Ingredients for a healthier future in Nepal | Caring for mothers and babies | Nurturing careers in nursing
A Common Place

We are blessed
J RON BYLER
MCC U.S. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR


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North Korea
Soy milk for health
Milk made from soybeans provided by MCC offers an added boost of nutrition for children at South Pyongyang Provincial Kindergarten Orphanage in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, also known as North Korea. For the last five years, MCC has been sending soybeans from Canada to North Korea through partner First Steps, giving more than 800 children access to protein-rich soy milk, tofu and toasted soybeans. The children’s names are not used for security reasons.

South Sudan
Famine and conflict
In Unity State, South Sudan, where the United Nations has declared a famine, MCC provided 245 families with urgent security reasons) earn income to re-establish their lives. MCC, through partner Zakho Small Villages Project, is helping through a cash-for-work project to build a water network. Residents such as these (names not used for security reasons) earn income to re-establish their lives and help�connect house- holds to a central water source.

Bangladesh
Outwitting pests
In Bangladesh, MCC agriculture projects don’t just focus on one aspect of planning, harvesting or selling crops. They’re built to help farmers succeed at every stage. As part of this approach, MCC provides training in organic, low-cost methods of warding off pests that can ravage crops and yields, such as building homemade fruit fly traps. Find this and other innovative projects in MCC’s Christmas giving supplement, mailed with this issue of the magazine or online at mcc.org/Christmas. Or contact MCC (see page 2) to receive a copy.

Lend a hand—Infant care kits
HELP PARENTS GIVE THEIR INFANTS A GOOD START.

(NEW items only, size 3-9 months)
2 gowns/ sleepers (flannel or similar warm, soft material)
2 undershirts/ onesies (short or long sleeves)
4 cloth diapers (flat-fold preferred)
1 receiving blanket (lightweight flannel or flannel, minimum 36 in)
4 safety pins (2 in)
1 large bar mild soap (leave in wrapper)
1 pair of socks
1 cap

Remove packaging material (except from soap) and fold items into the receiving blanket. Fasten together with safety pins. Items can be purchased or sewn from new fabric. Patterns for hand-sewn gowns and packages of pre-cut materials are available from some material resources centers. For material resources centers and other kit drop-off locations, go to mcc.org/kits/dropoff or contact your nearest MCC office (see page 2). Don’t live near a drop-off location? You can shop online for items to be shipped directly to a material resource center.

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Three ingredients for a healthier future

In Nepal, MCC and its local partners are teaching parents of malnourished children how to make a nutrient-rich super flour and how to grow more healthy foods.

STORY BY EMILY LOEWEN
PHOTOS BY COLIN VANDENBERG

Two-year-old Naitik Kumar Rajbhar nestles in his mother’s lap outside their home in Bhatigachh, Nepal. The longer they sit together the closer he edges toward sleep, until his eyes close completely and his mother, Kabita Devi Rajbhar, carries him inside. She lays him on a large wooden bed, pulls a white mosquito net over him and steps back outside.

While he sleeps, she gets to work at the outdoor stove roasting grains and legumes for super flour—the food that, when mixed with water and cooked into porridge, helped bring her malnourished son back to health.

A year ago, Rajbhar could tell Naitik was underweight. “I was looking at other children. I felt like they were so good, but when I saw my own child I thought, ‘He’s very thin, what will happen?’” says Rajbhar. She had purchased vitamins to help him grow, but that wasn’t enough.

Then MCC partner Brethren in Community Welfare Service (BICWS) came to her home and offered her nutrition training, lessons on how to make super flour and supplies to get started.

Only three ingredients are needed to make super flour—rice or wheat, corn and a protein like chickpeas or soybeans. The combination of carbohydrates and protein in the flour, when cooked with vitamin-filled vegetables, provides the needed combination of nutrients.

The ingredients are common and there is no expensive equipment to purchase. But for Rajbhar, learning how to make the super flour was the difference between a thin boy she worried about and the healthy child napping inside her house.

