highlighted malnutrition, awful housing conditions, unaffordable health issues and other forms of vulnerability and led to a level of poverty not seen in Armenia and Artsakh since 1990s, when the country was curved under the burden of both natural and man-made disasters. The continuous phone calls and visits of the people to AGAPE center could be compared only with the first years of the Project's work in this area, when there were so many people needing humanitarian aid and waiting at the gates of the AGAPE Center.

799 socially vulnerable families or about 3500 people (including refugee families from Syria) from Berdzor and several villages, received new and used clothing, new shoes, new socks, new and used bedding, school supplies, soft and hard toys, infant supplies, new and used coats, new hats and gloves, clothing accessories, sewing, household, kitchen and hygiene supplies worth of \$238,277. And this is only in the first half of 2017. The amount includes the following aid provided to:

- Children's Home - new shoes, blankets, new clothing, new socks and underwear, hygiene supplies
- The two schools in Berdzor - school supplies for their about 450 students
- The school in Karegah - school supplies and sewing supplies for the students and the needs of the school
- Berdzor AGAPE Hospital - medical supplies
- Regional 911/Emergency Response & Fire department/ - 84 new blankets



- Regional Sanitary & Epidemiological Station - medical & office supplies, several new blankets
- Regional Veterinarian station - office supplies,
- The Department of Education and Sport of Kashatagh - 116 new T-shirts
- The Ministry of Culture and Youth of the Artsakh Republic - sewing supplies.

## WELCOME-HOME-KITS FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES

The Syrian refugees who found refuge in the Kashatagh region of Artsakh received Welcome-Home-Kits which is a project initiated by the North Carolina Conference. They were so happy to receive kitchen and household supplies, backpacks full of school supplies, blankets, sewing supplies, **almost everything needed**

**for a family who has lost everything.**

"This is everything we need to start a new life and forget what we have passed through". This were the words of many of those families whose happiness while getting those supplies was just stamped on their faces.

The gratitude of the people receiving aid was boundless as always. The words of thankfulness were accompanied with many blessings, fading desperation and visible hope through expressions many people said: "What we would do without your help", "The only reason I am still here is the hope you give to my family", "Your help changed the life of my family, we survived thanks to Project AGAPE." It's funny that some people identify the word "aid" or "distribution" with AGAPE, as there are some people who call the staff and ask: "Do you have AGAPE?" meaning "Do you have distribution?"

This reminds the words of the 5th century Armenian clergy, Christian writer, philosopher, scientist and translator Eznik of Kolb or Yeznik Koghbatsi, who helped to translate the Bible into Armenian:

***"The demons get together to gain riches & accumulate wealth, the Angels get together to deliver it..."***

***Please know that YOU A'RE ANGELS!!!***





## JUNE - THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION CENTER OPENS ITS DOORS AGAIN



In June the Christian Education Center started the regular classes through different groups. Teaching English As a Second Language, Computer, Macramé, Knitting, Rug Making, Handcrafts, Tapestry, Sewing and

Embroidery classes invited the children of Berdzor to be involved in vocational education and training that gives the children very important skills which will be used both in their everyday life and in the future to find jobs or start personal businesses.

Armenia and Artsakh were part of the largest and the most unified system of vocational education created in the 70 years of the last century, but that system became less effective with the transition of the economies of post-Soviet countries to a market economy. It's very important to make the CEC's work more effective and efficient improving the quality of vocational education in this important facility, making vocational education and training better and more attractive to children and even to young adults, if funds are available to open more classes for providing skills that have high demand in the labor market.

## DINNER EVENTS FOR THE KIDS OF THE CHILDREN'S HOME

Since 1995, when Project AGAPE launched the Children's Home, the children who found refuge and care there, were the priority recipients of the food shipped in the containers. In the first 2-3 years even all of the food was delivered ONLY to the Children's Home (even if it was 10 and more tones). That was the reason many parents in those awful years who were not able to sustain their children in the post-war period took them to the Children's Home to make sure they do not starve. This changed at the end of 1997 and in the following years, as it appeared to be more important to help the families keep the child or children IN the family. So, half of the food was delivered to the Children's Home and the rest delivered to the families in need.

In the last several years, when the amount of food shipped in the containers diminished, the ONLY recipients of the canned food were the children of the Children's Home and Syrian refugee families.

But this changed, too: with the new customs regulations concerning the import of food items to Armenia starting from 2015, which requires special safety procedures, the North Carolina United Methodists are no longer able to send food from the United States unless there is a Food Safety Certification from the factory where the food has been processed. The main cause of this new regulation were kids poisoned by imported food in several Yerevan kindergartens.

Project AGAPE staff attempted to find ways to provide the kids of the Children's Home with nutritious food. Dinner events at AGAPE Center like barbeque dinners, and meals/cakes/pastries prepared and sent to the Children's Home are the optional ways that are carried out from time to time when the means allow.





## JUNE-JULY TEAM FROM WNCC



The first building team of 2017 arrived on June 22nd. It was the smallest team, Project AGAPE had ever had, but the work the team members fulfilled wasn't any different from the work of big teams. Nancy Fisher, Wanda Watts, Cecil Donahue, who was the team leader and John Boring were in the team. For most of the team members this was not the first visit (for Nancy this was the 3rd, for Wanda her 6th and for Cecil ... perhaps the 10th trip), only for John this was the first time in Armenia and Artsakh.

The team left for Artsakh right the next day having some sightseeing on the way from Yerevan to Berdzor.

The team's project was renovating Avanesyan family's house which was not far from the AGAPE Center.

Avanesyans' family living in that house is a big family of six - the parents and their four children - two daughters and two sons. The family is one of the Cattle Project beneficiaries and this is how Project AGAPE staff learned about their housing conditions.

The father of the family Artyom, has a great story about her grandmother, who during the WWII was the female priest of their village - the only one ever known in Armenia & Artsakh ☺

The house with three bedrooms and a living room was granted to the family by the government considering their social condition and the fact of having many children. It was in a desperate condition. The first task of the team, the family and the AGAPE staff was to clean the walls from oil paint, which was quite a challenge, then replace the old crumbling windows, replace the dividing wooden wall of the living room which was in a bad condition and which made it possible for the family to have an extra bedroom for the boys, and then complete as much as the time would allow.

The team did a great work and most importantly had a great time building not only the house, but invisible ties of great friendship with the family members.

The gratitude of the family was boundless and obvious in their words and actions: they tried to share what they had and what they could get with the team members.

(to be continued)

