

SPRING 2011

A M A Z I N G

Grace Lutheran School

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GRACE

“Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.”

I Peter 4:10 NRSV

Resource Teachers

Setting them up for success

by Gwen Gotsch

At different times throughout the school day at Grace, groups of three or four children gather up their books, pencils, and notebooks, leave their regular classroom, and walk through the school commons to see Mrs. O'Connor or Mrs. Byrne. They come to smaller, quieter classrooms, with fewer distractions, where they feel welcome and can get down to the business of learning.

“Going to Mrs. O'Connor is really fun,” said first-grader Naomi Pentell, bouncing around on her chair with excitement as she described all the games she and several other first graders play in Mrs. O'Connor's classroom every day. “We do math games. We play the Stinky Sock game where you have to feel what it is and say the letter for what's inside the sock.”

Alex Betinis, another first-grader, recited the phonics rules for a game where “we do open and closed vowels.” He agreed that going to Mrs. O'Connor for reading was “really fun.” Together he and Naomi demonstrated body motions for putting sounds together to make words: “P-a-t. M-a-t.”

Why do Naomi and Alex get to go to Mrs. O'Connor's classroom for reading? “Because we



“We're getting better... We can read really fast.”

need special help,” says Naomi, still smiling. “We're getting better, and now we're doing really good. We can read really fast.”

Maureen O'Connor is Grace's special education coordinator, a position she has held since 1984, when Principal Jerry Koenig asked her to start a program that would respond positively to the needs of children who were experiencing learning difficulties in the classroom. Under her leadership, Grace School does a remarkable job of making sure that all students who, for a variety of reasons, struggle with their lessons receive the support they need to succeed in school. Grace students, even those with learning challenges, come to feel confident and hopeful about their work at school.

Because problems are more easily and effectively addressed when children are very young, screening for learning difficulties begins at the end of the senior kindergarten year at

Resource teachers, Continued on page 2

GRACE
LUTHERAN
CHURCH
& SCHOOL

Carolyn Douma 1950 - 2010

Carolyn Douma was diagnosed with cancer in early fall of 2010 and died on December 10. It was a sad time for the many staff members at Grace who had been her friends for years. Grace students prayed for her during her illness, and the fifth through eighth grade students sang and rang handbells at her funeral.

Mrs. Douma's career as a resource teacher at Grace began in 1992, when two of her own children were students here. Through the years, she worked with countless students individually and in small groups, teaching with understanding, playfulness, and grace. "She was never boring," said eighth-grader Ellie Vanderwell with a smile. "She was always 'up.'"

Carolyn's positive spirit touched everyone she knew at Grace, students and staff alike. As her husband, Pastor Tim Douma, wrote in the bulletin for her funeral, "Her achievements are not something that can be captured in a list. They are in the lives she has touched and made better."



Resource teachers,

continued from page 1

Grace and continues formally and informally during first grade.

"If anything, we 'over-identify' kids who need help. If in doubt, we give them extra help," says Paulette Reddel, first-grade teacher at Grace. "We don't wait."

Children whose reading skills lag behind those of their peers may begin working in a small group setting with Maureen O'Connor at the beginning of first grade. Other first-grade students may join them as the school year progresses.

"The hallmark of our program is early intervention," she says. "We don't need to go through the many layers of paperwork that are required in public schools. We don't wait for children to fall far behind their peers." She and the classroom teachers work closely with parents to keep them informed about a child's problems and what is being done about them. This close collaboration means that Grace students receive extra help right away, before they get too discouraged. "We work very hard to help students learn to read in first, second and third grade," reports Mrs. O'Connor. "Most are back to regular reading classes with their peers by fourth or fifth grade."

"Some kids just learn better in small groups," said Mrs. Reddel. At the big table in Mrs. O'Connor's room they may play phonics games or work on reading comprehension. The pace is slower and the teacher is able to provide more individual help than in the regular classroom. Students with attention problems can focus on their lessons with fewer distractions and more direct guidance from the teacher.

