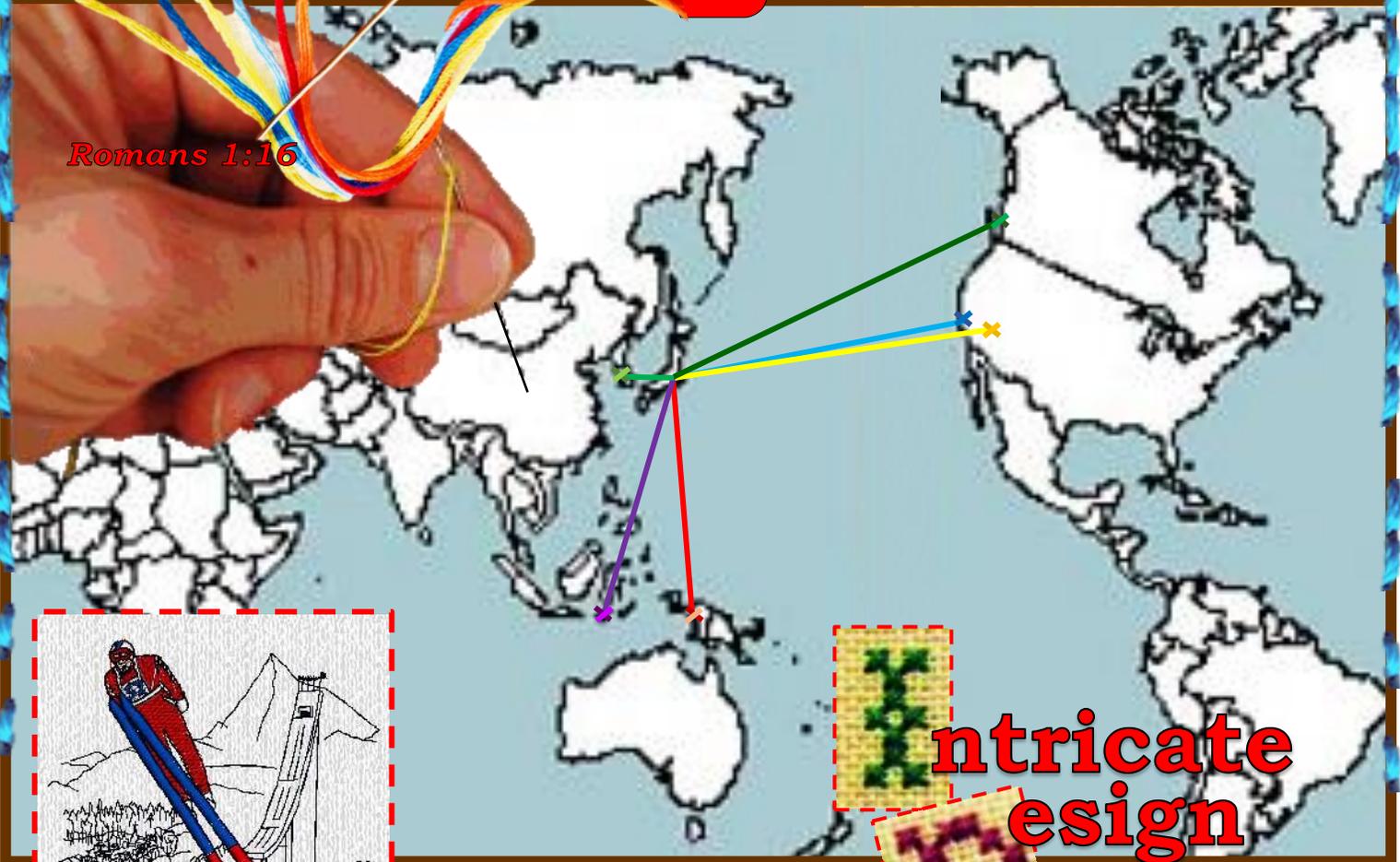


Going Forth

Romans 1:16



Intricate Design



Wouldn't it be nice to actually SEE God's Hand working above us?

