

# Jinishian JOTTINGS

...from poverty and despair to self-sufficiency and hope



## Letter from the Coordinator



Eliza Minasyan

The Jinishian Memorial Program (JMP) is a 45-year-old story about love and support to those in need. It is about helping the desperately poor reach for change as they strive to make

their lives better. This is an ongoing story about extending a helping hand and providing unique opportunities—for those who feel neglected and lost in the miseries of life, and those who are committed to compassion, justice, and care.

The Jinishian Memorial Program has been enabling Armenians in need to move from poverty and despair to self-sufficiency and hope through relief, development, and spiritual uplift. Working ecumenically with the three Armenian denominations (the Apostolic, Evangelical, and Catholic churches) and in partnership with individuals and organizations across the globe, JMP meets the needs of Armenian communities in Armenia and the Middle East, instilling values, developing skills, and creating opportunities for better lives. JMP is engaged in economic and community development, preventative health care, and civil society initiatives. It also provides basic social services and direct relief that help tens of thousands of Armenians in the midst of social, economic, political, and ethnic instability. To remain dedicated to its vision, mission, and values, JMP includes a spiritual uplift component in every aspect of its programs. Our Spring Jottings are devoted to spiritual uplift projects conducted in different sites by JMP staff and volunteers.

Thanks to the growing support of our donors, project partners, and volunteers, we have been able to extend a helping hand to the geographically remote and neglected areas of Armenia and the Middle East. Thank you for your trust and encouragement!

*Eliza Minasyan*

### Announcing 2011 Study Tours to Armenia and Karabakh

June 12-24 & October 9-21

Discover an old country, engage with JMP stakeholders, and make a positive social change.  
www.pcusa.org/jinishian-tour



Building friendships at summer camp in Syria. Photo by Ani Cholakian.

## Life Forever

By Ani Cholakian, Syria

Finding ways to integrate spirituality in our daily lives is important for our human development and our ability to develop healthy relationships with family, friends, and colleagues. Growing spiritually also helps us follow more closely in the path of Jesus Christ.

On May 16, 2010, the Jinishian Memorial Program (JMP) staff and 30 elementary school-aged children from JMP's summer camp program held a performance in Kamishly, Syria, portraying Christ's Ascension into heaven according to the accounts in the Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles. The Ascension Day performance conveyed the meaning behind the celebration of Ascension and reminded everyone that God is within our hearts. The performance also included national dances to celebrate the culture and identity of the Armenian people.

After the performance, several women approached the JMP Kamishly director to express their appreciation for such an event. They said they were unfamiliar with the story and meaning of Ascension. Even though many attend the Armenian Church, the church service is held in classic Armenian which is hard to understand. The women hope JMP will organize other events to provide opportunities to deepen their spirituality. The boy who played the role of Jesus felt honored to portray him, and his parents said they were proud of their son. All the children expressed a passion for performing sacred events and hope to have more opportunities to share biblical teachings they learn participating in JMP activities.

The performance was part of an ongoing youth development project that starts every year with summer camp. The camp seeks to offer children living in poverty a positive, fun, and

safe environment to learn life skills, gain independence, and make lasting friendships. Two hundred and sixty people attended the performance, which raised \$1,500 to benefit the summer camp program and other youth activities.

Visit the JMP website at [www.pcusa.org/jinishian](http://www.pcusa.org/jinishian) to see a short video of the Ascension Day performance.

JMP in Syria operates under the sponsorships of the three Armenian Church denominations.

**April 24, 1915**

the day of commemoration of the ARMENIAN GENOCIDE



Photo by Vahan Stepanyan/PanARMENIAN



Learn ways you can partner with JMP through your donations or by volunteering. Visit our websites— [www.pcusa.org/jinishian](http://www.pcusa.org/jinishian), [www.jinishian.org](http://www.jinishian.org), [www.jinishian-lebanon.org](http://www.jinishian-lebanon.org), or e-mail us at [jmp@pcusa.org](mailto:jmp@pcusa.org). JMP staff looks forward to hearing from you and partnering in our success.

## The Community Christmas Manger

By Taline Ladayan, Lebanon



For four years the Jinishian Memorial Program (JMP) Lebanon staff and volunteers have been preparing a Christmas manger in the Nabaa Bourj Hammoud region, an underprivileged multiethnic urban area where JMP has implemented its community development project. This year the neighborhood committee wanted to have a manger, unique and special not only in its appearance, but also in its preparation.

