

# Nepal

The Himalayan  
Church of the Lutheran Confession of Nepal



## Statistics\*

**Total area:** 147,181 sq. km. (56,136 sq. mi.), about the size and shape of Tennessee

**Population:** 29,519,114 (est. July 2008)

**Ethnicity:** Chhettri 15.5%, Brahman-Hill 12.5%, Magar 7%, Tharu 6.6%, Tamang 5.5%, Newar 5.4%, Muslim 4.2%, Kami 3.9%, Yadav 3.9%, other 32.7%, unspecified 2.8% (2001 census)

**Languages:** Nepali 47.8%, Maithali 12.1%, Bhojpuri 7.4%, Tharu (Dagaura/Rana) 5.8%, Tamang 5.1%, Newar 3.6%, Magar 3.3%, Awadhi 2.4%, other 10%, unspecified 2.5% (2001 census)

**Religion:** Hindu 80.6%, Buddhist 10.7%, Muslim 4.2%, Kirant 3.6%, Christianity and other 0.9% (2001 census)

**Government:** Democratic Republic (Hindu Monarchy abolished in June 2008)

**Capital:** Kathmandu

\* U.S. State Department, Gospel for Asia, and Voice of the Martyrs websites

# About Nepal

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The Kingdom of Nepal had the distinction of being the world's only Hindu nation until the Hindu Monarchy fell on June 28, 2008. Nepal is also known for having the world's highest mountain, Mount Everest, along with seven more of the world's top ten peaks. With isolated valleys and steep mountains, Nepal is one of the least developed countries in the world. Forest cover has been reduced from 60 percent in the early 1950s to 30 percent today, due mainly to the rapid increase in Nepal's population. The majority of Nepalese depend on farming and cultivation as their main source of income.

While known in past years as a peace-loving country, Nepal has lately faced unstable times both economically and politically. Tourism, the second largest industry, has greatly suffered due to internal conflicts.

The northern and western regions of Nepal are some of the most unreached areas of the world. Many villages are situated in areas where there are no roads, public transportation or electricity. It is hard work for missionaries to travel from one village to another. In addition to the challenge of mountainous terrain, Gospel workers routinely encounter resistance from anti-Christian fundamentalists.

Christianity is fairly new to Nepal with Christianity first arriving in this Hindu nation in 1952. All churches were “underground” until the early 1970s. Statistics now show that there are only approx. 2700 churches in Nepal. Most evangelism in Nepal has been carried out by reformed and Pentecostal mission organizations from India and Korea. Pastor JB Bhitrokoti reports that there is a real lack of solid Scriptural training in Nepal. After attending several seminars by mission organizations that have come to Kathmandu, Pastor JB is convinced that many, if not most, churches or denomination in Nepal have no real sense of the importance of the truth of God’s word and no real desire to search out the truth and stand upon God’s word alone.

Nepal is one of the most picturesque places on earth. But behind its natural beauty is an ugliness experienced by many Christians—especially those who attempt to win converts to Christ. In June 2008, the monarchy was officially abolished and a constitutional republic was established under the leadership of the former Maoist rebels. Ironically, it is believed that religious freedom may increase under the communist government.

While the Good News of Jesus Christ has made inroads into Nepal over the past fifty plus years, the message has been corrupted by many false teachings. In the northern regions of Nepal that share a border with China (Tibet), Christianity is mostly unknown. Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhist monk refugee camps dominate this region of Nepal. The Bhitrokoti family has contacts in this area and are eager to reach out to the lost souls in this rugged part of Nepal. When we also consider that less than 1% of the 29,000,000 people confess Jesus as their Lord and Savior, we see that there is much work yet to be done in Nepal.

## Main Contacts within Nepal

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**Pastor Raju Bhitrokoti** – Pastor Raju is 24 years old and will soon finish college with a bachelor degree in Healthcare Management. He was the first to contact the CLC with inquiries about pastoral training. He was brought up in a Christian family as the oldest of two sons of an independent Christian pastor living in Kathmandu. He has become very involved in the ministry of the congregation his father serves and has been called to serve as the youth pastor and also assists his father with the regular ministry of the congregation. With his father focusing more and more on encouraging and training other

