

## Sing unto the Lord a new song!

In October our church in Yerevan hosted a “Praise Evening”. We invited all our church members and friends, many of our young people and teens, and the choirs of two other churches. Armenians love “exciting events” and our charity workers didn’t leave a stone unturned, in making the evening beautiful. The whole building was reverberating with action and excitement. The church stage was cleaned, decorated and a lovely banner made for the occasion, covered in colourful musical notes.

Our church formed two choirs and the church children sang two pieces! The two visiting churches brought their choirs and Michael sang

four pieces (in Armenian!) too. Sandwiches and cakes were served in the interval and people were gathered in clusters all over the hallways and stairs of the building chattering and fellowshiping with one another. Several of the old ladies were so excited during the singing, you could see they were finding it hard to stay sitting down. They were grinning all over, swaying to the music and singing quietly (and not so very quietly) along with the choirs.

It was so good to see everyone forget the trials outside, the worries of a cold winter, and family concerns and come and sing heartily to God! Praise and worship are miraculous healers.

## Literature

With the coming of the New Year, the 2011 TBS calendars are being distributed so fast that the pile in our office is going down visibly on a daily basis. This year we have received just over 8000 calendars. Each month has a Bible verse, translated by Sona, in large letters printed on the front and it is amazing the places that these calendars reach. Our church members and charity’s workforce take them to distribute among their friends, family and acquaintances. They are distributed to church leaders to hand out to their congregations in Yerevan as well as further afield in many villages. AM’s local workers take them to all the government offices which we are involved with too. We are often surprised to enter an official’s office and spot a TBS calendar hanging on the noticeboard. We’ve even seen one in the doctor’s office! We have a contact who takes calendars to Karabakh for us, from where they often get into the hands of the young soldiers, and another who takes them into city prisons for us. The calendars, and therefore Bible verses, are hanging behind the desks of doctors, government officials, secretaries, school offices, kindergarten offices, church lobbies...



## The harsh face of poverty

*Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.  
(Matthew 10:29)*

*Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.  
(Luke 12:6-7)*

Every time a new plea for help comes to our attention, I am amazed, once again, at how shocking poverty looks in real life. Theoretically, we have seen all there is to see. We have been into cold homes, seen hungry people, seen mothers who can't afford to feed their children, visited the sick who all their life live with chronic pain that could be solved by a simple operation. In practice however, each new situation that arises, each new person that comes is a shock to the system. Looking into the face of a child who needs help always takes your breath away and makes tears come to the eyes.



A careful study of the verses above demonstrates that sparrows were of such little value that the fifth sparrow was simply “thrown in”. In man's eyes that fifth sparrow was worthless but in God's eyes not one of those sparrows were forgotten. No sparrow falls to the ground without God's knowledge. There are many people here in Armenia who undoubtedly feel like the fifth sparrow. The world has passed them by and no one knows of their existence. Every day, their day's work is simply staying alive – existence in its barest form. God knows about every single one of them and we as His children should make it our mission to find them too.

Recently we received a call for help from a family with six children who have struggled financially for some time. The charity was giving them food parcels once every two months, but their situation has recently become much worse. The recent plea for help came from the mother of the family. Her husband had been taken ill and was rushed to hospital. Not only are they having to cope

**Fear ye not  
therefore,  
ye are of  
more value  
than many  
sparrows  
(Matthew 10:31)**

with the hospital fees but there is now no chance of the woman earning any money to support her family as she must be in the hospital all day to wash and care for her husband. This will also include preparing his food and feeding him. Due to his operation or illness he has become incontinent and they cannot afford the fee required for a nurse to change his bedding, nor can they afford incontinence pads for him to wear. He is in need of daily injections and they cannot afford the syringes and needles required. We have so much in England that we are so ungrateful about – we don't even notice the worries that we don't have! When was the last time you worried about whether you could afford to eat if you were ever admitted to hospital, or where you would get enough bed-sheets from? The lady's urgent plea was for the charity to buy her incontinence pads and enough syringes for his hospital stay. The shopping cost the charity less than £12. An incidental request in the day-to-day work of our visitation team but I wonder how many nights' sleep and how many tears of humiliation it cost that couple.

