

GULF COUNTRIES TRIP 2 CAN-GO REPORT

Trip Dates: October 19-31, 2023

Report Written by Rusty Savage

C for Champion

- The original champions for this field came from our Nepali-speaking congregations in EFC-ER. Pastor Norbu Tamang was particularly influential in articulating the opportunities for ministry among migrant workers in the Gulf States to the EFC-ER Multiplication Team. Pastor Norbu has also worked hard to share the Luke 10 vision with Nepali-speaking Friends in other regions (currently there are 7 congregations throughout EFC-NA). Pastor DB Tamang of Mid-America Yearly Meeting was invited to participate in this Luke 10 trip because of the growing interest for mission sending within these Nepali-speaking US churches.
- Pastor Amen Thapa of EFC-Nepal has consistently given his affirmation to exploring ministry opportunities in Dubai and Doha. He is in contact with dozens of EFC-Nepal members who have relocated to this region, including potential leaders like Roman, a young man whom Amen led to Christ and disciplined while in Malaysia.
- Pastors Zach Bohler, Matt Bradbury, and Rusty Savage have been influential champions for this field on the EFC-ER Multiplication Team and throughout the Eastern Region.
- Thomas Moore, an EFM Future Missionary, was part of both exploratory trips to the Gulf States and has a deep love for Arab peoples and a definite desire for EFM to engage in ministry in this part of the world.

A for Affirmation

- Key leaders in EFC-ER have sensed a growing pull to open a field in this strategic region of the world where so many peoples from restricted nations throughout the 10/40 window are now living. While we have not yet identified individuals from within our region who sense a clear call to be sent as missionaries, there is a definite desire within EFC-ER to “own” a field in such a way that we are recruiting and sending our own people over the long haul. If Dubai were identified as one of the new EFM fields, EFC-ER leaders believe that families and individuals from within our region would be called to go.
- The sense of affirmation on our Luke 10 team increased significantly on this second trip, especially as our team progressively felt that God may indeed be calling EFM to Dubai, but not necessarily to minister exclusively to Nepali-speaking people as we originally envisioned. Our team felt much greater affirmation for endorsing EFC-Nepal’s efforts to minister to Nepali-speaking people while EFM focuses on multinational leadership development in this strategic, diverse city in the heart of the most unreached region of the world.
- During our time together in the Gulf, leadership from EFC-Nepal expressed their commitment to begin casting a vision for missions sending to this region within EFC-Nepal and take steps to form an EFC-Nepal Missions Committee that will begin to build the necessary framework to recruit, train, send, and care for missionaries from Nepal to the Gulf States.
- Nepali-speaking Friends Churches in the US have already committed to raise funds for this field.

N for Compelling Need

- The United Arab Emirates is made up of 36 distinct people groups, 31 of which are considered unreached.
- Only 1.1% of the UAE population is Evangelical Christian.
- 83.1% of the total UAE population is considered unreached.
- Geographically, Dubai is located in the heart of the most unreached region of the world.
- Millions of migrant workers live in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Doha. The majority of them come from nations with significantly unreached populations and heavy restrictions on missionary activity.
- Most of these migrant workers are separated from spouses and/or children who remain in their home nations. In many cases, they are only able to visit their families once every 1-2 years.
- During our time with Christian migrant workers in this region, their consistent request was for leadership development and biblical training.
- The relative freedom allowed by the UAE to establish churches for non-Emirati people who are living in the country as migrant workers allows for a significant Christian “beachhead” to be established within the heart of the Arab world.

G for Gifting

- Our team envisions the possibility for two distinct but overlapping missions in this region. One mission, under the care of EFM, could focus on leadership development and biblical training for multi-national English speakers. Dubai is a hub for people from all over the world, but especially from south Asia. English and Hindi represent the two most common and unifying languages for this cross-section of people.
- A second mission, under the care of EFC-Nepal, could focus on church planting among Nepali-speaking people.
- Having separate but overlapping teams in Dubai may allow for significant partnership between EFM and EFC-Nepal while also avoiding some of the complexity of a single, unified work.
- Prakash Thing, a young pastor in EFC-Nepal has expressed a desire to be sent as a missionary and was invited by Amen Thapa to participate in this Luke 10 trip as a means of helping to discern his call.
- Thomas Moore participated in both Luke 10 exploratory trips to the Gulf States. Thomas feels a sense of calling to minister to Arab peoples, but is not clear that Dubai is the place. He remains open to this region and continues to pray for the Lord’s direction.