According to the United Nations World Food Program, approximately 41 percent of children in Nepal are stunted and 29 percent are underweight. In Bhatigachh, located in Morang District in southeastern Nepal where BICWS works, local health workers estimate half of the children under 5 don’t weigh as much as they should.

BICWS, the service arm of the Brethren in Christ church in Nepal, teaches families what’s needed for a balanced diet and provides training on gardening, small-scale farming and fish farming. With new knowledge and...
skills, families know what they should eat and can grow it themselves or earn enough to buy it.

Reaching all those families, however, requires the dedication of local BICWS staff like Ajay Kumar Sah, a nutrition social mobilizer.

To choose participants for the super flour distribution and training, for instance, Sah rode his bicycle as far as an hour and a half one way, visiting each home in the area and weighing some 700 to 800 children.

After weighing each child, Sah referred the severely malnourished to the local government health clinic. Those in less severe condition were referred to the local government health clinic. Those in less severe condition were included in BICWS programs.

Sah grew up in Bhatigachh. While he could get work elsewhere with his training as a community medical assistant, “I think it’s important to work within my own community and provide service,” he says.

And he speaks the six languages found in the area, helping to put families at ease. “If you go into a community and you’re speaking Nepali and they are Santali maybe they won’t say everything. But if you speak Santali to them then they’ll speak very freely,” Sah says.

Although many families have limited income, a larger problem is that they’ve never learned what combination of foods provide the right nutrients. All the ingredients for super flour are locally available, but people just don’t know how to use them, says Sah.

That was the case for Rajbhar, whose mother used to make a flour for porridge. It contained corn but didn’t have the needed variety of nutrients that super flour has.

Now that Rajbhar knows how to make the super flour, she makes it about once a week, feeding some to her son about three times a day. She also gives him rice, dal made of lentils and vegetables from their small garden.

And in the last year she’s seen him gain weight and become more active.

Rajbhar also attended the BICWS kitchen garden training, which includes lessons on planting in rows, when to apply fertilizer and how to make organic compost. She received some hybrid seeds.

With the old seeds and methods, Rajbhar still needed to purchase some vegetables at the market, and she had to conserve them by eating just a little bit at a time. Now she’s growing more vegetables, and they are larger. “I get them from my own garden so I can eat them every day,” she says.

Farther northwest in Lalitpur District, the Rural Institution for Community Development (RICOD), another MCC partner, has a similar program. Four years ago, Devi Lopchan joined a mothers’ group coordinated by RICOD staff and local peer educators in her home community, Nallu.

When Lopchan joined the mothers’ group, her daughter Salina Lopchan was 4, and her health was poor. Salina would sometimes faint, and she had the large belly and thin limbs common with children who are malnourished. They made trips to the hospital, either paying for an ambulance, or walking for an hour before catching a bus into the city if she thought Salina was strong enough to make the journey.

Through the training with RICOD, Lopchan learned the importance of a balanced diet and how to make the super flour porridge. Durga Tamang, the field officer with RICOD, would encourage Lopchan to spend more time feeding her daughter, and to mix vegetables in with the porridge.

“I used to feed my children rice porridge. It would be just rice and water and salt and oil,” she says. “But after the training I learned to add green leaves, spinach or other greens, and then dal, lentils, which would be nutritious.” Over a period of two years Salina’s health improved.

Lopchan taught her husband Rajkumar Lopchan what she learned, and he also attended a nutrition workshop for men organized by RICOD. Now he often cooks the family’s evening meal and tries to incorporate proteins, carbohydrates and vitamins.

Kitchen garden training through RICOD also helped them have more consistent vegetable harvests.

In the past, “I would just plant those vegetables and if they grew then they...
Here’s how Kabita Devi Rajbhar makes super flour from rice, corn and soybeans.

1. After leaving the soybeans and corn to dry for several hours, she tosses them in the air on a woven bamboo disk, a nanglo; each well-practiced flick removes unwanted stones, grass and dirt.

2. Next she roasts everything over the open-fire stove. She mixes some sand with the corn and soybeans to keep an even heat while roasting, then uses pieces of dried palm branches to stir and carefully flick the fully roasted beans and kernels out of the pan, leaving the sand behind.

