

PARTNER PLAN

Malcolm & Cati Ramsay - Nepal November 2012

c/o United Mission to Nepal
PO Box 126
Kathmandu
Nepal

Dear Friends

Malcolm writes: A number of people have asked us to say more about our work. Our job description is 'Pastoral Care and Support.' We offer this above all to the expatriate staff of UMN, but the UMN Director has made it clear that we should feel free to offer care and support to *anyone* who comes our way, regardless of whether or not they work for UMN. In addition of course we try to support and encourage the many Nepalis that we meet, though in their case they need to speak good English for us to be able to communicate well – or they need to wait for our Nepali to improve!



John Wesley famously said 'the world is my parish', and given the parameters I've just described above we sometimes feel that 'Nepal is our parish'!



Apparently the most
Comfortable position to wait
for business!

Just as with the work of a parish minister in Scotland the calls on our time are extremely varied, and no two days are the same. Here are examples of some of the work we have been involved in.

* All UMN expatriate staff have an annual compulsory 'personal review' which we have been asked to conduct. This is *not* an assessment of their work performance, but rather a chance for them to reflect on how they are doing spiritually, emotionally, and physically. There is a pre-set questionnaire with questions like '*What have been the most fulfilling and rewarding things? What keeps you here? What are the things that have driven you to your knees?*' After the staff member has filled in the form we then spend

at least an hour with them talking over their answers. This has been a wonderful opportunity to get to know people at quite a deep level, and has led on to many very personal conversations.

* We are now fully involved in the process of welcoming new staff members joining UMN from the very first stage of meeting them at the airport. This is a great way to try to support people, and get to know them right from the start. People are often quite disorientated on arrival, and adjusting to life in a different culture can take time. Practical support is often vital!

* We have been involved in numerous conversations about all the normal frictions and pressure points of life, many of which are exacerbated by the stresses and difficulties of working in a developing country. These include marital strife, depression, anxiety attacks, personality clashes, post-traumatic stress disorder, loneliness, parenting difficulties, and so forth. Many of these pastoral matters are directly linked to matters of faith and belief. For example one young man has found his Christian organisation here in which he is a volunteer (*not* UMN!) to be very legalistic and

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controlling, so I have met with him on a number of occasions to talk and pray about how he responds to the unhappy place he finds himself in.

* We have been booked to lead Retreats for two different organisations, with a third possibility in the pipeline. In these I will lead the discussions, and Cati the music. We have led workshops together, - for example on 'Self-care.' I have preached at Kathmandu International Church when the pastor has been away.

* We travel to other parts of the country as and when necessary to support the staff there. Every two months we go to Tansen Mission Hospital for one week, and early next year we will go to the much smaller Okhaldunga Mission Hospital.

* Before we left Scotland Cati gained a qualification in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), and she is now using this by offering English classes to the Nepali staff at the UMN headquarters in Kathmandu. For my part I have offered to help in an organisation called Development Associates International (DAI). Their excellent website is: <http://www.daintl.org/> So far I have agreed to be the official mentor for two of their Nepali students, and I hope to be used as a facilitator in some of their training courses in the future.



The only means of getting a patient to hospital in Jumla

* Above all pastoral care and support involves being *available*. We never know when someone will appear at our house, or our office in UMN, or when our mobiles will ring, or when an email will bring a cry for help, so we need to be ready to stop what we are doing, and to give our time and a listening ear and a praying heart to whoever has sought us out.

Cati writes: The past two months or so have been unforgettable in many different ways and for very different reasons! Two family weddings next year have inevitably occupied our thoughts and our time considerably! Megan and Tim get married on 4th January in Pencaitland where my mother was born and raised. Angus and Hannah get married on 29th June in Northern Ireland where Hannah's family come from.

We have found it very difficult being so far away at such an important time but it has given us a wonderful excuse for frequent Skype conversations when possible and there have been some emotional moments that will stay with us for a long time! As her mother, I would have loved to be with Megan in choosing her wedding dress, for instance. With the wonders of technology this proved to be a virtual reality because she Skyped us here from her mobile, while trying on the two dresses that vied for her decision. An unforgettable experience thousands of miles apart, getting up here at 2am and 3am to coincide with the shops' opening time in Canada! I wouldn't have missed that moment for anything!



Eating becomes serious business!