Currently, 32 students—about 15 percent of the student body—receive services from Mrs. O'Connor and Mrs. Byrne. With first- and second-grade students, the focus is on mastering the

A M A Z I N G GRACE

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Mrs. Douma

Mrs. Douma died on Friday. She was my reading teacher. I worked on reading, spelling, and writing with her. Every Friday, we'd do a craft on the story we read that week. One week we did a tree house. Mine was red. We'd have to make a tree house and a paragraph about it. It was my favorite craft.

I will miss Mrs. Douma a lot. She was one of my favorite teachers. I'm glad she is not in pain anymore. Someday, we will all see her in heaven.

—Ella Massmann, Third Grade

basic reading and math skills that will enable them to handle the challenges ahead. Mrs. Byrne works with third and fourth grade readers and with fifth and sixth grade math students. In math, their studies closely parallel what the students in the regular teacher's classroom are studying, but they may spend a few more days on important skills such as manipulating fractions. In a small group setting, she says, "kids are not afraid to ask questions, or to say 'I didn't understand.' I can see the look on their faces when they don't get something, even if they say they do, so I know when to give them some more problems to work on."

Deirdre Byrne is a new addition to the Grace staff. She came to Grace last fall, when Carolyn Douma, the long-time resource teacher, was diagnosed with cancer and had to stop working. (See page 2.) Mrs. Byrne taught junior high language arts in a Catholic school before taking time off to raise four children. What was supposed to be a short stint as a substitute teacher has become a full-time job for her. She's familiar with the world of learning disabilities because of her oldest son's struggles with dyslexia and dysgraphia.

With junior high students, Mrs. Byrne works on organizational and study skills, how to write a paper, and how to take tests. Many of these students have been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. "They're smart kids. But being disorganized gets

Mrs. Byrne and Mrs. O'Connor also teach students to advocate for themselves, so that they become independent learners who are able to work well with teachers and peers in elementary school and especially in high school.

them in trouble."

Grace's program emphasizes teaching to students' strengths and supporting them emotionally as well as academically. Using their strengths helps students to compensate for their weaknesses. Mrs. Byrne and Mrs. O'Connor also teach students to advocate for themselves, so that they become independent learners who are able to work well with teachers and peers in elementary school and especially in high school.

"Olivia lived for Mrs. O'Connor," said her mother, Heidi Renteria. "That's how she got through school." Olivia Renteria graduated from Grace in June of 2010 and is now attending the Chicago Academy for the Performing Arts. "They set her up for success in high school, for her to succeed on her own." Two more Renteria girls are currently working with Mrs. Byrne and Mrs. O'Connor. "It's security for them," says their mother. "They know they can do their work without worry."

Some students require testing beyond the screenings and assessments available at Grace. The River Forest public schools are required by law to provide these services free of charge to students at the parochial elementary schools in the district. The evaluation process, which includes the construction of an Individual Education Plan (the IEP), is helpful to both the classroom teachers and the small group teachers at Grace. "Testing can help us know what's the best way to teach this child. Sometimes we already know. Testing often confirms what we thought we knew."

Mrs. O'Connor coordinates the testing process with the River Forest school district staff. Consenting to a formal evaluation by specialists isn't always



easy for parents; they may be concerned about "labeling" their child, or they may be confused by the process and paperwork. "It's a journey," says Mrs. O'Connor, "and we'll take that journey with them."

Ellie Vanderwell, an eighth grader at Grace, is approaching the end of her journey with the resource teachers. She will attend Oak Park River Forest High School in the fall, and she feels ready. She misses Mrs. Douma, who "always had something living—green, brown, or jumping around—in her classroom," but she also likes Mrs. Byrne's enthusiasm and understanding of young teens.

Maureen O'Connor holds master's degrees in special education and in administration. She is currently the president of the Illinois branch of the International Dyslexia Association. She is proud of what she has accomplished at Grace. "I have had the freedom I need to be able to put together a program that is good for children and to work with them, not just for a year, but for eight years. They don't want to disappoint us, so they work hard." A number of Mrs. O'Connor's former students have gone on to become special education teachers themselves, which, she says, is "the thing that gives me the most pleasure."