3. Once she’s roasted everything, Rajbhar pounds it all in a metal cylinder. Then after a final toss on the nanglo the mixture is ready to be ground.

4. The last step is to walk a half hour to a mill to have it ground into flour.

Life still isn’t easy for either the Lopchans in Nallu or the Rajbhars in Bhatigachh. Rajbhar’s husband goes to work as a laborer in India, returning once a month, and sometimes they don’t have enough money to buy the food they need. And the Lopchans are still living in a temporary shelter more than two years after the 2015 earthquake rendered their home unlivable.

But with the new knowledge and the skills to grow what they need, both families are better equipped to keep their children healthy today, as sleeping toddlers and climbing youngsters, and as they grow into the future.

Emily Loewen is digital content coordinator for MCC. Colin Vandenberg is a photographer in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Salina Lopchan’s father Rajkumar Lopchan also has learned to make the super flour. Here, the pair are in front of their temporary home, where they moved after the 2015 earthquake damaged their nearby house.

An MCC partner, the Rural Institution for Community Development, works with families in Nallu, Lalitpur District, where the Lopchan family lives.

Give a gift that changes lives around the world

This Christmas, give a gift of food, health or education. Explore MCC’s Christmas giving supplement, mailed with this issue of A Common Place, see Christmas giving projects online at mcc.org/christmas or contact your nearest MCC office (see page 2).
Sapana Tamang
A peer educator shares about her work in rural Nepal.

AS TOLD TO EMILY LOEWEN

I grew up in a village in Lalitpur District that did not have a secondary school, so I came to Bhadeura for school, then met my husband here. I was a student when I first learned about the Rural Institution for Community Development (RICOD, an MCC partner). As I was about to write my class 10 exams, a group of us were invited to a training on mother and child nutrition, and I also attended another training on leadership. Now, I have been a peer educator with RICOD for three years.

I travel by foot to visit women in their homes and invite them to a mothers’ group. Then I work with the RICOD field facilitator to provide training. We talk about nutrition, immunizations and the importance of getting check-ups during and after pregnancy. I help with growth monitoring for babies at a health outreach clinic that RICOD started. I write the names and numbers and check whether the infants have been taken for immunizations.

And everyone knows about the three types of foods they should eat: body-building proteins, body-protecting vitamins and energy-giving carbohydrates. Everyone eats these, if not three times then at least twice a day. I have also helped change the way my family eats. Before I attended the training, we would eat, and if you had a full stomach then that’s enough. But we learned about these three types of food and how to prepare food so that it keeps the nutrients.

I have been a peer educator with RICOD for three years. I travel by foot to visit women in their homes and invite them to a mothers’ group.

As a peer educator in Lalitpur District, Nepal, Sapana Tamang, center, often meets with women such as Bircha Maya Gole, left, and Manisha Lama, right.

I saw that people were using just rice and water to make porridge for their children, instead of including lentils and other ingredients to make it more nutritious. So I started looking for ways to make sure people see what they can do to add more nutrients to their children’s meals.

I have seen a difference in the health of my community. There were two babies who were malnourished in this area, but are now doing better after their mothers attended the trainings.

I would have to go two or three times to some houses to convince women to come. It was mostly because they had not understood what was going to happen, and also they would rather finish their work at home or in the fields. They’d think, “What’s the use of going to the meeting?”

But after they started coming, they started seeing this is something interesting and really very useful. Nowadays I call just once and everybody comes and they are on time and that really motivates me.

As I carry on with this voluntary work, I also learn new things. I had studied nutrition while in school, but that was just to sit for exams and we would not put it into practice. But after I attended this training while I was in school and then when I started as a peer educator, it began to have value, not just for me but also for the people I was talking to. One example is making nutritious porridge. I saw that people were using just rice and water to make porridge for their children, instead of including lentils and other ingredients to make it more nutritious. So I started looking for ways to make sure people see what they can do to add more nutrients to their children’s meals.

I have seen a difference in the health of my community. There were two babies who were malnourished in this area, but are now doing better after their mothers attended the trainings. Also the women take their babies regularly for immunizations.