pastors for the ministry, Raju and his father realized the need for structured and systematic doctrinal training for themselves if they planned to train and equip others for the ministry. With his father's blessing and advice, Raju began searching the Internet for Lutheran organizations that would be willing to offer pastoral training in Nepal. Raju "stumbled" upon the websites of a few CLC congregations. In reading and searching these sites he read reports concerning the CLC efforts to assist the CLCI and BELC in training pastors in India. Specifically he read reports from previous CLC Mission Helper Trips where mention was made of "pastoral training seminars." Raju began to send emails asking for assistance in training pastors in Nepal. Pastor Raju plans to support himself with secular work in the healthcare industry in Kathmandu while dedicating the rest of his time to training pastors and proclaiming the Word of God in Nepal. He has also mentioned that he would appreciate the opportunity to attend the ILC seminary for intense doctrinal training. Raju is a dedicated, resourceful, and highly organized individual. As evidence to his maturity and dedication, his father and the other eight pastors who are all working together (all of whom are older than Raju) unanimously and without hesitation elected him to serve as chairman of their newly formed Lutheran Church body. Raju has also started his own translating and publishing business. He has already translated a few short Gospel booklets from English into Nepali and also does translating for hire for other publishing companies in Kathmandu. He has begun work on translating the Shadows and Substance adult instruction course by Pastor John Schierenbeck. He also plans to translate the CLC Statement of Faith and Purpose and the Sydow Catechism soon. It seems that the Lord has truly blessed this remarkable young man with the gifts necessary for serving as a very capable leader and spokesperson for the newly formed Lutheran Church body in Nepal. With his love for the Lord, his nation of Nepal, the lost sheep who have yet to be gathered, I expect the Lord to accomplish much through this man.

**Pastor JB Bhitrokoti** – Pastor JB is the father of Raju and serves as pastor of Eternal Life Church in Kathmandu. JB was brought up in a Hindu family living in a rural village several hours from Kathmandu. He is not sure how old he is but estimates that he is in his mid forties. JB was brought to faith at a time when conversion to Christianity brought many challenges. About twenty years ago JB picked up a tract that had been thrown into the gutter. It was a small Gospel tract telling about Jesus. This was the first time in his life that he had heard anything about Jesus. The Holy Spirit soon worked faith in his heart. When he finally worked up the courage to tell his father what he had learned and the Good News of salvation, he was met with anger and resentment. His father kicked him out of his home and has not spoken with him since. For the past 17+ years JB has dedicated his life to telling others about their Savior and encouraging other men to take up the ministry. Many of the pastors we met while in Nepal are men that Pastor JB had baptized over the years. As JB turns his focus more to training and encouraging men in the Gospel ministry, he has come to the realization that his depth of knowledge and understanding in the Scriptures is lacking. He is of the opinion that most of the Christian materials that are available in Nepal are written from a very liberal and reformed viewpoint and have very little Scriptural support. He also reports that many evangelism organizations come with financial assistance but have little, if any, desire to offer sound Biblical training to pastors and teachers in the church. Pastor JB is convinced that what the church in Nepal needs more than financial assistance is solid Biblical training. He told us that there are organizations that will come in and build a church but have no interest in training a man to teach the truth of God's word. He mentioned that a Methodist organization was willing to build church buildings with the condition that the congregation change their name to Methodist but they were not concerned with what the pastor would teach. He is a very dedicated individual who seems to be truly committed to building a church body upon the solid foundation of Christ and the Word of God alone.

**Rajan Bhitrokoti** – is the youngest son of Pastor JB. He is twenty-two years old and is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in Rural Development. He is very enthusiastic about the opportunities to

spread the Gospel to the rural and unreached areas of Nepal. He told stories of trekking far into the hills of Nepal to reach tribal villages that are only accessible by footpath. He has plans to make missionary trips to far western regions of Nepal where currently there are no Christian churches. He too plans to support himself with secular employment in Rural Development while using this type of work as an avenue to carry out his greater goals of evangelizing the rural and tribal areas of Nepal. He is also very fluent in English and assists his brother with translation work. Rajan is a very adventuresome young man with a big heart for those in need.

## How the CLC became involved in Nepal

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As mentioned above, Pastor Raju, with his father's blessing and advice, began searching the internet for Lutheran organizations that would be willing to offer pastoral training in Nepal. He "stumbled" upon the websites of a few CLC congregations. In reading and searching these sites he read reports concerning the CLC efforts to assist the CLCI and BELC in training pastors in India. Specifically he read reports from previous CLC Mission Helper Trips where mention was made of "pastoral training seminars." Raju began to send emails asking for assistance in training pastors in Nepal. Pastor Ohlmann and two other CLC pastors received inquiries from Raju. Pastor Ohlmann began corresponding with Raju in September of 2007. After the first few email exchanges it became evident that Raju was sincere in requests for training. He mentioned that his father had received a Lutheran catechism and a couple of other Lutheran books and was convinced that Lutheran doctrine was Scriptural. Over the next several months Pastor Ohlmann led Pastor Raju, by email, through the adult instruction manual written by Pastor John Schierenbeck, titled "Shadows and Substance." Pastor Raju also shared the lessons with his father and his brother as together they compared the lessons, answers, and Pastor Ohlmann's comments with Scripture. Through this process they learned more and more and became convinced that the CLC was indeed a true teaching church body with whom they would like to work. Following the completion of this correspondence course, Raju was sent a few other books such as a Sydow Lutheran Catechism and workbook along with Mueller's Summary of Christian Doctrine, the Augsburg Confession, and other books.