Fifth grade pilots interactive science curriculum

By Lisa Files

The topic in fifth-grade science class today is Monster Storms. Teacher Bill Thompson asks the students to write about the biggest storm they can remember. After sharing their stories, he asks, “Where do you think that energy comes from?”

Some students eventually, tentatively, say, “Well, maybe the sun?” Here’s where technology comes in. Using the white board, Mr. Thompson shows a moving, animated water cycle as well as a short video on storms, complete with expert weather scientists at work.

Fifth grader Sam Dahlstrom declares it all to be “pretty cool.”

Never one to shy away from new technology, Mr. Thompson is using a new, free science curriculum called

Jason.org. “This is designed just for fifth grade,” he explains, “because it’s a pivotal year when kids start to lose or gain interest in the sciences. By the time they get into seventh or eighth grade, they’ve already decided whether or not they like science.”

Robert Ballard, famous for developing the remotely operated submersibles used to discover the shipwrecked Titanic, brought together resources from National Geographic, NASA, and others to develop Jason.org. The award-winning curriculum covers four fields of study:

- “Tectonic Fury” (geology)
- “Resilient Planet” (ecology)
- “Monster Storms” (weather)
- “Infinite Potential” (energy)

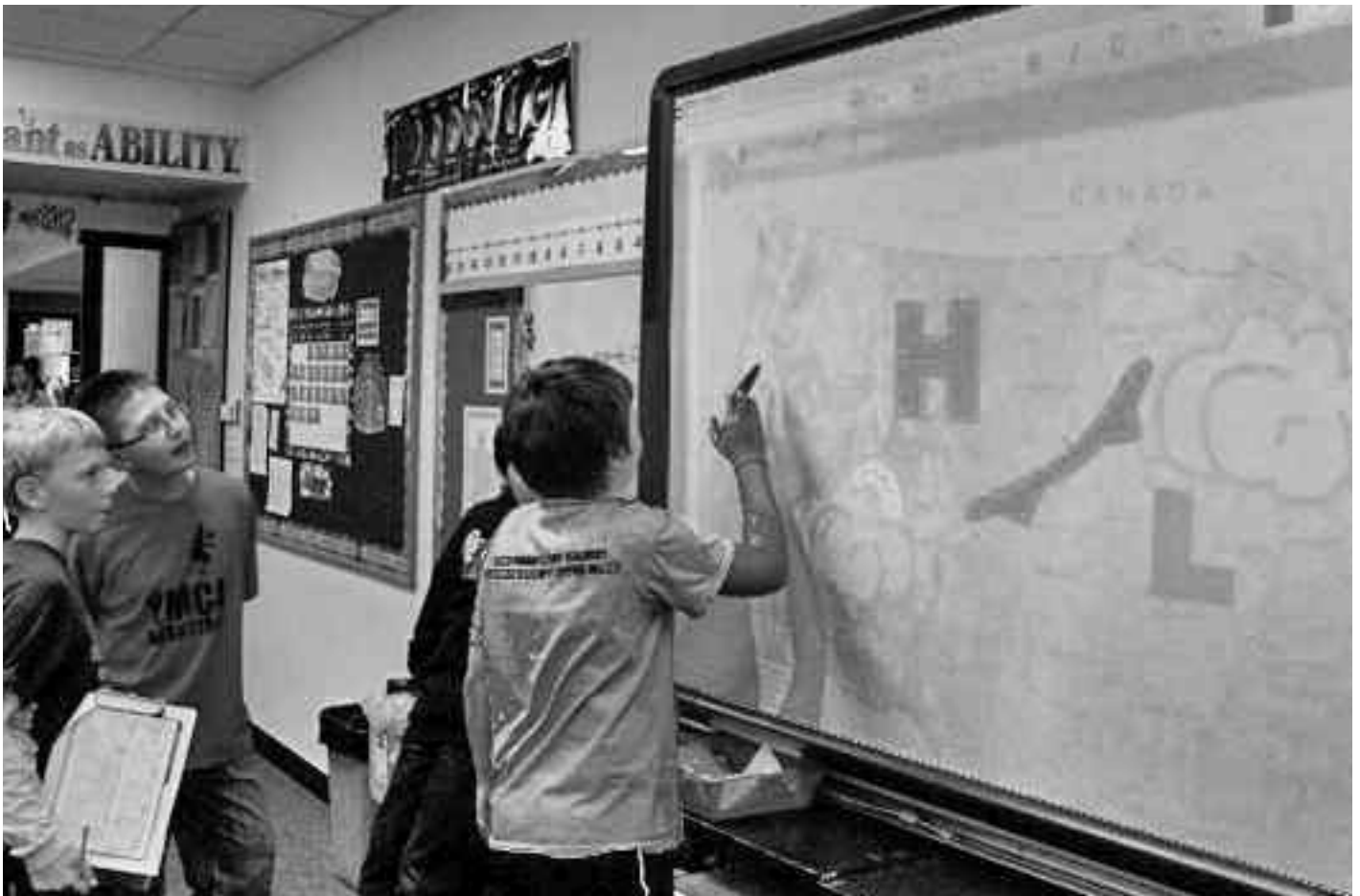
Fifth grade is “a pivotal year when kids start to lose or gain interest in the sciences. By the time they get into seventh or eighth grade, they’ve already decided whether or not they like science.”

