

Nepal



The country of Nepal, officially the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, is a landlocked state in south Asia. It is located in the Himalayan Mountains and borders China, India and Bangladesh. Its capital city is Kathmandu. In area, the country of Nepal is slightly larger than the state of Arkansas, while its population is ten times that of the state's. Most people live in the urban south; the northern part of the country is home to eight of the world's ten highest mountains, including Mount Everest.



Mount Everest

While the risk of major infectious disease is high – malaria, dengue fever, and many water borne illnesses such as typhoid fever are common – the average Nepali has little access to medical care. There is about one doctor for every 5,000 citizens of Nepal.

Nepal remains quite isolated from the rest of the world due to a lack of transportation infrastructure, although within the country, smaller airports fare better than roadways. There are 47 airports, 11 of them with paved runways. The mountainous terrain makes building roads difficult and expensive. There is one “all-season” road leading from India to Kathmandu – it is not affected by the heavy rains of the monsoon season. This makes access to markets, jobs, schools, and health clinics a challenge for the average Nepali.

Because of government instability and civil war, schools which were once financed and managed by local communities were taken over by the national regime with disastrous results. Teachers left their classrooms due to lack of pay and the literacy rate of children fell to 52% in 2001. When the government passed laws giving control of the schools back to the local people, teachers, and students returned to their classrooms– literacy rate climbed to 65.9% by 2011. Many students however, still do not go on to high school; this is seen as a luxury in such a poor country. Families need everyone to work so that all can be housed and fed.

MCA in Nepal

In Nepal, people greet each other saying “Namaste!” with a slight bow, made with hands pressed together, palms touching and



fingers pointed upwards. It literally means “To you!”

This sign of respect was explained by Bishop Anthony Sharma, S.J., Vicar Apostolic of Nepal.

Bishop Sharma was in the United States in 2011 to thank our donors for their support.

Christians in Nepal have had the freedom to practice their faith since 1991. Before that, they risked imprisonment for discussing their faith; conversion from one religion to another was illegal. Since these restrictions were lifted, many Catholic missionaries have come to Nepal, serving the poor of all faiths.

While less than 1% of people in the mostly Hindu country are currently Christian, Bishop Sharma shared that hope sustains his people. They know that “tomorrow will be a better day because God is in control”.

The bishop relies heavily on help from the Missionary Childhood Association (MCA), especially for support of the special needs children in his country. In the capital city of Kathmandu, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth have opened a center for 35 children



with a range of mental and physical disabilities. In addition to learning reading and math, the children learn basic household skills and hygiene – how to wash themselves and do their laundry. The center employees also work hard to teach the families of their students that a disability is not a cause for

shame. The head of the center, Sister Clementia, writes: “Disabilities are a hidden problem in Nepal because of shame, fear, embarrassment, ignorance, poverty, and lack of support. The main goal of the center is to help children become independent and live with dignity.”

“It is indeed a joyful experience for the children to come to the center,” Sister continues. “They feel at home here.



We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all who have offered their special gifts to these precious children. Through your help, prayers and faith, you supported us in our ministry to the children of Nepal.”

Bishop Sharma tells a moving story of how the support of missionaries brought him to his own vocation. Born 12 hours after his father’s death, tradition said that as the only son, he must care for his mother and carry on the family line. When his Jesuit principal asked him about the priesthood, he responded very simply, “**No way!**” He had other obligations. When he finally worked up the courage to tell his mother that he wanted to enter the Jesuits, she told him, “Over my dead body will you be a priest!” As he tried to pray the thought away, the desire to serve God grew. The day he was to leave for the seminary, he broke the news to his mother who walked to the doorway and prostrated herself. She told him, “You want to leave? Walk over me.”

“That was a step I had to take,” Bishop Sharma shared. They reconciled upon his ordination.

Last year MCA members sent \$35,300 to Bishop Sharma for the care, education, and faith formation of the children of Nepal.