Angus and Hannah's wedding plans were turned upside down while he was away in Bolivia on his medical elective. Despite Edinburgh University's graduation ceremonies always falling in the last week of June, they decided to shift everything for 2013 and Angus' graduation was suddenly scheduled for the day of his wedding. Fortunately the church, venue and ceilidh band were all free to switch to the week before. So our second unexpected return to UK in 2013 will include both wedding and graduation in succession.

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Meanwhile, we are looking forward enormously to going back to Scotland in time to celebrate our last Christmas with both children before their respective weddings. During the past few months work in our Edinburgh flat to treat dry rot has sounded alarmingly destructive, and for a while we were concerned that it might still not be habitable by the time we returned. However, thankfully all seems to be on schedule and we should have a bed to sleep in at the very least! Throughout the work needing to be done, we have been indebted to our neighbour Jamie, and my cousin Francis, who have worked tirelessly to get the necessary treatment carried out. Without them we would have been struggling!

An intensely memorable experience of recent months has been a two week pastoral visit to a remote part of Western Nepal where everyday life is utterly different from the life we have become familiar with here in Kathmandu. It involved three day's travelling to get there, the final stretch on a



Breakfast in the early morning of Millet roti and roasted corn

small aeroplane accommodating barely a dozen people. Arriving in a valley surrounded by mountains under a vivid blue sky was just the beginning of a profoundly inspiring, challenging and rewarding journey. Despite this being one of the poorest areas in Nepal, the people we met were extraordinarily generous and hospitable. Every day without exception, we were invited into people's homes to share freshly picked sweetcorn roasted in a wood fire, or a meal of Dal Bhat (lentils and rice with vegetables). We stayed overnight in one home involving several hours' walk

through wild and beautiful landscapes. We visited two orphanages where the security and care given to the children were overflowing with tangible love and happiness. We visited a

health clinic where mothers were given accommodation for weeks or months while treating their babies for severe malnutrition; and everywhere we went we saw folk determinedly and quietly getting on with their everyday chores, whether in the home or out in the fields...always ready to smile and never, as far as we were aware, complaining of their lot. From the moment we arrived until the day we left, we were exposed to levels of generosity in time and energy and provision of food that were utterly disproportionate to people's stark living conditions. Once again we have had our eyes opened to people and situations that would be unimaginable back home and have irrevocably altered our appreciation of life and human resilience.

Outwith work, we have also recently enjoyed our first holiday, trekking to Annapurna Base Camp. Nine days of hard walking through rhododendron and bamboo forests, passing through picturesque villages, adjusting to extremely basic living conditions in some places and enjoying clear weather from one day to the next as we climbed steadily up to over 4000 metres. The temperature at higher altitudes plummeted below freezing and I can say unequivocally that we have never been SO COLD! Crawling into bed dressed in every garment of clothing we could find, including hats, scarves, and gloves, was a novel experience. Creeping to the outdoor loo in the night and having to break the ice over the bucket of water used for flushing was a challenge. But getting up before dawn to watch the early sunlight creeping over the vast mountain peaks all around us was more than compensation! Nature in all its beautiful, austere and magnificent majesty.



Sunrise at Annapurna Base Camp

Back here in Kathmandu, we enjoy sunshine most of the time during the day, but by evening the cold is intense and we have to wrap up in several layers given that no home is heated beyond having a single free-standing gas heater that travels from room to room. In one home recently we

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were even issued with yak blankets to keep warm while we talked! A novel idea but one that might well be repeated over these next four years!

Malcolm writes: We told you some time ago that when the Parliament (or 'Constituent Assembly') failed to ratify the new Constitution it had been dissolved, and a General Election had been set for 22 November. In fact that Election has not been held. The reasons for this are complex and opaque, and I do not claim to understand them all. A large part of it has to do with the fact that this scenario was not anticipated by the temporary Constitution, and there is no precedent. It seems all parties fear the results of an Election, so the one thing that unites them is a desire to postpone it, and to use the stale-mate as a chance to jockey for power. The end result is that as of now there is no new date for the Election, and the country is being run by a caretaker government with no mandate. Like most Nepalis we find it heart-breaking that a country with immense problems that require urgent and sustained attention is being left leaderless and rudderless for such a long time. There is very little the average Nepali can do but to plod on with characteristic resignation, but with very little hope that any of the current politicians will provide the visionary and disinterested leadership that is so sorely needed. The situation needs a lot of prayer both by the church within Nepal, and in the rest of the world.

With love and prayers,

Malcolm and Cati

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The regular task of collecting firewood

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