

Link Letter No 17 October 2011

Dear friends,

It is autumn here in Nepal and there have been beautiful clear skies and good views of the mountains – a lovely time of year. It has also been the main Hindu festival and holiday time in Nepal. It's a time when many travel to be with their families, and various religious duties are performed.

Travelling precariously in Nepal...

I was just reading a headline this morning in one of the main newspapers, *"The Himalayan"* entitled *"42 killed in Sindhuli bus fall"*. The bus was completely over packed. Unfortunately, one reads of such accidents all too often. The paper's second heading read: *"Road accidents more fatal than diseases"*, and the article discussed how far more people are killed or injured in road accidents compared to the major diseases and ailments here, such as pneumonia, heart disease and cancer.

Travel here, especially at holiday time, is not for the faint hearted. I had the chance to go for a few days trek in the hills while Paul looked after Jennifer. The bus ride back to Kathmandu was awful, with perhaps five times more people on board than there officially should be. I was with a Nepali friend and they were surprised to learn that in the UK for bus travel on long distances, it is "one person to one seat". Here,

Training in South Sudan



Jean and Paul Dobbing
With Jennifer
CMS mission partners
Nepal

on so many buses, especially during the holiday time, people are crammed on the roof of the bus and squashed inside every conceivable space and the buses rock along with their uncertain loads, with typically almost bald tyres.

There is a particular day, during this 10 day festival each year, where vehicles are worshipped with the hope and prayer for safety and prosperity. On this day, I saw that most vehicles had incense, food, flowers and red powder garnished over the front of them and were not used for the day. Next to our house I saw a neighbour's jeep; there was a dead bird with the severed head and body next to each other (I presume offered as a sacrifice), along with various other bits of paraphernalia. I think more safety standards would be more effective! It showed me though, that despite all the technological and educational advances here, that many people still try to appease gods and live in fear and superstition as they have for centuries.

There was also a plane crash recently, on Sunday 25 September, and people thought that it was partly due to bad weather. That same day, Paul was to go to the airport and fly to a nearby town (Pokhara) with a colleague to do some computer work for a Christian development organisation. He heard about the crash but carried on to the airport nevertheless and, eventually, managed to get a flight to the town and was safe and sound.

United Mission to Nepal
PO Box 126
Kathmandu
Nepal
pauljean@dobbing.org.uk
pauljeand@gmail.com

Did you know that you can now receive link letters by email, sent as a PDF? If you would like to receive them this way, and help CMS save money, please contact jonathan.self@cms-uk.org or 01865 787527



With Pastor Amen at the daughter church in the village

There was also an earthquake, on 15 September, on the Eastern Nepal border. I was reflecting on these things and thinking how Nepal – and I guess many developing countries – are not always secure places to be and in a very real way for us living here, compared to the UK, we are pushed to trust more in God and in His goodness.

Shakes at the table...

Paul writes: On the evening of Sunday 15 September, we took a meal round to a friend's house who had recently arrived in Kathmandu. We sat down to a tasty bean stew and were glad to connect with our friends after a busy week and share various stories. As we chatted and enjoyed each other's company, at 6:10pm the table, and items on it, began to significantly shake!

No sooner had my friend and I looked at each other while experiencing this strange phenomenon, that it became clear that it was an earthquake and we all immediately made our way outside. The shaking stopped, and as we grouped outside in the now dark, the ground moved again but this time more like a boat rocking. It happened again and we stood together in a relatively open space watching the building from which we had evacuated from. We stood looking at the dark murky backdrop of the sky and the intermittent flashes of lightning signalling an impending storm. I commented to my friend: *"Why, within only five minutes has our life gone from an idyllic peaceful meal to an apocalyptic scene!?"*

It was a half an hour before we trudged back to the house in bare feet, assuming it to be safe to return indoors. Shortly after, reports came in of casualties in Kathmandu. The earthquake, a deep 6.8 magnitude one, claimed altogether over 100 lives, mostly to the East in Sikkim. A few points more on the Richter scale, or a more shallow earthquake, and Kathmandu would be a very different



Communion

looking place now! Thankfully however, we were safe. Life in Kathmandu and in Nepal can be precarious at the best of times. These guys we photographed a week later at our nearby shop, would have had a calamity in the earthquake!

Over the past year there had been much conjecture over an earthquake which is apparently overdue. Historical data shows there is a major earthquake approximately every 75 years in Nepal, and it is now 77 years since the last devastating one in 1934.

A trip to South Sudan

Back in July, Paul went with a Nepali colleague for a couple of weeks to work in South Sudan. They were invited to install software in a hospital and give training in this. The hospital is now using the computer software to keep track of medical and pharmaceutical supplies, which means that the patients can get the right medicine in good time.

He connected with the church in South Sudan while he was away and happened to be there at a historical time, when the South officially became independent from the North. It was a time of real celebration and sense of achievement. We pray for this, the newest nation, to know peace and to be built up well.

Paul writes: "Our office continues to be busy. We work as a team to develop medical inventory software. In the past month we have released a new version of the software, which contains a number of new features. Working together with the staff is rewarding, as is assisting our customers to use the software to better manage and distribute their medicines. We try to work with integrity and honesty and we pray that people will see the link between our faith and our ways of work."