I like that I have been able to balance work as a peer educator with work in the household and in our field. We grow maize and mustard seed, and I also do a kitchen garden where I grow green leafy vegetables, peas, onions and garlic.

We usually grow vegetables for our household use, but if we have more than enough then we sell that or keep some for seeds. I have been growing vegetables all my life, but I did attend a kitchen garden training with RICOD where I learned how to make organic compost.

I’m very happy to be working as a peer educator and to be associated with RICOD, and I want MCC to continue to support this kind of training. Training is something that goes beyond the end of the program. It increases our knowledge for the long term and is really very helpful for us.

Sapana Tamang, 25, volunteers as a peer educator with MCC partner the Rural Institution for Community Development in Lalitpur District, Nepal. She also works with her family farming maize and runs a small store.
Caring for mothers and babies, preventing the spread of HIV

In Nigeria, an MCC-supported hospital is helping mothers who are HIV positive avoid transmitting the virus to their infants.

STORY BY LINDA ESPENSHADE
PHOTOS BY MATTHEW LESTER

When Martha Peter came to Faith Alive Foundation’s clinic and hospital in Jos, Nigeria—pregnant and newly diagnosed as HIV positive—she was desperate. She had been living in a camp where she and others from northeast Nigeria settled in 2015 after fleeing the militant group, Boko Haram, but her husband forced her to leave him and the camp when she discovered she had HIV.

Her last baby had died and Peter was afraid she would lose this child too. She and her other four children came to live with her sister, who brought Peter to Faith Alive, in the city of Jos.

She remembers crying as she entered one of the clinic’s two waiting rooms where patients were praying and singing together, as part of the devotional time that starts each clinic day. She couldn’t imagine how she could live with HIV.

Dr. Mark Stephen, a staff physician at Faith Alive, had good news for her and her unborn baby. Between 2009 and 2016, 98 percent of the 1,122 pregnant mothers with HIV who delivered their babies at Faith Alive’s hospital did not transmit HIV to their babies during pregnancy or birth.

To make sure her baby would be free of HIV too, Stephen told her, she must follow his instructions, starting with taking the free antiretroviral (ARV) medication at the same time every day. Faith Alive also would provide all her prenatal care, delivery at the hospital and follow-up treat-

ment for her and the baby free of charge.

“They were so kind to me,” Peter says. “For me to have a baby that was (HIV) negative with my situation, it impressed me. I’ve never expected this would happen to me. I was wondering, ‘What kind of hospital is this?’”

It’s the kind of hospital that wraps its arms around the poorest and most vulnerable people—both Muslim and Christian—in and around Jos, offering them free health care, health classes, counseling, home care and medication.

It’s also the kind of hospital that doesn’t just meet physical needs.

Faith Alive Foundation, the Christian organization that runs the hospital and clinic, also offers vocational and biblical discipleship training and emergency food and lodging. Orphans and vulnerable children are assigned staff mentors and foster families, and Faith Alive provides education and social activities.

Ever since Dr. Christian Isichei established Faith Alive in 2003, MCC has partnered with the foundation, supporting its holistic ministry. Currently, MCC’s support includes treatment for pregnant mothers with HIV and their babies as well as vocational training for the mothers and other patients in need.

Vocational training is essential, Isichei says, because healing the body is not enough to help a per-
son thrive. “Disease leads to poverty. Poverty leads to disease. You have to break the cycle. If you empower somebody, you are breaking poverty.”

Zipporah Moses has both good health and a job because of Faith Alive’s intervention. When she came to Faith Alive 13 years ago with HIV, she wasn’t sure she would survive. At that time, when a sporadic drug supply limited treatment options, Isichei wasn’t sure either.

The most important thing Moses could do, Isichei told her, was to strengthen her immune system with a healthy diet. As she grew stronger, he got her started in Faith Alive’s sewing class. She finished it in one year and helped teach the class the second year. Then she launched her own business with the sewing machine Faith Alive gave her when she graduated. Today, she makes a living sewing dresses; each one sells for about $12, using customers’ fabric. She also teaches other patients from Faith Alive how to sew, embroider and applique in addition to basic literacy skills they’ll need to record orders and measurements. “I know . . . not to put too much work on her. Depression and stress can disturb her; so definitely, I have to come and to help her.”

