

It is staggering to think that today on World Refugee Day there are more than 25 million refugees worldwide. A crisis beyond imagination. Yet, amidst this excruciating reality we as a church have had the great privilege of receiving a most wonderful community of people who tragically found themselves refugees. From this we have been forever changed!

10 years ago this month thanks to the vision and hard work of Alice Andrews, the first Bhutanese Refugee family was welcomed into the life of Thornapple Church. Before their arrival Indra, Hari Maya, and Ashmita Adhikari spent 15+ years in a refugee camp in Nepal like approximately 120,000 other ethnic Nepalese who fled their homeland of Bhutan.

Alice's vision moved her to form a team of faithful volunteers including her husband Chuck who spent countless hours preparing for the family's arrival and then helping the family get settled into their new life in GR.

We are thankful that soon after we met the Adhikaris, the first Christians were welcomed to Thornapple, Man, Rhoda, and Samuel **Sarki**...this family remains a part of Thornapple and are faithful members.

More and more folks heard of Thornapple as their friends received the help of our volunteers...

We soon began **providing transportation** to Sunday worship. To date....**600+ Sunday bus** trips to and from Kentwood

In **2009** Satya Maharjan a Nepalese student came on as an intern to provide Nepali language Bible lessons and to build relationships.

Spiritual formation continued with Sunday evening Bible study , other Thornapple Americans began weekly home bible studies, and a Sunday teen bible study class

...folks continued to arrive from Nepal and family members immediately brought them here...

Thank you for befriending the **250 + Nepali speaking** folks who have come through our doors. You have made the love of Christ tangible to so many.

- 1600+ rides to medical/dental appointments
- untangling 100's of govt. Paperwork problem
- scores of children enrolled in school, etc.
- 22,000 cups of chia tea served
- 500+ hours of home bible study
- 450+ sermons preached
- 100's of hours of driving lessons
- Untold hours of prayer and
- friendship

From there came the baptisms! The first in June **2010** and since then **28** individuals have received their baptism and more have given their lives to Christ!

In **2011** Patty Dekker's staff coordinator position was created and in **2013** we welcomed Ram Aryal on staff as Pastor.

Communion was served for the 1st time in Nepali language service in 2013.

.....**then** the baby showers and dedications came, and the weddings, and the funerals.....

Our NS friends are no longer refugees but residents!

- So many of the Christians that we know have a place of worship
- folks continually earn their American citizenship
- Everyone we know who is able, is working!
- We thank God that many families have purchased a home
- students are graduating from high School, are attending and graduating from college ... as engineers, medical assistants, etc.
- Purni, had her story featured in our denominations national magazine this winter
- Chabi is attending CHIC and his life story will be presented in a special feature there.

Our volunteers say:

"On June 13, 2008 I anxiously awaited the arrival of the Adhikari family at the Ford airport. I had no idea what to expect or how deeply involved I wanted to become **maybe just a few months to get them settled? God had other plans.** 10 years later and I'm still involved with Ashmita and her wonderful family."

"Seeing Nepali friends give out of their poverty has been life changing"

"Anyone who has not had time to volunteer with a Nepali family has really missed a life changing opportunity"

Nepali friends say...

"Through weekly bible studies we learned that Jesus is the only true God and He died to take away our sin and that is amazing. We wanted that forgiveness in deed".

"It is like you gave us birth, and now we are growing up...but we also know that Thornapple friends will always be here if we need them"

We have so much to be thankful for.

Yet, we must now acknowledge the present realities as we do find ourselves in a time of change in NS ministry. The **elders** have discerned it is time to begin the process of winding down the FORMAL programmed ministries such as Sunday NL worship. The details will be formed and communicated over the summer as they evolve.

This has been an unexpected work among us these past 10 years...

One that no one saw coming or could have imagined where and how long it would take us

But we celebrate that Thornapple took the challenge and God created something new of us

We are saddened by this change...

But we have a new opportunity now to trust God, believing that God calls us to give thanks in all things. None of us know what impact our love has and will have for God's greater kingdom!!!

Will we continue to remain faithful to nurture relationships , to pray and participate in the next steps of this journey? I hope so.

We remain one church with our Nepali friends....and our arms are open wide
Patty Dekker

