

AG Move of God Touching Hindus and Buddhists

Namaste. Tapaa~ Angrezi bolnu hunccha?

It's not all that uncommon for an Assemblies of God church to have a visitor who was born outside the United States. It's a bit more uncommon if that visitor came from a Hindu or Buddhist background. And it's fairly uncommon for that same visitor to be from the Nepal/Bhutan region of the world, but perhaps not unheard of.

Still, when a non-English-speaking Hindu visitor shows up with nearly 220 of his Hindu and Buddhist Nepalese/Bhutanese family and friends—nearly half of whom have never even heard of Jesus—on Christmas Day at an AG church where attendance is about 100 (on a good day) ... well, that's a God thing!

And knowing the phrase, "Good morning. Do you speak English?" in Nepalese, could come in handy for anyone found in that rare situation—like AG Pastor Chris Dawes did last Christmas.

One might imagine that with such an influx of Nepali refugees from Bhutan that Dawes' church is likely located on a coast—east, west, even southeast. But North Dakota? That's more on the "coast" of Canada than anywhere else.

Dawes, who pastors Valley Christian Center in Grand Forks, N.D., admits that he doesn't know what God is up to, only that He's up to something!

He explains that his church—and the community for the most part—has historically been overwhelmingly white. But recently God has been doing something totally "unexpected" in his small church.

Dawes said last year he had heard some talk about refugees

from the Nepal/Bhutan region of the world being in the Grand Forks area, but the information was sketchy. And really, with a church that runs between 60 and 100 on any given Sunday, there didn't seem to be a way for Valley Christian Center to make any kind of significant impact on first-generation immigrants who likely didn't even speak English.

Then, six days before Christmas, Dawes received the most unexpected of calls.

"Pastor Deepak, who leads this growing group of Christians, called me out of the blue and asked me if our church would be willing to host a Christmas Day outreach meal for maybe 100 Christian and an additional 100 or so non-believing Nepalese and Bhutanese," Dawes recalls. "The refugees had been meeting in apartments and some were meeting at a local church, but they needed a place to meet where being openly Pentecostal was not going to be a cause for concern. I told them they were welcome to come and use our facilities."

On Christmas Day, a sea of nearly 220 new faces arrived at Valley Christian Center for a special service and meal. Deepak later told Dawes that 130 of the guests were non-believers made up of Hindus and Buddhists, indicating many of them had never before heard the gospel message.

Deepak, who had been with the Nepalese American church in Georgia under Pastor Silas, had recently come to Grand Forks to pastor this group of believers and was the speaker for this event. A former refugee and Buddhist from Nepal, Deepak had accepted Christ and was later healed from the effects of a debilitating stroke when a Pentecostal evangelist prayed for him while he was living in a refugee camp in Nepal.

"Fifteen Hindus and Buddhists gave their lives to the Lord that day, with many more wanting to learn more about Jesus," Dawes says. "I just really feel this was prophetic in that this happened on Christmas Day—it was like the Lord handed us

a gift on a silver platter. God entrusted to us the commission to reach out and touch these precious people with the love of Jesus.”

Since that Christmas Day, the Nepalese believers and their guests have started meeting regularly at Valley Christian Center. Every week, more people are accepting Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Dawes says he felt the Lord has told him that his church’s responsibility is to help this first generation of Pentecostal believers to feel “at home” at Valley Christian Center. The church is doing its best to do just that. Dawes is studying the Nepalese culture and language in an effort to help bridge the communities into one community. And for every step they take, Dawes observes, it seems Deepak and his church take two towards them in return.

Of course, with the influx of new faces and cultures come other opportunities and challenges.

One of the greatest opportunities, Dawes says, is that his youth group of three kids now suddenly has 33 youth—with more Nepali youth coming each week. Many of these new students are still working on their conversational English, which provides an excellent opportunity for the church to speak into their lives.

“A lot of the kids also want to learn how to play guitar so they can be part of leading praise and worship wherever they are,” Dawes says. “We’ve been doing our best to round up guitars, and so far we’ve gotten eight of them into the hands of kids and I’ve been teaching them how to play, with more kids on the waiting list for a guitar.”

However, Dawes has come to realize that there are also challenges. Many of the Nepalese have only arrived in America and made a decision for Christ within the last year or so, and

the pitfalls of Satan surround them.

“These new Christians that have only recently arrived in this country do not always realize that ‘all that glitters is not gold,’ and that some elements of American culture are both unbiblical and spiritually deadly,” Dawes says. “My desire is to share the timeless truths of the gospel with them in a way that is culturally relevant and help them effectively assimilate into the American culture while maintaining their Christianity.”

For Dawes and Valley Christian Center, it’s a time of wonder and amazement as they witness God working in ways they never imagined in their church. Although at first blush, it appears this is a singular work by God, Dawes quickly corrects that impression.

“There’s a group of Nepali believers in Fargo who, thanks to the generosity and wide open arms of Pastor Kevin Zaun and Heartland Community Church (AG), now have a home as well.

“We’re averaging about 40 a week in the Nepalese service,” Zaun says. “We’ve been holding services about six or eight weeks now and people are getting saved; miracles are happening!”

However, Zaun and his church are not new to working with different cultures. For several years, they’ve been working with African refugees, and helping to start All Nations AG in Fargo, that is home to Africans from at least 12 different African countries.

And recently, Dawes and Zaun have learned there are more Nepalese Christians in Sioux Falls, S.D., where Calvary Assembly and Pastor Dan Kuno have now opened their doors to this group of new believers.

Deepak recently shared that each of the three AG churches—Grand Forks, Fargo and Sioux Falls—would see an

increase of at least 50 from the Nepali communities in those cities if additional transportation could be provided.

Dawes and Zaun say they both feel an urgency to reach these first generation Americans for Christ. But Zaun adds that it's not just those from Nepal where God is working.

"There are a lot of new Americans from a lot of different cultures and countries coming to America who are being impacted by the presence of God," Zaun says. "They are, in many ways, the future of our country and we need to embrace them, disciple them, invite them into our church culture and involve them."

"I feel God is definitely moving," Dawes says. "I don't know where this is all going to go, but I know right now, we're supposed to work, because night is coming, and we must welcome them and reach them now with the love and gospel message of Jesus Christ."

For more information about Valley Christian Center, visit its website. To learn more about Heartland Community Church, [click here](#).