On the map above, we've highlighted five places that the Lord has stretched His colorful strings of music, friendships, family, and prayer partnerships to connect our family and ministry here at Urawa Lutheran Church and School (ULS) in Japan with other ministries, schools, churches, & friends. God is at work on His Design of Salvation and Love.

There is a bright GREEN string connecting us with Korea, along with the rest of the world following the exciting Olympics in Pyeong Chang! As a family, we cheer loudly for both America and Japan! It is unusual to have the Olympics take place in our time zone, but we still tape events and watch them in the evenings. We miss the English American broadcasting and back stories of athletes, but are having so much fun watching as many events as we can! Recently, while skiing as a family, we pretended we were athletes in the Games. Having attended the Winter Olympics in Nagano in 1998, we have such good memories of shivering in the snow, singing and dancing along with the Japanese crowds to keep warm, waiting for events to begin and soaking in the international atmosphere of these remarkable Games.

You have read many stories in our newsletters about our connections with our partners in mission churches and schools in California and Arizona, shown above in light BLUE and YELLOW. The student & professor exchanges with Concordia University Irvine and Christ Church Lutheran and Christ Lutheran School in Phoenix have continued successfully, influencing more and more Japanese students and their families at ULS.

In this letter, you will read of our renewed connection with two schools in Indonesia, marked in PURPLE and RED.

Watching the Lord work His Design, slowly stitching His pattern in His own Time is an honor. Sometimes God's intricate designs have so many details and we look too closely at what is in front of us, not able to see the big picture that He is creating. Read of how we have been waiting for His Timing on page 3.

We have written in recent newsletters about two professional musicians, Taka & Yumiko Nagatsuka who joined our praise band at church just for the joy of the music. We have told you of how their son has gone as an exchange student to Vancouver in Canada, shown as a dark GREEN string, to a Christian school and joined the chapel band. He and his parents have been amused to see how many songs our two bands have in common. Those lyrics of praise are sure to work in their hearts!

Each year when chaperoning ULS students to the United States for a
(continued on page 2)

From Heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; from His dwelling place He watches all who live on earth – For the word of the Lord is right & true; He is faithful in all He does. The plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of His heart through all generations. (Psalm 33: 13, 4, 11)



month of American cultural and language study, there are students who return to Japan excited about the English Christian songs that they sang all summer.

Last year, a group of high school students formed a band who joined our praise worship times at church and occasionally lead special high school chapels at school. The band, made up mostly of juniors, called themselves "The L-Rights." The students in the photo at the right giving their "L" sign for the band are seniors in high school this year and cannot come to evening events at church. In Japan, the last year of high school is dedicated to study for national exams and preparing for university. They must quit club and extracurricular activities, instead committing themselves to rigorous study.

The Lord inspired a younger band to replace the senior band, and this year's band of juniors calls themselves "S-Pieces." They also participate in the praise worships at church and help lead some chapels at school. In addition, the Lord has lent us a very talented keyboardist, **Daigo**, who has been accepted to study at Concordia University Irvine and is exempt from national exams. As you can see in the photo at right, Daigo plays bass guitar & piano. He is studying weekly with Tom at school to prepare for his study abroad. Read one of his recent essays in the red text box at the right. **We still know that the Holy Spirit will work in the hearts & minds of students studying English lyrics of hymns & praise songs!**



We have read and talked about many things related to FAMILY. What is your definition of a family?

My definition of a family is a group of people who are living with love & trust. They don't have to have the same blood. Some people say that a family is a group of people who are living under the same roof, but I disagree with this idea. For instance, my grandparents live away from my house, but they are still one of my family members. If I marry a lady from the United States, she and her parents will be my family, because I will trust and love them. I also consider myself as part of God's family, because I trust, love, and believe in Him.