## A trip to Nepal planned and approved

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Becoming more and more convinced that the CLC held to and proclaimed the true teachings of God's word, Pastor Raju asked if Pastor Ohlmann would be willing to come to Nepal to offer pastoral training seminars like the Mission Helper Trips he had read about on the internet. Raju mentioned that there were eight other independent pastors in Nepal who were associated with him and his father. Together they had already begun an organization they named Nepal Christian Organization. Raju also mentioned that there were several other pastors in Nepal who would most likely attend a training seminar. Pastor Ohlmann explained to Raju that it would be best if an initial meeting could be held first at which time our doctrine could be more thoroughly explained and we could also discuss the opportunities that the Lord might have in store for us if we are committed to spreading the truth of God's word together in a God pleasing way. Raju was pleased with this answer and began to make plans for such a visit to take place. Along with his secular studies in college he, along with his brother and father, began an in-depth study of the materials that had been sent with an understanding that doctrinal unity was of great importance to God.

With the approval of the CLC Mission Board, Pastor Ohlmann began looking into the possibility of combining a trip to Kathmandu with his already scheduled trip to India in May and June of 2008. It was also decided to ask Missionary Matt Ude to accompany him to Nepal. With the trip approved and

scheduled, correspondence with Raju continued. With the advice of Missionary Koenig a seven day trip to Nepal was planned and scheduled for the end of May and the first week of June.

## Seven Days in Nepal

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Upon arrival in Kathmandu, Pastors Ohlmann and Ude were met at the airport by Raju and Rajan and were given silk shawls, as is the custom in Nepal. Following a couple hours of rest at our hotel we were taken to the home of Pastor JB and his family for an evening meal and a few hours of discussions concerning the state of the Christian church in Nepal and their ideas, plans, and prayers for the future.

During the seven days we were given in Nepal we visited several of the congregations and pastors associated with Pastor JB and his sons. These congregations are found in the hilly regions west of Kathmandu. Pastor JB is originally from this part of Nepal and knows many people there. We had the privilege of meeting and visiting with four pastors who Pastor JB works with. Two of these pastors he baptized years ago when they were brought to faith. While the distance to these places was not far, the amount of time it takes to travel there was very long. We probably averaged about 30-40 km/hour as we wound our way up and down mountain roads that seem to have been built for one way traffic but somehow they manage two way traffic with all sort of vehicles, including very large lorries (trucks) making their way through. We visited the cities of Hetauda, Bharatpur, and Butwol. We attended and taught at special church services that were arranged since we would be there and we also visited and taught at a couple of house churches. My impression of the four pastors we met is that they are very sincere in serving the Lord and have truly humbled themselves before the Word with a great desire to increase their knowledge and understanding of it. As we met with the congregations and especially the pastors we stressed the fact that we were not coming with financial assistance but rather with the one thing needful...the Word of God. After one such explanation to the congregation in Butwol, the pastor (who speaks good English) smiled and commented that what has just been said was very sweetly stated and exactly what his people needed to hear. Over and over we heard similar comments from the pastors. While there is an obvious shortage of financial resources in most of the Nepali congregations, the pastors were most enthusiastic about receiving more in-depth training in the Word of God

This trip through the hills and mountains west of Kathmandu was grueling, long, and sometime frustrating as we sat for long periods of times as traffic was brought to a stand still in the middle of nowhere for no apparent reason. But the beauty of these mountains is breath taking. And the joy of proclaiming our risen and reigning Lord and Savior was pure joy.

After a night's rest back in Kathmandu we met for eight hours with Pastor JB, Pastor Raju, and Rajan along with seven other independent pastors. Pastor Ohlmann began the day with a devotion that helped to focus our attention on the importance of God's word and privilege we have as servants and stewards of the mysteries of God's grace. Following the devotion Pastor Ohlmann presented a brief history of the CLC along with an overview of the variety of mission efforts that the Lord has blessed the CLC with opportunity to be involved. Throughout this presentation the point was made that our main concern is with teaching and proclaiming the truth of God's word. We explained that we were not here to dictate a certain way of worship or even to insist upon them taking the name Lutheran, but rather we were there to proclaim the whole truth of God's word with the hope that they too were interested in this. It was also stressed that while the Lord has not chosen to bestow upon the CLC vast monetary resources, the Lord has blessed the CLC with deep theological roots and a heritage and history that values the truth of God's word above all and that we bow to no authority other than Scripture. They certainly got the message that the CLC did not have lots of financial resources to hand out. And that being associated with the CLC

would not result in a great influx of money to their church. This was made abundantly clear, almost to point that I felt I was repeating it too much.

