Dear Friends,

Greetings from Yokohama, Japan. We are grateful for your faithful support of the youth mission in Japan. We are sustained by your unceasing prayers and generosity.

As with you, our ministries and daily lives have been affected by the COVID-19 situation since February. From March to May, so many events and gatherings were canceled or postponed. Many, or probably nearly all, of the churches here were closed for several weeks. Fortunately, we were able to maintain a small weekly worship gathering with a local pastor, his family, and a few elders. We worshiped the Lord and prayed for the church members, most of whom had to remain at their homes. Of course, we made efforts to follow the local health protocols.

Thankfully, we are not directly aware of anyone here who has been hospitalized or passed away due to this virus. Nathan and I, and our three sons are doing well under God’s mercy.

During this unusual time, we find ourselves asking deep questions such as, “How can we evangelize when we are told not to gather?” We have had to sit with deep questions like this. Another question that we have been asking ourselves is, “What is a true and fruitful ministry in this context?” It has been an important time to reexamine ourselves and our ministries.

Many have been trying to reach out online, but at the same time, we recognize there are limits as to what can be done online. Some things can only be done in person and some things can only be fully conveyed in person. After all, that is what the incarnation was all about.

This is not the first time we have had to do such soul searching. We remember our experiences of other disasters over the years. We were here in 2011 through the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. The damage was terrible with approximately 20,000 fatalities. Many people were washed out to sea. It was grief almost too much to bear. Not to mention, the meltdown of the nuclear power plant at Fukushima, which still affects so many. We still remember the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in NYC in 2001, when we were serving the church there. As you may know, terrorists hijacked four airplanes, two of which they flew into the Twin Towers in NYC. The collapse of the two tallest towers destroyed or severely damaged a total of nine buildings. All onboard the planes as well as almost 3,000 people in the buildings were killed. The smoke from the burning debris and the cries of the people who had lost loved ones rose toward the sky for many days and months.

And now, in 2020, a cacophony of voices seems to again be spreading fear, insecurity, isolation, loneliness, despair, anger, and violence. This situation with the virus along with other issues is peeling away the veneer, revealing our human condition in all its brokenness. We almost despair. But, we must remember that this is a broken world so loved by God. Though we cannot heal or save ourselves, we can turn to the One who is beyond us. Yes, the only One true God who loves us with an everlasting love. Only God can save and heal us completely. We remember how Jesus came to this broken world staying with those who were afraid and living among us, touching and healing the sick.
Jesus loved the children and blessed them. Now we hear Jesus’ invitation to follow Him. We must keep our eyes on Jesus so that we can know where to point the next generation. Please continue to help us.

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Please pray for:

1. Nathan’s work at Ferris Girls’ school. The school has been struggling to follow all the guidelines. The teachers have had to create homework for the students and arrange online classes. Now they are transitioning back to school in stages and having to take all kinds of precautions. Nathan has more work than usual to manage online classes and the transition back to classes at school and mountains of incoming homework to check. Many teachers and students are afraid of the virus and feeling insecure about the future. Please pray for Nathan to be a good witness of Christ among the other teachers and for the students.

2. The Green House Youth gatherings. Unfortunately, the events had to be canceled for the past three months. We are considering when and how to restart the student gatherings. Please pray for wisdom so we can again make space and time for the students to hear and see the living gospel.

3. The Children and Worship (C&W) program and curriculum. Fortunately, we have been able to re-open the C&W training sessions since mid-June. Our other bigger seminars had to be canceled or postponed. However, we praise the Lord that this stay home order afforded Nozomi and the team the badly needed time to work on the translation of the second C&W textbook, “Following Jesus.” We have been working on it for quite a while, but now can report substantial progress. We are hopeful that the book will be published soon. We believe the publishing of this textbook will breathe new life into the ministry. We also believe that C&W is urgently needed as a counterbalance to how young people are being sucked into the virtual world on their small screens.

4. The state of the church in Japan. Now many of the members, especially the seniors, are afraid to come to church even after the reopening. Please pray that the church will be able to proclaim the eternal hope in God and that the church members will be able to return.

5. The urgent concern for the youth who are deeply affected by the internet. The digital world is now dominating the lives of the youth more than ever. Until just a few weeks ago, teachers and parents still tried to limit students’ time online. But now, by adding “required” online classes and online meetings onto the already addictive games and virtual world of SNS, we observe that now the students have almost no limits. We observe that there is much damage being done to these precious young hearts and minds because of the 24/7/365 overuse of the internet. Please pray for the youth to be liberated from bondage to the gadgets of this modern world. Please pray that the youth will be filled with the Spirit of the Living God! Please pray that God will give us wisdom and strength to carry on the work given to us.

We also pray for you knowing that the churches around the world are similarly struggling. We pray that the Kingdom of God will come and God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Hope in God,
Nathan and Nozomi Brownell

Brownells’ ministry

Nathan helps share the gospel through the GreenHouse youth center by identifying, encouraging, and raising up youth leaders. Nozomi shares the vision for a revived national youth outreach via the Children and Worship International program. To learn more go to www.rca.org/brownell.