

Canadian Youth Mission to Armenia - 2002

July 1st, a small band of Armenian teenagers gathered in Montreal, Quebec, with a common intent, interest and resolve: as participants in the 10th annual Canadian Youth Mission to Armenia (CYMA), all came together under His Eminence Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, to receive a blessing and warm sendoff as they boarded a Vienna-bound flight, with a connection through to Zvartnots Airport in Yerevan.

As a not-for-profit organization, CYMA's objective is to contribute to the Armenian cause through service projects at various sites throughout the country. Previous missions have served in Ararat, Vanadzor, Dilijan, Dzargatzor, Khor-Virab, and Aradashen; the work has varied from renovation and restoration projects, to house visitations, to day-camp programs for local children. Thus far each mission has been tremendously rewarding, and has left a lasting impact on its hosts long after its conclusion. This year's group was relatively diverse, its members hailing from Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and even California - united by a common purpose: to give to, and gain from their Mother Land - to restore, and be restored by their native culture.

This year's mission returned to Aradashen, a small village in Etchmiadzin who had received aid from CYMA in 2000. Whereas the previous group had renovated the local school, CYMA 2002 ventured to renovate the adjacent gymnasium. For one month, members stayed with host families and shared in the village life. They experienced firsthand the joys of a free and simple subsistence lifestyle, and conversely, the sorrows that stemmed from a struggling economy in an unstable nation-state.

This array of emotion only served to renew participants' sense of purpose. Due to such a persistent and palpable clash of cultures and mentalities, over the course of the project, each member had the opportunity to widen his scope and open his mind. He could share in the laughter of young children at the day camp, the intense competition of the locals on the soccer field, or in the raw passion of the elderly in a political discussion. Through CYMA, he could be humbled by the sight of Ararat from Khor Virab, awed by the architecture of Armenia's many churches and monasteries, and baptized in Lake Sevan.

CYMA 2002 concluded on July 28th at Zvartnots Airport, amidst the small clusters of members and host families who could not bear to be separated. Many promises were made, of return, of remembrance, of stability, and of happiness. Through the legacy CYMA builds each year, these promises can and will be kept.

Ari Najarian
CYMA 2002 participant