

STAFF UPDATE - ALEX & ERI VERWEY

After finishing their studies, Alex and Eri returned to Japan and Eri started to work part-time with Japan Mission.

Their first child, *William*, was born in July 2012. Neil's heart was filled with joy as he became a great grandfather for the first time. Alex and Eri were a great encouragement to him as he suffered from cancer and he went to be with the Lord on August 5, 2013.

The Lord used this situation to speak to their hearts and Alex and Eri decided to join Japan Mission as full-time workers from September 2013.

The Lord later blessed Alex and Eri with two more children, *Joseph*, born in August 2014; and a girl, *Naoko*, born in July 2017. *Joey* is now in kindergarten and *Will* is now in grade school.

The Lord has opened up many avenues of ministry for Alex and Eri through their children. When the children met *Will* at kindergarten, their parents asked if we would teach them English. That was the beginning of the *Kid's Club* ministry. Many children and their parents started to frequent our property and hear the Gospel for the first time.

When the children at *Will's* grade school met him, they also asked us to teach them English, so we started an *after-school program*, where we have been able to share God's love with grade school children each week.

Pray for Eri as the Lord continues to give her unique opportunities to influence people of many walks of life. The Lord has blessed her ministry among the families, and she has had the joy of introducing a number of them to local churches. She also leads a prayer group for young Christian mothers who are in need of encouragement and prayer. **Pray** for wisdom and discernment as Eri offers words of council to many.



Alex & Eri Verwey with
Nao (2), Will (7) & Joey (5)



Sept / Oct 2019

THE GOLDEN RULE

Alex and Eri Verwey were married in 2008, and are now an important part of the work of Japan Mission. This is the remarkable story of how Eri's desire to learn English played a pivotal role in her salvation.

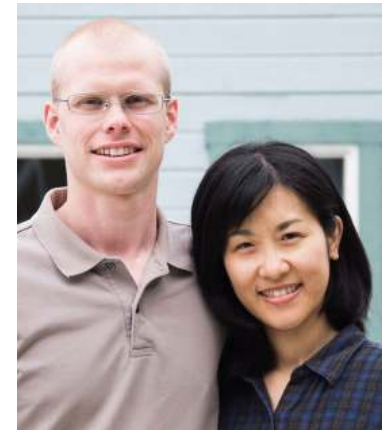
Eri was born into a typical Japanese family near Kyoto city in June 1984. Her parents and grandparents taught her and her younger sister to pray to the spirits of their ancestors and respect the gods by worshipping at the local shrine.

As Eri grew up playing in the countryside of Kyoto, she struggled to live up to people's expectations and was very much afraid of being teased at school. When her school mates would annoy her, she would become frustrated and torment her younger sister.

"One night, while I was in middle school, I felt so disillusioned that I cut my wrist," Eri shared. "My friends had rejected me, I felt hurt and miserable, and started to question the reason for living.

"What would happen to me if I died?" was the thought that struck my mind, as I saw the blood dripping from my hand. The realization that I had no answer to that question suddenly made me very much afraid of death! I cried out to my mother and she rushed me to a nearby hospital.

"Sometime later, I faced a turning-point in my life while riding a bus. A friendly-looking, English-speaking family sat behind me. I was curious about foreigners and wanted to learn more about their lives



Alex and Eri Verwey

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and culture, so I hoped that they would speak to me.

"I heard a voice behind me saying, 'Hi!' so I turned around and nervously said, 'Hi!' I was embarrassed when I realized that the foreign man was talking on his cell phone!

"He was equally surprised by my response and started to talk to me afterwards, and invited me to study English at his church.

"The people at his church were very friendly and welcomed me whole-heartedly. I heard a different talk from the Bible each week after English class.

"As I learned about Christianity, I soon realized that I could not go along with their teachings. I knew that if I became a Christian, I would have to give up my independent lifestyle and would not be able to live up to my family's expectations.

"I was determined not to become a Christian, so I tried to sleep during most of the Bible talks.

"As my English improved, I noticed that these Christians had something that I desired. They seemed to be at peace and assured that their God would help them when they faced difficulties in life.

"I understood the story of Jesus dying on the cross and shedding His blood for my sins, but struggled to believe the resurrection.

"As I sought answers and faced various problems, I started to pray to the Lord Jesus and found that my prayers were being answered!

"This helped me realize that Jesus was alive, and that the resurrection was indeed a historical event. I then confessed my sins and asked Jesus to become my Lord and Savior, when I was 15 years old.

"If you declare with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9, NIV).

"As God worked in my heart, I was committed to show God's love to my family and live out the golden rule of Christ." ***Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them*** (Matthew 7:12).

"I realized how much God had changed my heart since becoming a Christian when my unsaved sister gave me a letter and a present, even though it was not my birthday!

"She wrote: *'Dear Eri, I thought that you were the person that I hated the most, but you changed and are now showing such true concern for me. My feelings have changed from hating you to you really loving you!'*"

As Eri grew in the Lord and graduated from high school, God led her to attend Kyoto International University (KIU), which is a Christian university.

When she was 19, her faith was severely tested when her mother was diagnosed with cancer and died shortly afterwards. She struggled with the thought that her mother died without ever having the chance to turn to the Lord, and she felt as though she was somehow to blame.

KIU is where Eri first met Alex and he was able to pray with her and help her, as she faced the many challenges of living with a family that was so steeped in idolatry.

"One night, I was spending time with my grandparents when my grandpa asked me, 'How old are you now?'" Eri shared.

"I am 23."

"I see," he said, while rubbing a piece of paper against my arm.

"The room was a little dark, so I could not figure out what he was doing. 'What are you doing?' I asked, while pointing to the piece of paper.

"This is a talisman for you from the Uzigami family god," he explained. 'He will protect you from illness and injury. I just need to have your name and age to make this charm valid.'

"I was very upset. 'I don't need that kind of protection!' I responded. 'You are involving me in idolatry and I don't want to have anything to do with it!'

"We argued to and fro, but I later realized that I should have been much more respectful in my attitude and words. He was offended at my indignation and asked me to leave. He felt that I had rudely rejected his kind concern for me.

"I realized through this incident how much my grandparents were involved in darkness and what a deep relationship they had with the spirit world.

"I knew that I could not compromise with idolatry, but I also

knew that I owed him an apology. 'I want to apologize for being so rude to you last night,' I said to him while he was washing his car.

"You can help me wash the car," he replied. Then his somber face broke out into a smile and I knew I was forgiven.

"After we washed the car, he invited me to go with him to his garden to pick some vegetables. 'I want to share the vegetables with you,' he said."

After Eri graduated with a degree in *International Relations*, the Lord led Alex and Eri to get married in July 2008. They then moved to California, where she worked and studied *Christian Counseling*.

During 2010, Eri's grandfather fell gravely ill, so they both returned to Japan for a short visit, where the Lord gave them a wonderful opportunity to visit and pray with him.

"On Sunday we decided not to go to church, but to bring church to grandpa," Alex shared. "We had a wonderful time of fellowship as we prayed, sang hymns and read the Word with him!" Although on his death bed and sometimes incoherent, the Lord seemed to do a work in his heart. Eri's grandfather passed away a few weeks after Alex and Eri had to return to the USA.

Pray for the salvation of Eri's father. He is reading his Bible and has taken steps to cut ties with Buddhism and the local shrine. He now attends church regularly, but has not yet asked the Lord Jesus to be his Savior and Lord. ■