

NEPAL MINISTRY GROWING DESPITE PERSECUTION FAMILY-LIKE CHURCH DEDICATED TO SHARING GOSPEL WITH NEIGHBORS



Above: Phil Bratten and Steve Benham with men and women from the local church in East Nepal

MIWC's third visit to its prayer partners in Nepal late last year for the first time included MIWC President Stephen Benham and Board Member Phil Bratten.

While two previous MIWC associate visits focused on conference teaching at local churches and women's ministry, this time Benham and Bratten worked specifically with member churches of the Aashish Presbyterian Church Association. ["Aashish" means "blessings" in Nepali.]



Bratten and Benham with conference attendees

Upon arrival, Benham noticed how incredibly diverse Nepal is, despite its relatively small size. For comparison, while Nepal is similar in size to the U.S. state of Iowa, its population is almost 30 million, nearly 10 times that of Iowa's. Since the Himalayan Mountains can't support large settlements, this means the majority of those 30 million live in the cities, lowlands and lower mountain areas.

Devastation from the April 2015 earthquake is still evident in all areas, as is the prevalence of Hinduism. Benham said in the capital city of Kathmandu every street seemed to have a shrine or temple devoted to one or more Hindu gods. People actively worshiped at these shrines often by painting the idols in bright colors, presenting fruits and vegetables, chanting and lighting incense.

"The sense of spiritual darkness is intense," said Benham.

"The grip that Hinduism has on the hearts of the majority of Nepalese people is great. It is a dark religion that focuses on worship of phallic symbols."

The Nepali church invited Benham and Bratten to be guest speakers at the 25th anniversary celebration of the Aashish Presbyterian Church located in the small town of Pakhribas, located in Dhankuta District, in East Nepal.

There were approximately 400 attendees at the conference, which included representatives from other member churches from across Nepal and India. Founders and pastors of other churches also spoke and were in attendance. Benham spoke on the topic of "The Church in a Time of Persecution."

Today's believers in Nepal face mounting challenges. Harsh laws forbid open evangelistic efforts leading to the frequent arrests of pastors and missionaries. The government moves back and forth between a Communist or a Hindu majority.

"Christians are mocked for their beliefs," Benham said, "even though they are held in great respect because of their character, moral lifestyles, and hard work."



Aashish Presbyterian Church 25th anniversary celebration conference

Despite the reality of the daily persecution threat, the local church is very much like a family. Believers look after each other – providing care, food and spiritual support.



Pastor Ganesh Poudel (pictured above) distributed audio bibles to women and men in remote Nepali villages thanks to MIWC supporter donations.

They meet regularly for prayer services and devote ministries to women's needs, children and youth, and pastoral training, among others.

Benham describes the Nepali, who are mostly subsistence farmers, as generous, even though they are poor.

"They are kind, loving and have a sincere love for their neighbors," he said, "They want to share the Gospel with everyone!

MIWC, through its supporters, has been providing direct support so that local ministers can travel to remote villages where the Gospel has not yet been heard.

Recently, these pastors were able to distribute audio Bibles, made possible from MIWC supporters, and talk to villagers about the message of Jesus Christ.

There are few good roads in Nepal so travel, especially to these remote locations, is slow and extremely difficult.

Constant flooding means roads are frequently washed out.



The MIWC Nepal ministry team needs a better vehicle to access these areas – **approximately \$8000 in new support can make that happen.**





Photos above and below from outdoor Christmas event

Persecution threats also did not stop a large open-air Christmas event. Pastor Ganesh Poudel said he had never seen such a large gathering – more than 500 watched Gospel and cultural performances while government leaders and police looked on.



"We thanked God because he opened the door for His glory. It is an amazing thing because we performed the great work of God in this difficult situation in Nepal," Poudel said.

Poudel's team sang Christmas carols and performed traditional Nepali dances. Benham describes Nepali music as beautiful, and very melodic with the singing sounding more nasal than the west may be used to and very ornamented.



Nepali churches do also sing traditional Western European and American music, and include modern style songs.

Electric guitars blend with traditional Nepali instruments, such as drums, flutes and stringed instruments.

Dance figures prominently into Nepali culture and local churches maintain dance ministries.

MIWC will continue to provide teachers for pastoral and church leadership training and plans are in the works to provide training for a larger, interdenominational convention later this year.

MIWC will also be bringing one Nepali pastor to the United States in the spring for training and support raising.

***Look for Pastor
Ganesh Poudel's visit
to Peters Creek
Baptist Church on
Palm Sunday
weekend!***



Benham and Bratten at the Agriculture Research Station in Pakhribas, Dhankuta, East Nepal

**MIWC Mission & Purpose
Statement**

Our passion and calling is to empower all nations and cultures to worship Christ.

Nations are transformed when people are transformed, but only Christ has the power to transform lives.

At MIWC, we believe that biblical training in worship and the use of music and music education in the church are primary means of preparing the local church to reach communities and countries for Jesus Christ.



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