■ Daigo Ikeda (12th Grade)

Another guitarist has joined the band, widening our tapestry of music! **Mr. Abiko**, shown below on the right beside Pastor Kasahara, is a young local worker who has been a member of our church since he was a little boy. He helps Pastor at Tuesday night worship services for workers like himself who can't attend church on the weekends. **It is exciting to watch the Lord faithfully continue His stitching on His tapestry of musical influence.**



A Pattern Manners

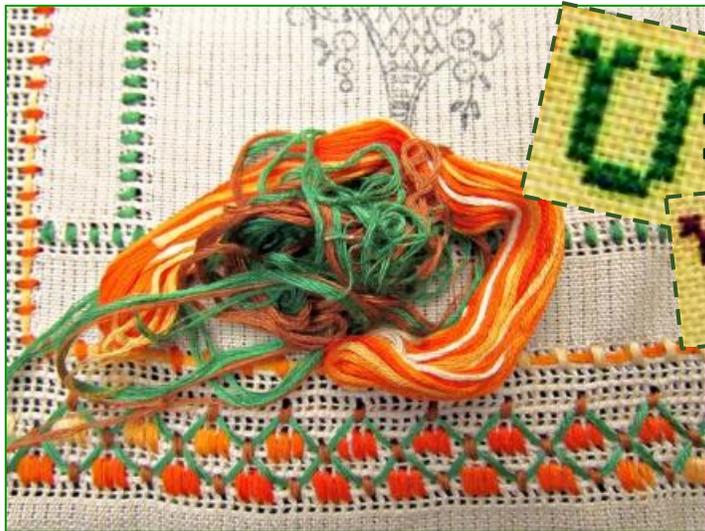
Japan is well-known for polite commuters on efficient trains, almost no litter on streets & sidewalks, and safe neighborhoods.

Above right, you see a line of ladies and their bikes in front of a busy department store. The sign is asking them to quietly wait in line for a bicycle parking space on the sidewalk.

When the parking guard in the green uniform signals, you can park and then shop to your heart's content! We can't imagine many Americans willing to stand in line to park a bike!

You are probably surprised to see a huge ash tray on these pages! We didn't want you to miss the amusing diagram showing the effect of the cigarette on the poor dog walker who the Japanese says, "moved his body out of the way!" but still got "bumped into" by the smoke!





Unfinished Work



Perhaps many of you remember reading about a shipment of desks and chairs that we

were hoping to send to Indonesia. **The original story dates back three years ago:**

When Urawa Lutheran School moved to our new campus in January of 2015, we decided to send hundreds of used school desks and chairs to a village school in Indonesia. We had visited these schools and had become aware of their needs.

ULS student government got involved in collecting other various school supplies to send to Sekola Lentera Harapan (Lamp of Hope School) in Lampung (*shown on the front page with the purple thread*) and the village school in Mamit on the island of Papua, Indonesia (*shown on the front page with the red thread*). Unfortunately, the school supplies became bogged down as the Japanese moving company tried to negotiate shipping & customs fees into Indonesia. Months went by as we waited for news, then months turned to years while the desks and chairs sat on a Japanese dock in Yokohama, all packed in a container and ready to be shipped.

We kept praying that God would somehow open the right doors. We felt that the Lord had given us the idea of how to be wise stewards with ULS' sturdy school furniture that was on its way to be recycled as the school bought new desks & chairs for the new campus when they bought new supplies. At the right, you can see Mr. Kondo, the Principal of the Elementary School, with Mr. Shin, Art teacher, helping to load stacks of chairs on the waiting truck (*at the bottom of the next page*). At the time, having recently moved back to Japan, it felt as though we were connecting our new Christian school working for the Gospel in Japan with our former Christian school struggling to share the Gospel in Indonesia. **It was like a rich tapestry being woven, but then the work was interrupted, and we've been waiting for it to be finished.**



We recently got an e-mail from the shipping agent who helped us load the desks, chairs, and equipment onto a huge truck. He told us that he was hoping to get all of the loose strings that had been hanging, so requested a meeting at our school. We were anxious leading up to the meeting not knowing what he was coming to announce or request . . .