Faith Alive counselors walked the couple through the steps they needed to take to reduce the chances Jerry would contract HIV and, when they wanted to have a baby, to make sure the virus wasn’t transmitted to the baby. For Blessing and Jerry, the best result of their involvement with Faith Alive came in 2016 when their daughter Joy was born without HIV. Joy responded to the medication that the doctors gave her at birth to block the growth of HIV and to a different medicine that protected her from getting the virus from her mother’s breast milk. A year later, she and her father were still free of the virus. “We were overjoyed. We still have the joy in us presently,” Jerry says, as he holds his daughter.

Part of their happiness comes from their experience at Faith Alive, Blessing and Jerry agree. They were listened to so well, Blessing says, remembering how the doctor would call them on the phone and sit down to take time to explain things to them. “Faith Alive is like a second church,” Jerry says. “Whatever burden you have when you come, you go out with ease and joy.”

Linda Espenshade is news coordinator for MCC U.S. Matthew Lester is a photographer in Lancaster, Pa.
Nurturing careers in nursing

In Bangladesh, MCC is helping young people gain the education they need to pursue careers in health care.

**STORY BY EMILY LOEWEN**

**PHOTO BY COLIN VANDENBERG**

Just a three-hour drive separates Nirma Mankhin’s nursing college in Mymensingh, Bangladesh, from her family’s home in Bhuiyapara.

At one end is a city with roads full of brightly painted rickshaws and large buses with sides dented from squeezing through traffic jams. At the other end is the village of Bhuiyapara, its quiet red-dirt roads surrounded by vibrant green rice fields, with more pedestrians and bicycles than buses.

In Bhuiyapara, Nirma’s father Monindra Rongdi and mother Sonachi Mankhin work as daily laborers in rice fields owned by others.

Meanwhile in Mymensingh, the 20-year-old, through an MCC-supported program, spends her days in classrooms filled with preserved organs, plastic skeletons and models of bodily systems. It’s these classrooms that are the key to her mother’s hopes for Nirma.

“We don’t want our children to be like us,” Sonachi Mankhin says. “We are laboring very hard—we want them to get a good job.”

As a child, she only made it through second grade. Her father died when she was young and her mother couldn’t afford education for her three daughters. “Sometimes we had to beg from others for a living,” she says. Her husband also lost his father as a young child and his mother couldn’t afford school past the fifth grade.

The couple’s oldest daughter, Tira, finished 10th grade, but then Rongdi got tuberculosis, and paying for his treatments meant the family didn’t have enough money for her to stay in school. “It wasn’t possible,” says Tira, who is now married with two children, and works out of her home as a tailor. Her husband dyes fabric in the garment industry.

Nirma, however, is able to go to nursing school because of funding from MCC, administered through the Bhalukapara Catholic Church.

The program, which is for students who would struggle to afford more schooling but want to finish grades 11 and 12 or attend vocational training programs, helps cover tuition and the cost of living in a city away from home.

It provides a tangible path for students such as Nirma or Luxmi Chambugong, who also is from Bhuiyapara and is studying nursing in Mymensingh, to gain their footing in a new career and have the opportunity for better-paying jobs.

While Chambugong’s family does own some land and farms rice, her father Moniraj Manda says they’re sometimes needed to borrow money or sell pigs, cows or trees from their land to pay for schooling. Affording Chambugong’s tuition and living costs in Mymensingh, as well as education for her siblings, would be a struggle without MCC’s help. “If we wouldn’t get that support maybe we would sell the land, maybe we would sell the cow to help them finish,” Manda says.

Instead, he and his wife can focus on working their land, while Chambugong—dressed in a white lab coat that is the uniform of nurses in training—continues to attend classes at Rumdo Institute of Medical Technology.