The charity's yard is currently full of logs that have been chopped and are ready to be delivered as firewood throughout the winter months. One lady approached our local director, Gevork, to ask whether she could sweep up the sawdust from the yard. Her family does not receive help from the charity as they are considered to be "not in enough need". She wanted to take it home so that they could mix it with some oil and burn it throughout the winter. She stated that they don't have anything else of significance to burn to keep them warm apart from what they have collected, some old shoes, clothes and rubbish. Wood is being distributed amongst the poorer families over the next few weeks. In an attempt to make supplies last our charity team take a bundle of wood every month to the needy families. They are hesitant to give it all at once in case a severe winter should suddenly arrive and families literally freeze to death.



All of the homes we have visited over the last few weeks, without any exception, have not yet put any heating on. They are all frightened of cold weather. The gas prices are going to escalate in January and everyone is saving their pennies, or their bundles of wood, for emergency. I have drawn a painful conclusion. Heating, amongst the families we visit, is not put on to make them comfortable. They live in the cold. They only heat their homes when the alternative is freezing to death. Last week we visited a family who we try to help as much as we can and yet their heating was not on. Their house was cold and all of us sat with our overcoats and shivered.

Straight after one of the ladies' meeting I had a heart-rending experience. One of the old ladies got up from her place, moved silently to my side, sat and held her cheek against mine and then cried for about ten minutes. I thought that someone must have died in her family so I tried my best

to say some comforting things while she cried. Finally, she fished into her handbag and showed me two receipts. Apparently the gas suppliers were going to cut off her gas supply as she has been unable to pay her bill for so long. She had borrowed from all her neighbours over the last few weeks and paid off parts of the bill – enough to prevent them cutting her off. However, eventually no one else would lend her anything. Fearful that she would no longer be able to heat any water or food, she had appealed to the charity for help. One of the visitation team had gone with her and fully paid her gas bill (which, for the record, was about £30). She was so overwhelmed that she cried and cried and I tried not to cry as she sincerely thanked the Lord for sending her help at her time of need. We are so grateful to have a small part in being able to be a comfort to just one of His children. She said she had finally received her pension too and at last had some money to go and do some shopping. She had £8 to last her the rest of the month.

One cold autumn morning we visited a lady called Anoush. She lives with her husband and six children in a small room – one room. There was no space for the visiting team to stand in the room, we literally stood and walked round each other. The adorable baby boy took a great liking to Michael and they played together for a while. The baby was sat in his cot – there was nowhere else for him to play and no visible evidence of any toys or books anywhere. The baby was a year and a half old but couldn't yet walk. The lady summed up the situation as "It is not that my baby is a slow developer, it's just that there is no space for him in this small space to walk. Luckily, he is very content and happily sits in his cot all day long".



## “A Thought for Food”

help us give food to extra families through this winter



The charity's visitation team has spent most of the last week (the second in November) in consultation about how to deal with the increasing number of poor people knocking on our door and begging us to put them on the list for receiving regular food parcels. We have, in fact, found ourselves at a crisis point. Several factors have led to dire need amongst the people we support, as they face a cold and hungry winter. The first factor is that the fruit and vegetable harvest was very meagre throughout 2010. Consequently, the prices were very high, to the extent, that many locals we speak to did not manage to bottle any fruit or vegetables to eat during the winter. Bottled and preserved food, along with bread, are ordinarily the staples of the winter diet. A further factor has been generally escalating food prices, with no increase in either pensions or wages.

These factors have affected our charity's food distribution programme to the extent that our ordinary monthly food budget has been forced to almost double. To illustrate the escalating prices – in March, the cost of a typical food parcel was around 4,200 dram (£7.50), whereas the current cost of an equivalent food parcel is around 6,400 dram (£11.20). Consequently, we have removed those items which have gone up dramatically in price, such as buckwheat (quadrupled in price!) and lentils, and replaced them with cheaper alternatives. In addition, every day families turn up at the charity office to tell us that they have nothing left to eat in the home. We cannot turn them away!



A typical food parcel, to feed a family for one month, consists of:

- 1 kg of yellow split peas
- 3 kg of rice
- 3 kg of sugar
- 3 kg of pasta
- 1 kg of corn
- 1 kg of cracked wheat
- 1 bottle of vegetable oil

As you can see it's hardly a Christmas hamper

– its purpose is not luxury but survival.

Will you help us to help them?

*Dear friends, we wish to thank all of you who supported us in any way during 2010. Furthermore, we take this opportunity to convey our gratitude to those who have made anonymous donations, whom we have not been able to personally thank. All of us at Armenian Ministries would like to wish you all a very happy and blessed 2011.*

*Yours by Grace alone,*

*Perouz Harrison*

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