School students in the area were approached to participate in the preparation of the manger, with the intention of raising the students' awareness concerning community work and community belongingness. The JMP's community development team met the students at school and explained them the importance of their participation in the community life and development projects being carried out in their area. The team explained that a handicraft from one school and decoration from another school could give a special meaning to the manger, and it would become the "Community's Manger," or everyone's manger. Consequently, the students decorated the site of the manger with handicrafts representing decorative stars, a Christmas tree, Santa Claus, and posters with verses from the Bible.

Community members, encouraged by this atmosphere, asked families residing in the area to contribute financially to buy new decorations for the manger. Those who weren't able to make a financial contribution worked to help the group decorate the manger. Many families visiting the manger were from neighboring communities. They took photos and explained to their children the true meaning of Christmas and the Nativity.

The neighborhood's teenagers took the responsibility of guarding the site from vandalism.

When the Christmas season was over and the decorations were removed, everyone was surprised to see someone had covered the baby Jesus with a small blanket; another had placed a rose near the manger. Some people had placed candles and left coins.

The community participation and joint efforts enriched what had become the Community Manger. Community members took pride in their accomplishment. The activity was reported in Armenian newspapers and on a local TV station as an activity that brought the community together.

## Now I Treat People Better

By Eliza Minasyan, Armenia

One of the world's oldest civilizations, Armenia was the first in the world to officially accept Christianity as its state religion. Unfortunately, many decades of communist agnostic propaganda diminished the strong spiritual roots and traditions in the country. As a result of this spiritual gap, children's knowledge about Christianity is very limited and is mainly based on the beliefs of parents who were strongly influenced by communistic atheism. Because of the shortage of churches and priests in many remote communities, children and the population in general have little if any interaction with clergy and only a vague understanding of Christian faith and values that in the past helped Armenians to survive as a nation.

Recognizing the spiritual need to reach people with the gospel and to bring communities back to church, in 2006 the Jinishian Memorial Foundation-Armenia (JMF-Armenia) and the dioceses of the Armenian Apostolic Church started a project called Spiritual Education and Experiences for Children. Currently, the project is active in eleven villages in the Lori and Syunik regions of Armenia.

Two young priests make regular visits to these villages, bringing the Word of God into the hearts of about four hundred Armenian children and teaching Christian values that develop moral convictions. Through spiritual discussions, Bible studies, prayers, celebrations of Christian rituals and holidays, acceptance of baptism, visits to historical churches, and participation in other spiritual activities, the children can identify with their spiritual and religious heritage. Each meeting with the priests is both challenging and uplifting for the children as they try to find the spiritual path that is right for them.

When asked by a JMP staff member, "What has changed in your life since you began attending the spiritual lessons?" a number of children answered, "Now I treat people better."

Father Vrtanes, one of the priests in charge of the project, says, "This project was the will of God and we are simply the hands that perform the will of God."



A young participant in the spiritual uplift and education project.

Photo by Eliza Minasyan

## Hand in Hand We Are Stronger

By Ani Aznavourian, Lebanon



JMP staff and a group of 22 elderly participate in an organized visit to the Armenian Catholic Church Monastery in Bzommar. Photo by Ani Aznavourian

and medical needs. JMP volunteers, women and men of all ages, participate in implementing the activities. Some of the volunteers are JMP beneficiaries who are also faced with poverty and hardship.

Recently, one participant stated, "We thank JMP for giving us the opportunity to participate in these activities. We eagerly look forward to escaping our lonely, dull lives and attending the inspirational gatherings."

Many elderly expressed finally feeling a sense of respect and belonging to a community after being alone for numerous years. The intergenerational community that is forming as a result of JMP efforts to provide services for the elderly has inspired the elderly with the presence of God. Through community prayer and opportunities for spiritual growth, they receive peace and hope.

Miss Arshalouise is an elderly woman who lives alone. Her neighbors help her by providing food and accompanying her to JMP so that she can receive affordable medication for her chronic illness. They also bring her to JMP to attend group gatherings and outings. In spite of her sickness she insists on participating and listening carefully to the priest or spiritual leader who shares spiritual messages on special occasions. She appreciates the cultural and recreational activities and the presence of the volunteer performers and participants. She says she receives emotional and spiritual support to overcome her difficulties, which deepens her faith in God and helps her whenever she feels in need.

Joy and happiness are reflected on the faces of the elderly every time they receive a personal invitation to participate in a recreational and spiritual group activity organized by the Jinishian Memorial Program (JMP) Lebanon. Often with no social security benefits or other social protections, many elderly do not have the resources to cover their basic needs. An often forgotten population in society, JMP reaches out to the elderly to help them with their social, spiritual,