Across town at Scholar’s Medical Institute, Nirma is now in her second year of nursing school, taking anatomy and physiology courses that are leading her closer to a career in health care.

As she studies and practices her skills three days a week at the Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, she knows how important it is to her parents that she and her sister, who attends another nursing college in Mymensingh, take advantage of this opportunity.

“Mom and Dad said, ‘We couldn’t study more but we want you to study,’” she says. “‘What we couldn’t do, you will do.’”

Emily Loewen is digital content coordinator for MCC. Colin Vandenberg is a photographer in Winnipeg, Manitoba.
Rehabilitation therapist

**Name:** Esther H. Bucher  
**Hometown:** Richmond, Virginia (Richmond Mennonite Fellowship)

**Assignment:** Rehabilitation therapist at the day center of MCC partner Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange in Quang Ngi Province, Vietnam.

**Typical day:** After my husband Paul Bucher and I ride our motorbike to the center, I begin therapy work with one of the children affected by Agent Orange, an herbicide used by the U.S. military during the Vietnam War that has resulted in severe disabilities for many children and even grandchildren of those exposed to it. I pair up with a Vietnamese staff member, using activities to stretch each child’s skills and potential. No one is the same. After lunch with staff, we go home for a noon rest. In 90-plus temperatures and high humidity this is refreshing! Then I do more therapy activities, trainings or home visits in the afternoons.

**MCC story:** I worked with the Mennonite church and MCC in Vietnam from 1970 to 1974 while my husband did alternative service in Vietnam, then worked 27 years as an occupational therapist before returning to MCC.

**Joys:** When an idea or activity I’ve shared with staff, who are not professionally trained in rehabilitation, is tried and changes people’s way of experiencing their world.

**Challenge:** Limited language ability and at times feeling unable to explain or share ideas, particularly medical explanations.

**Find your place**  
MCC has workers around the world, as well as in Canada and the U.S. Go to mcc.org/serve, contact your nearest MCC office or follow @servemcc on Twitter to learn about current opportunities. MCC workers are expected to exhibit a commitment to Christian faith, active church membership and biblical peacemaking.

**What you can do**  
Visit mcc.org/agent-orange to encourage members of Congress to sponsor legislation addressing the devastation Agent Orange left behind, including cleaning up still-infected areas and providing health funding for multiple generations in Vietnam and the U.S. who live with disabilities caused by Agent Orange.

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Sudam Kumari Rai helps tend to her family’s calf at their home in Bhatigachh, Nepal.

**My name is Sudam Kumari Rai**  
**Age:** 9  
**Lives in:** Bhatigachh, Morang District, Nepal

I live with my mother, father and older brother. I also have two older sisters, but they have gotten married and moved away. I have lots of friends in the neighborhood. Our favorite game is when we cook. We make a stoved and pretend to cook.

I go to school in the morning, come home and eat, then go back to school in the afternoon. I speak two different languages, Nepali at school and Maithali at home.

About a year ago our house burned down. When we rebuilt it we had space for a garden. Now we’re growing green leafy vegetables and okra. I help bring water from the well for the plants.

Another chore is feeding our two cows, a mom and a baby. They live in a shelter attached to our house. I go to the wheat fields and cut weeds for them to eat. I also clear out manure, sweep the yard and help my mother make food.

**My favorite food:** Rice with dal (lentils), potato, cauliflower and cabbage  
**My favorite subject:** Nepali  
**What I want to be:** worker in the market

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**Garden word find**  
Sudam’s mother learned more about gardening through an MCC-supported training. Here are some words she might have heard.

- cabbage
- okra
- soil
- tomato
- water
- greens
- compost
- weeds
- tomatoes
- vegetables
- leaves
- veggies
- plants
- dirt
- garden
- earth

**How do you say hello in Nepali?**

**namaste**  
(Say “na-mas-TAY”)  

**Print more copies**  
[link to mcc.org/hello]

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**NEPAL**  
How do you say hello in Nepali?

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**For children**  
**hello**
GIVE HOPE

MCC CHRISTMAS GIVING
mcc.org/christmas

“….I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people…”
-Luke 2:10