

## PARTNER PLAN

# Malcolm & Cati Ramsay - Nepal August 2015

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Dear Friends

*Malcolm writes:* It is now just over three months since the two earthquakes hammered Nepal on 25 April and 12 May. A common slogan here in the weeks since then has been 'Building Back Better.' What this means is that – above all – new buildings that are being constructed must be earthquake-proof. Better materials need to be used. Building regulations that were routinely ignored now need to be rigorously enforced. And in a wider sense too Nepal needs to be far more 'disaster-ready.' Stockpiles of essential relief materials, and plans for their distribution, need to be in place *before* the next big earthquake.



Never more to be inhabited-  
Gangabu room 103



Endless household objects in amongst  
the rubble of Bungumati

Our organisation – the United Mission to Nepal – has been allocated parts of an area called Dhading as our responsibility for post-earthquake work. In the first phase of emergency response we in UMN have supplied relief materials to 12,175 homes, many of which were very remote and difficult to reach. In the second phase we are now moving on to a two year plan for rehabilitation and reconstruction. It is a privilege to be taking part in work in which we can try to demonstrate in very practical terms Christ's love for people who have

suffered so terribly. You can read many more details about what UMN is doing in response to the earthquakes, including regular updates, on our website:

<http://www.umn.org.np/>

*Cati writes:* Alongside encouraging news to report however, there are also desperately discouraging situations that we have been able to see for ourselves here in Kathmandu itself and its outskirts. The pastor from our Nepali church took us to see three different areas that have been seriously impacted by the two earthquakes and still now the people there are struggling.



A deserted home in Bungumati

In several cases NGOs have turned up with relief materials only to insist on photographs of their good work rather than actually taking time to talk to the local people and find out exactly what their greatest needs are. In one case an NGO arrived with huge sacks of food, took lots of photographs and then insisted on taking back the sacks! They handed out snacks from within the sacks and headed off to the next area.

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Temporary shelter with a view, Sankhu

In one area called Bungumati, 1100 homes had been destroyed. A Danish People's Aid organisation began building 200 new shelters but this apparently had to stop because of the foreseen conflict and jealousy entailed in deciding who was going to be lucky enough to qualify for one of the houses. All or nothing. Sadly at the time of our visit, the status quo was 'nothing'. No help from the government was forthcoming either, despite promises announced months ago.

In another area known as Sanku people had given up hoping and waiting for help and had taken upon themselves the huge task of removing piles of rubble to try recreating space for reconstruction etc. It was heart-breaking to talk to one old man slowly and laboriously digging down into the vast mound of rubble that used to be his home, in the hope of finding bags of rice etc.

or were seriously damaged by the earthquakes, killing hundreds of people inside. The gradual demolition since then, brick by brick, meant we couldn't see how it had been immediately after the earthquake but some buildings, we were told, had quite literally collapsed in such a way that two or three floors simply disappeared under the ground, trapping people inside. Harrowingly we were told that people had sent text messages crying out for help, but nothing could be done before they eventually fell silent. The volume of rubble combined with the treacherous condition of remaining walls has meant that any bodies underneath are still buried.

All three areas resembled in places a bleak bomb-site where signs of recovery are minimal as people bemoan the utter failure of the government to give them tangible, practical help either in terms of manpower, expertise or financial contributions. We came away feeling drained by the helplessness and resignation of people whose lives limp along with little hope of immediate improvement.



Attempts at clearing vast mounds of rubble that was his home, Sankhu



Several floors literally swallowed up by the ground when the earthquake struck-Gangabu

*Malcolm writes:* Some stories in the media are even more disturbing. Incompetence, greed, and corruption are commonplace. In some cases the sheer inhumanity of some people towards others in distress beggars belief. For example a group of men have been arrested on the charge of procuring women for sexual trafficking in the Middle East. They have deliberately targeted the areas worst affected by the earthquakes, offering 'work' to young women in families that are desperate for money. But, it is alleged, the women only discover too late that the 'work' consists of forced prostitution, not gainful and honourable employment.

In Nepal - as is true for every country on earth – the phrase 'building back better' means little unless it embraces the human heart as well as human homes. The Christian church here is small, but growing steadily in numbers and in confidence. Please pray for the church, and its leaders, that they may live the gospel in such a way that many more are

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drawn into God's good purposes for our world. Surely in Christian terms 'building back better' involves not merely construction codes and disaster plans, but also the recognition and honouring of right relationships - with God, with our neighbour, and with our planet.



Dangerously damaged yet still standing-Gangabu

*Cati writes:* Aftershocks now are less regular but with the monsoon has come the constant risk of serious landslides in areas where the ground has already been rendered unstable by the earthquakes. Every day we read of these around the country. Tragically several landslides on the Tansen road in the past month have killed people with no warning at all. The precariousness of life is brought into sharp focus by ongoing tragedies like this and we pray for protection as people try to get on with their lives.

We have been extremely grateful to the Church of Scotland for giving us compassionate leave recently with which to recover from cumulative exhaustion, both physically and emotionally. We spent it in Thailand and found the complete break away from Nepal wonderfully

restorative! Relishing the absence of after-shocks; and enjoying hot water, 24 hour electricity, and streets that were so clean one could almost eat off them! On one day we had the chance of a day trip to see the notorious Death Railway and the bridge over the River Kwai, which cost the lives of thousands of POWs and Asian labourers during WWII. It was sobering to travel along part of the railway in basic wooden carriages, and then to visit one of the vast cemeteries containing the bodies of young men whose lives were cruelly cut short by atrocious treatment and conditions. In many ways witnessing the many tourists enthusiastically entertained by the opportunities to take endless 'selfies' everywhere was as distressing as seeing the graves. Yet I was deeply moved by the sight of a Thai gardener quietly and meticulously caring for each grave as if it was unique amidst countless others.



Notorious bridge over the river Kwai

With love and prayers,  
Malcolm & Cati



Meticulous attention to the Kwai cemeteries, here British casualties