Had that huge pile of furniture been forgotten, sold off in auction, or thrown away? We envisioned a HUGE bill being laid on the table. The agent, Mr. Suzuki, updated us with the good news that the school's furniture is still in storage and that absolutely NO fees have been charged for storage of the 250 desks and chairs in their warehouse in Yokohama! For 3 long years, the moving company, has NOT sought a payment for the use of one big corner in their warehouse. A real gift from the Lord! (*At the left, ULS students 3 years ago made two signs to pack with the school furniture and supplies – "Blessed to be a Blessing," sharing their enthusiasm for the project!*)



Mr. Suzuki did, however, share that his bosses were now wanting to close out our account and contract, wanting to come to some kind of solution and conclusion. **Of course, our first choice was still to pursue shipping the items to Indonesia. We have just kept working on our tapestry by praying on a regular basis.**

Mr. Suzuki also presented the option of NOT shipping the desks and chairs, but rather simply removing the items from storage. However, this would require a team of people to dismantle (to separate metal from wood) all the desks and chairs to be recycled, a process that would cost us almost the same amount of money as it would take to ship the items. When Tom heard that price, he nearly fell out of his chair and knew then that we were to pursue our original plan.

A second part of the tapestry was stitched, widening the pattern when the needs at our favorite school system in Indonesia were highlighted again as **Tom arranged for Christmas offerings at ULS to be used to purchase some supplies much needed by the little school in the mountain village of Mamit.** He spoke in the Elementary chapel worship in January about how a portion of the ULS Christmas offerings were used to purchase recorders to also send in a separate shipment to Indonesia this year.

As you can see in the photo at the right, the elementary Student Government packed the box of musical instruments with joy! We had colorful posters around school to spark interest in the need of these village schools, and soon after, many teachers began asking questions and making enlightening connections like strings pulling the 2 schools together. **It seemed that Indonesia was at the forefront of everyone's minds, as well as the various ways ULS could serve needy schools and students there, when we got word from Mr. Suzuki!**

Well, the second part of the plan – asking the school in Mamit what they need, finding “recorders” on their list of wanted school supplies, gathering chapel offerings, sending off a big box of recorders – has been

completed! The recorders were received in Mamit by Mr. Andi and his 4th grade students (see photo at right)!

Work on the tapestry continues! We are still bit confused as to why the Lord has allowed this project of desks & chairs to linger for so long, but trust that we will all know in the near future why He chose to wait THREE years!! Perhaps it was to allow the expenses to decrease... perhaps to prepare just the right schools in Indonesia to receive these gifts.... perhaps to teach us all patience... to show us how His faithful needle Work is never finished, stitch by stitch!

A Lentera classroom that could benefit from ULS' durable supplies.



The children are so haaappy!!! They're amazed knowing that those recorders are from a faraway country! When they found out that these recorders are from Japan, they went to see the world's map. Praise God!!! May the students will be more enthusiastic in learning how to play recorder that God has provided for them through brothers and sisters in Christ at ULS ☺ Please send our thank you from Mamit's children for our friends in Japan!!!





angled on this side

This year, we have spent several months in California with Debi's parents working through medical issues. **Jackie**, in the photo at the left at **Jim's** side, is bravely battling leukemia while caring for Debi's dad.