—Bill Thompson

Mr. Thompson learned about the Jason Project at the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Conference last spring.

Ballard wanted to create a science program without a textbook that was more interactive. As a result, students are able to do labs on the white board, virtually. “It really makes learning more fun,” says fifth grader Gigi Andreoli.

A group of students discuss weather trends using the interactive SmartBoard system.



But Mr. Thompson likes to augment the virtual labs with real-world, hands-on experience. “Take measuring air, for example. You can do that virtually, on screen, or you can do that with real instruments. I’d rather the kids do that with real instruments so they can learn the techniques they’d need to function in a science lab.”

Not having a textbook has also been another hurdle. When it’s time to study for tests, students refer to their notes and can look for information on the Jason.org website.

Adapting for every grade

With all this in mind, Principal Kendall Grigg, along with teachers, reviewed the school’s overall science curriculum this year. Grace staff members also participated in a monthly meeting with science educators from local public and parochial schools where they shared ideas about the best science pedagogy.



Fifth graders Natalie Roder, Cameron Moore and Anastasia Melani gather data for a science experiment.

“We’ve taken what we’ve learned from the Jason Project and have developed science curriculum and found materials to help us carry out that curriculum for all grades,” says Dr. Grigg.

Next year, the school will introduce Pearson Interactive Science for grades five to eight. “It combines virtual labs and that technology piece with hands-on science labs. And there is an interactive textbook that looks like a workbook. Kids can circle and underline and highlight and write notes and make predictions and respond to whatever they are learning.”

“It really makes learning more fun!”

—Gigi Andreoli

“We’ve taken what we’ve learned from the Jason Project and have developed science curriculum and found materials to help us carry out that curriculum for all grades.”

—Kendall Grigg

Pearson Interactive Science promises kids will get their hands dirty doing experiments with jello, clay, straws, and Slinkies. And they will apply what they learn through discussions with classmates, working in small groups.

Lastly, students will be able to go to myscienceonline.com to interact with virtual labs. With this new curriculum, Grace Lutheran hopes to integrate virtual and real-world science in the classroom for grades five through eight. Students in kindergarten through fourth can look forward to its implementation in 2012-13.





**Primary Grades Musical
Friday, May 13, 7:00 pm**

Join us for "A Technicolor Promise," the story of Noah and the flood, presented by Grace students in junior kindergarten through fourth grade, directed by Janel Dennen.

A rare Snow Day!

Alumni will remember with dismay how rare it was for a snow day to be called at Grace. This year's February blizzard warranted not just one, but two days off! The field had about 14 inches of snow, with plenty to play in once school resumed!



Dancing to the Top

Ayisha McMillan ('92) has joined North Carolina Dance Theatre School of Dance, Charlotte, N.C., as principal.