O for Opportunity

- Our missionary contact with FOCUS (Fellowship of Christian UAE Students) encouraged us that he sees more opportunity and less restrictions for gospel ministry in UAE than ever before.
- Two different Nepali women, unaware of our reason for being in UAE, asked us to send workers to establish churches among the migrant worker population. These honest invitations from migrant workers felt very much like a “Macedonian call” to members of our team.

- When asked for his advice, Pastor Kumar of the Himalayan Vision Church in Dubai told us that “the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few” in UAE. He was very encouraging to our team that he and his church would welcome our presence and partnership in the region.
- Pastor Rajendra works full time as a driving instructor in Qatar and also leads a church for migrant workers with over 700 attendees who worship in three services on Fridays. Many of the members travel more than two hours on a bus to be part of the worship services. On both of our visits, Pastor Rajendra has refused our offer of a small financial gift to help cover the large cost his church has incurred by feeding and hosting our group. His consistent request has been for help in leadership development and Bible training for his people.
- Many of the Christians we spoke with in the UAE and Qatar told us that migrant workers are uniquely open to considering Christianity in a way that they would not be in their home countries. They all sensed that the “soil” among migrant workers in the Gulf Region was ready for the seed of the gospel.
- The isolation from family that many of the migrant workers experience upon their arrival in the Gulf Region provides a profound opportunity to meet a genuine need for community and friendships.

Luke 10 Team Recommendation to EFM:

Our team recommendation to the Think Tank is a strong “yes” to opening a new field in the Gulf Region, centered in Dubai, UAE. We think that working out of Dubai specifically would result in the greatest opportunity for ministry in multiple emirates.

We believe that four of the five CAN GO criteria have been met. The one criterion which has not yet been met is “Gifting,” as no missionary candidates from EFM have expressed a strong desire and clear sense of calling to be sent to this region. Nevertheless, we are clear in our sense that there is great potential for fruitful kingdom work among the migrant worker population in the Gulf and have confidence that God will raise up workers for this field.

The most compelling reason for our team is the opportunity that Dubai presents for ministry among a large number of people from some of the most restricted nations around the globe. Population growth in the UAE is among the highest in the world, due almost exclusively to the influx of workers from India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. During our time in the region, we sensed a genuine openness among many of these immigrants to gospel conversations. This was confirmed by many of the believers we spoke to in the region. Our ministry contacts in UAE and Qatar have consistently requested help in leadership development and biblical training for their people, which would not only strengthen the church in the Middle East but would impact the home nations and communities to which most of these workers will eventually return as well. Establishing strong, healthy churches among migrant workers who make up 80% of the population in this region may even open the door for future ministry among the native Arab population.

Although our original interest was in working exclusively with Nepali-speaking migrant workers in the Gulf, our team ultimately concluded that God may be calling EFM to have a *multinational focus* that concentrates on training and equipping workers from a variety of backgrounds and ethnicities who have all gathered in this one region of the world.

At the same time, we believe that God may be calling EFC-Nepal to send workers of their own, who would focus on church planting among Nepali immigrants. These separate but overlapping ministry spheres could provide a unique opportunity for fruitful partnership between EFM and EFC-Nepal while also avoiding some of the difficulties of a single multinational team with a singular ministry focus. In other words, we could work closely together as Evangelical Friends from the US and Nepal, sharing strong fellowship and cooperation, but on separate teams with our own distinct goals, sending organizations, and procedures.

In addition to our recommendation about opening a field in the Gulf Region, our team recommends that EFM partner with Asian Friends to hold a conference in the very near future, similar to the recent gathering in Burundi, which may help Yearly Meetings in Asia begin conversations about how to develop the necessary framework for missions sending.