Making decisions about doctors and hospitals and care can be very worrying, much like looking at the BACK of a tapestry or work of embroidery. We see many tangles and knots and strings that go one way and suddenly go another or disappear altogether, without any sense or pattern. It doesn't look beautiful and it is hard to believe that it's anyone's work in progress, much less a masterpiece. Yet, when we imagine the Divine Hand on the first page of this newsletter plying His needle and colorful threads with a Purpose and a Plan and a beautiful design in His Mind, we realize that we are looking at the **UNDERSIDE** of His Work! **We look up to pray, expecting to see God weaving His beautiful creation, hoping to see His awesome patterns and plans, but all we see are knots and tangles.**

We ask God, "Why can't I see Your plan? I want to know what the pattern is going to be! What are You doing up there? Are You really working?" When we look at God's Word, though, we see His Plan. He tells us that He is moving and working in mysterious ways that cannot fathom. He tells us that His thoughts are not our thoughts, "neither are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts higher than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8)

We have spent quite a bit of time off of the mission field this year taking precious time to be with and care for dear family members. While at home in Japan, it is painful to be so far away during these hard times, but we take great comfort knowing that God is lovingly watching over us in His loving Wisdom.

It is also encouraging to receiving Mom Bush's prayer e-mails that she regularly sends out to friends and family. Read in the text box how she candidly writes of her doubts, fears, faith, and praises!

I have so much to be joyful for -- 54 years of marriage to a great man of God; a wonderful daughter & son & grandchildren who help us out; neighbors who are willing to help; safety in driving to the hospital almost every day; that I have not been sick with the chemotherapy (just tired); a small house to take care of (I'm so glad we downsized by moving from Tracy, CA to San Diego/ Escondido one year ago!); and much warmer weather. No doubt God was thinking ahead to our circumstances.

I continue to worry about everything and anything...but I remember one of my favorite passages from Habakkuk, "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no new grapes on the vines...though the crop fails and fields produce no food...though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls...yet I will rejoice in the Lord... I will be joyful in God my Savior..." (3:17-18)

Family Corner

When meeting people for the first time, explaining the kids' names is a chance to talk a little or a lot about the Bible. Most of you know that Megumi was given her name, meaning, God's grace or blessing in Japanese, because of the miraculous way that God blessed our family with twins. It is a Japanese name with a Chinese character and she signed it for you here.

恵み



Isaac has written his name here for you before as it is written in the Japanese Bible, in the Japanese alphabet for foreign words and pronounced, "Eesahkoo." Recently, he asked if he might choose some Japanese characters for the sound of his name the way we say it in English, "Ah-ee-zahk." He chose "Ai," love in Japanese, and "Sahkoo," meaning to make. He was, indeed, made by love, with love, and for love! Both Megumi and Isaac have been wonderful partners in the Gospel, sharing Jesus' love for them with friends.

愛作



Megumi & Isaac turn ten years old right after you receive this newsletter. They enjoy sports, reading, and riding their bikes around our city. (Don't tell them, but they will get new bikes as birthday presents! It is hard to say who is looking forward more to a cool new ride, but Megumi has pedaled with our family on very long bike rides for four years with just one gear. She is looking forward to going up and down hilly Saitama with gears!) It probably will not surprise many of you to hear that Isaac likes riding his at top speeds, usually with no hands.



When asked what careers they are thinking or dreaming of, Megumi would like to be an Army field nurse or a falcon trainer or an actress in mystery movies (like the Nancy Drew books she is reading). Isaac says he would like to be an Airforce jet pilot (like his newest hero, **Captain Chesley Sullenburger**, whose autobiography he is reading), a professional American football player, or a stuntman for action movies. (The falcon that he is most interested in, by the way, is the **Millenium Falcon**, being a **huge Star Wars fan!**) Since the Japanese school year ends in March, Megumi and Isaac will be starting 5th grade in April. **As they grow up so quickly, please pray for wisdom and joy for our family as we continue to serve and stitch and connect threads and work on God's tapestry of Love here in the Land of the Rising Sun!**



Tom & Debi Going

serve as educational missionaries for the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod in Japan with their 10-year old twins, Megumi & Isaac.

They served in Japan from 1990 – 2006, then in Indonesia from 2008 to 2013 and returned to Japan in 2013 to teach north of Tokyo at Urawa Lutheran School.