Paul training in South Sudan

Paul's visit to a village church

Paul also got the chance to go for a weekend trip in September, with a pastor friend to visit a village church and this made quite an impression on him: "Along with the pastor of a local church here in Kathmandu, I visited a village church deep in the hills of central Nepal, as part of a programme of regular meetings. The purpose was to encourage and build up the young Christian community of about 30 strong. So I left behind Jean and Jennifer for the weekend and embarked on a painful five hour motorcycle ride – on pillion – that brought us to our destination: the bottom of a steep hill on the far side of Trisuli, a town built at the meeting point of three rivers and 75 kilometres north-west of Kathmandu. We collected the ingredients of Holy Communion (flour and apple juice) from the town centre, stored the motorcycle in a friend's shed and started the one-hour walk up the side of a steep hill to the small village. It was raining and dark by the time we arrived at the village and we were greeted with a warm greeting and given mats to sit on and traditional snacks.

We then walked up to another house and it eventually became clear that this would be the house in which we would meet as a



The overpacked bus that Jean was on

church, eat our meals and sleep in. The first room of the two roomed house contained a traditional cooking area that used firewood to cook in one corner; in another corner a rack of plates and cups was held. In the third corner there was a tied-up buffalo calf "keeping warm."

Pastor Amen had asked me to give "the message" and he translated my English into Nepali. The young Christians that attended were enthusiastic and keen to learn. Pastor Amen distributed study bibles in the Nepali language, which the younger believers would be able to read but which the older people would have to depend on their younger family members to read to them.

At the end of the sermon Pastor Amen asked the congregation if over Dashain, the main festival period, they would wear 'tikka' – the red powder that Hindus use place on their foreheads during worship. Coming from their lifetime of Hinduism there is evidently a tendency to either revert to their old religious practices or continue to perform rituals as a matter of habit. We moved to communion, which was

The ladies meeting at the Friends' Church



apple juice taken with a spoon from a cup and a small piece of chapatti bread each (flour, water and salt). We went to bed with large sounding insects buzzing about our heads, the smell of the buffalo calf in the corner and a rather chilling story from the pastor from a previous visit of a woman who was demon possessed and through whom another woman was speaking! The pastor was told to go down the hill to the house where the woman was standing, and sure enough she was there. The pastor and others prayed over this woman and she seemed to be helped by this."

Leadership training

Jean writes: I was given the opportunity to teach a few classes on basic Christian beliefs to women from many different parts of Nepal. The organisation doing this training was called "Leadership Training and Development" and is headed up by a Nepali CMS co-mission partner. Each year, there are four or five month long courses for women called "Women's Leadership Training". I will have the chance to teach again on a new course taking place soon. I also enjoyed doing some teaching to women at our friends' Amen and Rachel's church, called "Friends Church". Each year the church organises a four-day workshop for the women over a Hindu festival time where the Hindu women are meant to fast for their husbands and do various religious rituals.

I was recently encouraged because the school I worked with in the south of the country got quite a lot of government funding for two new classrooms. They also now hope to get government funding to print further copies of the books they have made in their local languages and hope that this government funding will come on a yearly basis.

Jennifer

Jennifer turned four and we had a great time celebrating with a few of her friends but we missed our family and friends from home. Jennifer is fine, but her school class teacher left – she was Russian and quite creative and musical. So now she has a Nepali teacher who is okay but perhaps not as skilled and as interactive with the children. As a result, some of the parents have taken their children out of the school – or are thinking of taking their children out of the school – and these children are Jennifer's friends. We decided to keep Jennifer at this school until we come back from the UK following home leave. It does mean that I have to do some pre school stuff at home with Jennifer (basic letter and number work mostly I think), so that Jennifer will hopefully be ready to start in the first class of school when we come back to Nepal after our time in the UK. We hope to send her to the international mission school here

in Kathmandu in August 2012.

Home leave

We hope to come back to the UK for a few months next spring/summer and plans for that are progressing. It is quite a logistical challenge to manage our time in the UK with family, friends and churches so spread out. As well as that, we prefer not to be moving around too much, to create a sense of stability, especially for Jennifer.

I think our next quarterly link letter will come to you in the New Year. So, we hope that this letter finds you well and that you will know much peace and joy in the run up towards, and celebration of, Christmas. It is always great to hear from you. We are very aware of your thoughts, prayers, care and support – without which we could not be here.

Prayer points:

- We have had a few colds and lacked energy at times over the past few months. We ask you to pray for good health and energy for us. Soon, it will be quite cold here and there is little in the way of heating in homes, so it can be challenging. Pray also for our safety and protection please.
- We are thankful for how we are building up good relationships here in Kathmandu. So much so, that Paul wanted to include the photo of the local barber shop where he goes for his hair cut (including head massage) for around 40 pence.
- Pray for the building up of the church in Nepal through training, teaching, visiting. Paul and I are both thankful for the good opportunities we have had these past few months to visit and teach Nepali Christians. We pray also for these opportunities to continue to develop.
- Please pray for our home leave visit to UK next spring/summer. We are excited to meet many of you and are beginning to plan meetings and presentations. Please can you pray for wisdom and help in planning?
- Pray for Jennifer and her learning and fun at school and at home.

Best wishes and blessings to you all,

Jean, Paul and Jennifer

www.cms-uk.org



Church Mission Society

Watlington Road, Oxford, OX4 6BZ Tel: 01865 787400 Fax: 01865 776375
Email: info@cms-uk.org www.cms-uk.org Registered Charity Number 1131655
Executive Director: The Rev Canon Tim Dakin