

Dear All,

Greetings from Armenia! Christ is Born and Revealed!!

For those wondering...there is no rhyme or reason to the list of people this was sent to. I randomly went through my address book and hit "send" to whomever I came across. Please feel free to share and forward to whomever.

Well, I have finally settled into my apartment in Gavar which is a medium size city in the Northeastern region of Armenia. It is directly East of the capital city of Yerevan. It is at the southernmost tip of Lake Sevan. Gavar belong to the diocese of Kegharkounik which is the diocese which surrounds Lake Sevan. Most of the diocese is water!

I have been assigned by His Holiness Karekin II, to serve within this diocese for the next 4-6 months under the leadership of Bishop Margos, a young (34 yr.) bishop of the church who took over when Fr. Terenig died almost two years ago. Gavar is the diocesan seat and there is a beautiful church right next door which is in the center of the city.

I am now living in Gavar in a small apartment which we are renting. There are three rooms, however I'm only occupying the "living-room" because it would be wasteful to try and heat the whole apartment. So if you can imagine that my bed, sofa, and table (desk) are all in one room. I have two small heaters which keep the place warm at night. Bishop Margos was kind enough to install a small instant hot water heater in the shower so that I can shower with warm water.

To give you an idea how cold it can get, the temperature got down to -16 Fahrenheit three nights ago. It's cold during the day and at night. I keep asking people what the temperature is or how I can find out and they tell me it's better not to know.

I've been spending my days with Bishop Margos at the diocese getting to know how things run (or sometimes not). The diocese consists of three rooms, one is Bp. Margos' office (which he does not use during the winter - too expensive to heat) a kitchen which is the "catch-all" room for everyone and Bp. Margos' bedroom.

Last week I spend a few days in the village of Dzovinar which has a population of about 3000. Real village living, no running water indoors, only a faucet outside...so when you want to clean-up or brush your teeth, it's outside in the snow. As for a bathroom...remember what an outhouse used to be? They still exist. I was able to wash my hair and face in the kitchen when they boiled some water and poured it over me as I bent over a bucket. I tell you this to have you appreciate the comforts that we all have and sometimes forget that we should be grateful for even the small things in life.

Many of you know that last Sunday was Armenian Christmas. I had the honor of celebrating Armenian Christmas Eve Liturgy in the church in Gavar. Church was full and cold!! I don't know

how cold, but I could not keep my hands on the altar for too long, it got too cold. My feet were freeeeeeezeing, but as I said, church was full!! The people's faith is growing! (Below I'll tell you about some baptisms, we use Holy Chrism or Muiron which we have to thaw out before the baptism begins, that's how cold the church is) On Sunday Bp. Margos sent me to the neighboring village called Hatzarad (which means - abundant bread). There, since there's no chalice, we did not celebrate liturgy, but we did the traditional Blessing of the Water Service. They had about six or seven 50 gallon drums filled with water for me to bless. The people faithfully come and take water home all day long into the evening. By Tuesday the water was gone. Following the blessing service, I did 10 home blessing services. It reminded me of village life 100 years ago when the priest went home to home. I wore my Veghar and Black robe and walked through the six inches of fresh snow from one house to the next.

Over the past few days, I've done 19 home blessings and baptized 10 people. It is quite fulfilling. Even though it's cold, the people are warm,

Well, in the meantime, I got a call from my Parish Council Chairman back in Chicago, so I'm going to have to cut this short. I'm working on trying to get e-mail in Gavar. I'm now in Yerevan at a close friend's office at Arlex, Dr. Tom Samuelian who has been kind enough to allow me to use his facilities. I now have to go see my friend Apgar who will give me a haircut and then I'm back off to Gavar with Bishop Margos' driver.

I keep you all in my prayers, and ask that you all pray for me.

With love and prayers,

Fr. Aren

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