2019 YEAR IN REVIEW

1. What are you and your ministry partner doing that is unique/positive to the area?

For decades and centuries, the percentage of Christians in Japan has been under 2%. The average church here has only a few teens if any. We aim to help change this. One of our projects is a mid-week youth gathering of junior and senior high school students from area schools. Another project is a special quarterly event for youth from several area churches. These gatherings are to help the students experience Christian community while they are young. We also want to encourage area youth leaders and pastors in their outreach to the next generation. It is hard to quantify this in numbers but my wife Nozomi reports that during the holiday season alone from Thanksgiving to Christmas we hosted 280 individuals.

2. What were some exciting outcomes from this past year in your ministry? Please share 1-2 stories.

1. New youth events
   In addition to our already established weekly youth events at the Green House youth center, we are excited about the new quarterly youth events, which we are co-hosting in coordination with several local pastors. This is the fruit of a decade of prayer and networking.

2. Invitation to speak to the alumni association of the school
   Last Spring, I was invited twice to speak to the alumni association of the school. The first time was to a group of their core regularly attending members. My message was based on the Bible story of Esther along with quotes from certain missionaries who were involved in the founding of the school. The message was well-received such that I was invited to also address their large annual meeting. It was a privilege to be invited twice in the same season. Also although recent high school graduates do not usually attend such official alumni gatherings until several years after graduation (except for what we might call homecoming type events), I was also glad and encouraged to see almost a dozen of our recent graduates who came to hear my message. Please pray that the seeds of that message will take root, grow and blossom.

3. What were some of the ongoing challenges you faced this past year? How did this impact your ministry?

In reading through the Bible again this year, I have been deeply moved by the history of the kings of Israel
and Judah, as recorded in 1st and 2nd Kings as well as 1st and 2nd Chronicles, (especially 2 Chronicles). As you know, both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel cycled through generations of good and bad kings. However, even when there is a good king, we often find this line, “He did what was good in the sight of the Lord but did not take down the high places …” I have been wondering what “the high places” of today are? And I wonder what future generations will say about us? We need to be intentional about this. As we reach out to the next generation, we must ask the Lord for spiritual discernment regarding what can be made inviting but also what must we be clear about taking down, even if it complicates the mission? We should not seek the path of least resistance.

There is always the challenge of the things that so fully occupy the youth. Here, in a nutshell, is a typical day of a junior or senior high school student. Early morning school club practice (the clubs are their sports teams or certain academic subjects like biology or chemistry etc…) several days per week, normal classes throughout the day, and after school clubs. Then they’re off to private cram schools in the evening and this is repeated almost every day, including Saturdays (although thankfully our school does not have classes on Saturday as some do). Students only have Sunday off, but most are exhausted. This means that the system here is organized against them having even a chance to go to church. Some of the schools, which were founded by missionaries, still maintain chapel services so some youth can hear the gospel. But, most lack the foundational experience of Christian community. In addition to chapel time, some of the mission schools maintain a mandatory weekly Bible class, but despite the Japanese chaplain’s best efforts, it seems that still, only a precious few find their way to Christian community. So we are here to help augment and support the work of the Japanese chaplains and pastors who are trying to reach the next generation, we are a bridge to connect the students with the local pastors and churches.

4. How can your church partners and supporting individuals be praying for you?

Please pray for the youth in Japan who are under the heavy pressures of both the high school entrance and college entrance exams. These are set up as a kind of make or break it system. Many of the teens become depressed, such that they cannot even attend class or in some cases won’t even go outside. God’s Spirit at work through our prayers may be the only thing that can bring such troubled teens so they can hear and receive the Gospel.

This 2020 Olympics will be held in Tokyo. Please pray for discernment so that we would be able to recognize new opportunities for ministry but also take appropriate caution as there may be increased security risks such as terrorism.

Please also continue to pray for our safety, as we live and work in an area prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes. You may remember the mega-quake of 2011.

5. Besides prayer support, are you in need of any other form of support (financial, mission team need, etc.) that your supporting churches might be able to provide?

As you know, my wife Nozomi’s primary outreach is Children and Worship (C&W). C&W is a Montessori based educational system using small wooden figures to tell the Bible stories. This program is very effective here in Japan (and in other parts of the world). If your churches have unused C&W figures or woodworkers who might be able to produce and gift a set of the figures to our mission it would be very much appreciated and used to share the Gospel. Our mission fund may be able to help take care of postage costs. Please support us at [http://www.rca.org/brownell](http://www.rca.org/brownell) and at the Children and Worship tab on our page.

6. What are you looking forward to in this next year in your ministry? Share some goals you have for this upcoming year.

One of my first goals this year is to help lead a successful retreat for missionaries. This year I am serving on the planning committee for the annual missionary retreat which is held with those serving in connection with the mainline churches here. I look forward to the close fellowship and kinship that we can experience as the Holy Spirit ministers between us.

Another goal is to help with the successful restructuring of one of our partner organizations. The work will be challenging but it is necessary. Please pray that the Lord will grant me the wisdom needed for this task.