

## PARTNERPLAN

# Joel Hafvenstein - Nepal September 2016

United Mission to Nepal  
PO Box 126  
KATHMANDU  
Nepal

Dear friends in Scotland,

It's been much too long since our last prayer update! "No news is good news" mostly applies; there's much to praise the Lord for. But here are our **top five prayer requests**:

- 1. That UMN will get government approval to rebuild houses for the poorest.**
- 2. Wisdom and encouragement for leaders in the Nepali Christian community in the face of persecution.**
- 3. For Fiona to start building a good foundation for the medicinal plant work she wants to do.**
- 4. For ongoing language learning for us all, but especially for Fiona.**
- 5. Emotional resilience and joy for all of us.**



*The boys on Caleb's first school day*

Personal praise. We're both feeling like our family is properly planted in Nepal. The boys are thriving. Caleb has started classes at KISC, the school that Joel also attended from 1987-90, and is loving it. Isaac is figuring out the world at exponential two-year-old pace, and over the course of a stormy monsoon season he's nearly managed to convince himself that he's not scared of thunder. He's also sleeping much, much better, thank God.

Fi is finding some friends, Nepali and expat -- as well as some promising opportunities to get into the medicinal plant work that has been one of her key professional interests since university. One morning a week Fiona 'teaches', as a native English speaker, at the Nepali run

pre-school that Caleb attended before KISC. It gives Isaac a chance to play in a different environment, and is a good place of community for Fiona. Another morning she and Isaac go to a mum's bible study.

Both Fiona and Joel continue with language study, albeit at a slower pace. We've found the Nepali church that we will now continue to go to. And we are settled into an evening international home group.

Three months into the UMN director job, things are going well for Joel. He's repeatedly felt confirmation that this is the right role for him at this time. And so far it's been a pleasure, a demanding but usually not stressful role.

So thank you so much for upholding us in prayer, and praise God for establishing us here! There have been hard moments too, of course. A close friend recently died of cancer in the US, and it's been difficult for Joel to be so (very) far away from the rest of his friends in a time of mourning. And the busyness of work plus the pace of life as parents of young children can be really exhausting. Please pray that we'll stay

# PARTNER PLAN

resilient and joyful through all kinds of circumstances. And please continue to pray for Joel in his responsibilities as leader.

## **The work of the United Mission**

In June, Joel travelled to the Far West of Nepal, where UMN partners with a wide variety of groups that reach the poorest people – anti-poverty NGOs, schools, women's savings groups, farmer cooperatives, networks of people with disabilities. Again and again, Joel heard a similar story: “When UMN found us, we weren't real organisations... we were just some documents in a bag. After working with UMN for years, though, we are well organised, we have a real identity, and we are known for our work throughout the district.”

And as they become “real organisations,” UMN's partners are able to make real changes in poor people's lives. Promoting greenhouses, improved pest control, and beekeeping to increase incomes; helping children with disabilities get corrective surgery; teaching at-risk adolescents about sexual health and HIV; helping former leprosy patients start businesses... over a two week visit, Joel saw so much inspiring work being done by UMN partners on many different aspects of poverty. Please pray that our partners will continue to grow and mature, so that they can keep doing this good work when their partnership with UMN eventually ends.

UMN also continues to respond to the 2015 earthquakes. We've already fixed hydropower plants, roads, and footpaths, as well as helping quake victims restart their livelihoods; when the monsoon rains stop, we'll be rebuilding many schools that collapsed in the quake. But, amazingly, we haven't yet received permission from the Nepal government to support house rebuilding! The government has given some agencies permission to support rebuilding if they do it for every affected household... but given the limited scale of our resources, we really want to focus on the poorest people, who need the most help to rebuild. Please pray that we'll get an opportunity to do this.



*A woman disabled by leprosy has started a small eatery with support from a UMN partner*

We should add that we're moved and humbled by the generosity of Church of Scotland on this front. The *Let Us Build a House* campaign for Nepal has raised more than £200,000, far in excess of what we'd expected. The needs are great, and every penny will go to rebuilding communities affected by the quake. So many thanks from us to all of you who have given to that campaign, and to those who have given in other ways to UMN's work.

## **The Nepali Church – Fixing Bridges**

Some of you may already be aware through ministries with a focus on the persecuted church that the climate for Nepali Christians has become more hostile recently. Christians make a convenient scapegoat for some of Nepal's recent social and political disruptions, and the current Hindu nationalist government in India has a lot of influence in Nepal. The government has started applying various laws and regulations in a

# PARTNER PLAN

way that is hostile to churches and Christian organisations, and a growing number of Christians have been arrested or investigated for promoting their faith.

Joel has met with around thirty leaders in the Nepali Christian community since June. Most are clearly ready to meet the challenge; many of them lived through a period of far more overt and intense persecution in the 1980s. Please pray for wisdom, courage, and a spirit of unity as they decide how to address the growing harassment and opposition they face.



*A farmer trained by a UMN partner in commercial vegetable cultivation.*

And please pray for a growing number of churches to catch the vision to love and serve the poor in their villages, especially now when outside forces will be trying to stir up antagonism between churches and their neighbours. One of UMN's programmes with churches is to get them doing Bible studies on love of neighbour and what it means to serve our communities. It's called *Sangsangey*, Nepali for "together," because it generally results in church and community working together to solve common problems and help the poor in their midst.

Joel was particularly struck by one rural pastor's story of the *Sangsangey* process. Pastor Bhim said that when he first heard about it, he exclaimed, "We Christians were rejected by our old community, and that was very painful, very difficult. We built a new community, and that was difficult. Now you say we need to go back and love and serve the old community?" As he walked home wrestling with the idea, he came to a bridge that had been broken for some time – and decided this bridge would be his test.

He went to the village authorities and declared, "The bridge has needed fixing for too long. We've got strong young men in our congregation; you've also got some labour, some resources. Why don't we work together and fix this thing?" They agreed, and together they fixed it.

Afterward, Pastor Bhim reflected on how it felt and decided that "it didn't feel like this was a distraction from the work of the church, or that we were trying to be an NGO. This felt good, like part of the mission of the church. So we decided we would continue with it." We hope many more pastors and churches will find *Sangsangey* a useful set of tools for building bridges with their communities, even during a season of increasing hostility.

Thank you so much for your prayers – for us, for UMN, and for the church in Nepal.

Joel and Fiona  
Caleb and Isaac