



RCA Global Mission

2020 Year in Review



Nathan and Nozomi Brownell – Japan

2020 has been a very unusual year, to say the least. Many of our original plans had to be canceled, rescheduled, or downsized due to the COVID-19 situation.

Highlights and Joys of 2020

Although almost everything went into a virtual shutdown from late March to early June, the K-12 schools were able to reopen quickly and we were able to maintain a small weekly worship service at the local church.

Because the schools re-opened online and then in-person classes relatively quickly here, Nathan could teach online during those first two months of the COVID-19 situation and return to in-person classes for the rest of the year. Believe it or not, summer break here was abbreviated so the schools could make up for some of the lost time. Needless to say, everyone has faced a lot of challenges such as schedule adjustments, masks, and distancing, but thankfully Nathan and the other mission teachers' witness to the students could continue.

We were also glad to eventually be able to do an initial "re-open" of the Green House after-school program for junior and senior high students (from October to December). Unfortunately, we have had to pause that again due to the COVID-19 situation here, but we hope to reopen again soon. Hopefully sometime this spring or by early summer.

One of our greatest joys has been to be a part of a local church, which has been able to continue at least a small weekly service straight through the whole year. Even during the first shutdowns, our family and the senior pastor's family along with two or three elders or deacons held a brief worship service every week. Our second, Raymond, who is a Bible college student and an intern at the church, has been able to help restart the Sunday school program (Nozomi has also been helping this effort). Raymond has been on rotation leading the Sunday school and has been invited into the rotation to preach at the church for the Sunday morning main worship service. We praise the Lord for such opportunities for mission.

Children and Worship

We were very glad to have been able to restart the Children and Worship program, which is currently ongoing. Since early summer 2020, Children and Worship Japan set a new goal refocused on empowering and encouraging the already certified worship leaders. Previously, we had been focused on introducing the program to wider audiences and on cultivating relationships with other educational groups. In this way, we were able to adapt and resume the monthly worship focused on training the adults and the seminar/workshops, albeit with some limitations.

Although had to downsize the seminars and workshops, we were able to increase the number of workshops. We are happy to report that all the events held were at full capacity.

Some benefits of the smaller seminars were that participants could have time to make more of the props for the stories and there were more opportunities to practice the storytelling together. Such quality time in smaller groups strengthened the bonds between the present worship leaders.



Before the pandemic, everyone seemed so busy that we often felt a lack of time. Interestingly, God has used this situation for good. Now some are more intentional about trying to slow down and find what matters in life.

We also discovered that the C&W program can work well even within COVID-19 restrictions. Firstly, the program works best with small numbers of children. Secondly, we can easily adapt the setting of the room so that children can keep an appropriate space between each other to prevent the spread of any sickness. Thirdly, the program encourages a quiet and orderly manner. All of this done well helps kids experience a certain sense of calm and order that comes from the Creator—despite all the chaos in our world, which is projected in the daily news.

Ironically, this season has become an opportunity to reconfirm the blessings of C&W. We praise the Lord that many worship leaders were granted courage and opportunities to continue working with kids and adults. Some of us found it effective to tell the stories through video when their churches were unable to gather. We created certain guidelines about how such videos would be posted responsibly. Another benefit we had not anticipated was that some of the videos reached the families of the children who had been participating in the C&W programs.

We are also glad to report how overjoyed the C&W leaders here have been because of the donation of several sets of wooden figures from a U.S. church. In 2020, Pultneyville Reformed Church of Upstate New York sent us several boxes of used figures and felt underlays. These are now shared among the worship leaders who were preparing their Worship Centers. This generous gift is a visible sign of spiritual support from the community of faith in the U.S. The sense of togetherness in the name of the Lord gives us so much encouragement! We are so grateful for such gifts. These additional sets of figures will continue to be a great support for those starting and sustaining the Sunday schools and outreaches across Japan.

Despite the current COVID-19 related limits, there are still many benefits to be experienced through C&W that will impact the spiritual growth of children and adults.

Now it seems that the digital world is trying to consume the minds and souls of people. We must realize the strength of the real world by honoring the quiet time to experience the goodness of our Lord by simply using our five senses. C&W is an extraordinarily powerful tool to touch people's lives in a very deep way. We know from our experience that it has a way to reach out even to non-Christians. C&W helps deepen our spirituality, and it provides new ways to engage the ministry.

Please, do not give up! Let us work together.



How We Can Pray

Although we were unable to go out to promote the program to new groups, we praise the Lord for sustaining us thus far. For this New Year, please pray for the following:

- For our inner strength and physical energy/health and an increase in leadership to empower more individuals and the community of faith by providing means to serve the Lord in concrete ways.
- For the spirituality of children in Japan and more opportunities for them to hear the Word of God and become a part of a worshipping community.
- For the empowerment of Worship Leaders. Some lack opportunities to lead C&W due to various situations.
- For new people to join the C&W training.
- For the formation of a team of woodworkers to provide the necessary figures.

Additional Needs

We are still in need of more wooden figures because we are trying to arrange a system to make the materials available to the churches here in Japan. If any of the RCA churches are willing to send us the used or new figures, please let us know.

The Green House model worship center also serves as a virtual library through which we lend out some of the figures to those who do not have enough to tell the stories. More materials on hand will help us spread the program without worrying so much about the limited number of sets, and the dates and time of duration we can lend the supplies.

Several of those who want to start C&W at their churches are limited by the cost of the figures. We often hear, "It's such a nice program, but how can we afford so many figures? And where can we order them and, if we order, when can we receive them?" Too often we cannot reply well.

Hopes for 2021

- We anticipate publishing the second textbook, "Following Jesus," in Japanese. We have been working on the translation for the last few years and we are now very close to its completion! With this textbook, we will be able to train more worship leaders to share more of Jesus' stories.
- Continue training the Worship Leaders who can serve the Christian community.
- Provide additional training for those who are called to be trainers.
- For the mental health of the junior and senior high school students and that we will be able to reopen the youth outreach program at the right time.
- For the restructuring project of one of our partner organizations known as the Interboard. Nathan is the representative director. Please pray that the Lord would direct and lead the whole board for the mutual benefit of all those involved.
- Pray that we would be able to continue the mission in such a way as to help provide for the next generation of missionaries to and from Japan.