We spent our time studying through the basic doctrines of the Scriptures using the CLC Statement of Faith and Purpose. It was a fruitful and exciting day as we spent our time bowing before the authority of God's Word. These are truly sincere and dedicated men and it was humbling to sit with them and discuss the importance of God's word and the privilege we have been given as shepherds in His Kingdom. There were questions and comments, as one would expect, when sharing the truth of God's word.

Remembering that Christianity has only a fifty year history in Nepal and that very few theological books are available in Nepal, let alone translated into Nepali, we were not surprised that some doctrines that Lutheran hold to were new to these men. Also taking into consideration that the majority of what they hear concerning the Scriptures comes over the airwaves through the likes of Joyce Meyers, Benny Hinn and others who spread corrupt and dangerous false teaching. For most of these men, the doctrine of infant baptism was new to them. They had never even considered that God's Word might indicate that infants can and should be baptized. At the end of the day each man was at a very minimum convinced that Baptism was indeed a gift from the Lord and a gift that every person, man, woman, and child needed. They were all eager to learn more and to share what they had learned with the congregations they were serving. If nothing else was accomplished during these seven days in Nepal, at least there are seven pastors who are now studying and proclaiming the truth concerning the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit in Baptism. They are all very excited about what they have learned and have only one request...they want us to teach them more!

Following the doctrinal discussions an hour was set-aside for Pastor JB and Raju to lead an organizational meeting with the other independent pastors who had gathered. Pastor JB told me later that he and his sons were so convinced of the truth and validity of Lutheran doctrine that even if the other men would have decided not to go along with them, they had already decided to start a Lutheran Church body on their own. After an hour or so of discussion by the pastors a resolution to join together and form a Confessional Lutheran Church body in Nepal passed with a unanimous vote and enthusiastic clapping of hands and singing. Advice was sought about what they should name their new church body. No specific suggestions were given but they were told that they should choose a name that best represents them and the doctrine they intend to proclaim. They chose the name: Himalayan Church of the Lutheran Confession of Nepal. Their first act was to elect Pastor Raju to serve as chairman. As chairman he was assigned the duties of continuing correspondence with the CLC, organizing and leading ongoing training of the pastors, and to begin the task of writing a doctrinal platform and constitution.

What follows is the text of a letter written by Pastor Raju on behalf of the pastors of the HCLCN and sent to President Schierenbeck and the CLC Board of Missions:

*Greetings from the land of Mount Everest, Nepal!*

*There is a short history of Nepalese Christianity and there are many difficulties with us due to lack of the proper Christian foundation and teachings. Therefore we were praying for a church body that can assist us to know more about the truth of the Bible that we can carry out ministry in Nepal.*

*At that time we came to know Faith Lutheran Church of St. Louis and I started correspondence with Pastor Todd Ohlmann and he encouraged me to do ministry as well as taught many new things which were not known to me. I completed a correspondence course of "Shadows and Substance" as well as Luther's Small and Large Catechism, My Church and others and some other books which directly help me in my ministry. I came to know about the CLC Statement of Faith and Purpose and Pastor Todd guided me on this.*

*In May 27, 2008, God gave us a privilege to welcome Pastor Todd and Pastor Matthew Ude among us. We started doctrinal discussions and other information regarding CLC Board of Missions.*

*We had a meeting in June 1, 2008 at Kathmandu and 8 pastors participated the meeting and all of them were greatly interested to know more about CLC. Pastor Todd Ohlmann and Pastor Matthew Ude taught about the doctrines of CLC and they clarify each section of CLC Statement of Faith and Purpose.*

*After the doctrinal discussion we all came to conclusion to seek affiliation with CLC to extend the kingdom of God in Nepal.*

*From the several months of studying and doctrinal discussions we formed a Lutheran Church Body in Nepal. We have chosen the name "**Himalayan Church of Lutheran Confession of Nepal**" for the body.*

*We have a great desire to establish a fellowship with the CLC and also working relationship with CLC Board of Missions with the sole purpose and hope of receiving on going training in the Word.*

*The founding pastors of the HCLCN pray that the Lord will bless this newly formed Lutheran Church body in Nepal. We are also praying that the Lord will establish a long and fruitful relationship with the CLC that we may work together to proclaim the Word of the God throughout Nepal and glorify our Lord and savior Jesus Christ.*

*On Behalf of the pastors of the HCLCN,*

*Pastor Raju Bhitrakoti,  
Chairman*