McMillan joined Houston Ballet in 1996, touring and performing in London, Hong Kong, Toronto, and at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., performing ballets by George Balanchine, Glen Tetley, Trey McIntyre and Lila York.

McMillan then spent five seasons with North Carolina Dance Theatre and was the first African American woman to play a principal role in the company's "Nutcracker." Her time at Dance Theatre also included a memorable role as Tinker Bell in Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux's "Peter Pan," as well as being featured in Alvin Ailey's "The River" and in George Balanchine's "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

McMillan's dance career began at an early age at the Momenta Dance Company in Oak Park, where she trained in ballet and early American modern dance with Stephanie Clemens. On scholarship from Homer Hans Bryant, founding principal dancer at Dance Theatre of Harlem, McMillan studied at the Chicago Multi-Cultural Dance Center. She also trained at Maria Tallchief's School of Chicago City Ballet, and under Bolshoi Ballet Director Asaf Messerer and Mikhail

Messerer at their Soviet American Ballet School. At the age of 15, McMillan left home to study on full scholarship at the Houston Ballet Academy.

McMillan's teaching experience includes working as a dance instructor and mentor at La



Salle Street CYCLE WIZ Factory of Learning and Chicago Multi-Cultural Dance Center. She was also a resident artist for the Arts in Medicine Program at Texas Children's Hospital where she conceptualized, developed and led movement and music-based workshops to creatively engage pediatric cancer outpatients.

In 2007 McMillan was inducted into the prestigious HistoryMakers national archive in recognition for her accomplishments as an African American in the Arts. McMillan studied at Rice University and most recently at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

"My career in dance introduced me to a global diversity of people, places and stories. Those dance experiences provide me wealth from which to draw. I am inspired to bring the passion I have carried for dancing all my life into engaging the entire community to dance themselves," said McMillan.

After retiring as a professional dancer in 2007, McMillan joined Dance Theatre's marketing department.

McMillan's role as school principal will include overseeing the faculty, schedules and budget. "I believe dance is a powerful vehicle for self discovery, and I hope to foster a love of dance in our students," said McMillan.

CLASSNOTES

1945 Howard Burgdorf would like to get in touch with classmates. Contact the school office for his contact information.

1961 Larry Amling is a retired Navy Reserve Captain. He earned an MBA from University of Southern California. He would like to get in touch with classmates. Contact the school office for his contact information.

1962 The world premiere of "Passion," composed by **Hollis Thoms**, was performed March 27, 2011, at Christ Lutheran Church in Baltimore, Maryland, as part of the Bach Concert Series. The 75-minute work is based on the Gospel of John, the Gospel of Nicodemus and a variety of religious poetry. It is written for mixed choir, four soloists, and chamber ensemble.



1978 We mourn the death of Lynda Nielsen, daughter of Irene and the late Ronald Nielsen (not George Nielsen; correction from previous issue).

1992 Ayisha McMillan has joined North Carolina Dance Theatre School of Dance, Charlotte, N.C., as school principal. (See story on page 6.)

Top ten donor opportunities

- 1 Volleyball uniforms, \$500
- 2 Classroom reading sets, \$250
- 3 Sponsor a student at Grace, \$6,300
- 4 Document camera for classroom use, \$500
- 5 Music stands, \$35 each
- 6 Table covers for the junior high bell choir, \$500
- 7 Science Resource kits, \$500
- 8 Classroom set of ActivWands for whiteboards, \$1,600
- 9 Sponsor an issue of *Amazing Grace*, \$2,000
- 10 ActiveSlates for whiteboards, \$400

THANK YOU!

We gratefully acknowledge and thank alumni who have given gifts to Grace (November 2010 through March 2011):

Howard Burgdorf, class of 1945

Edward Kipple, class of 1946

Betty Elmen, in memory of **Allen Elmen**, class of 1956

Dorothy Choitz, class of 1956

Bonnie Papke Pihl, class of 1957

Karen Huegli Buethe, class of 1959, in honor of Paul Bouman

Janet Sylvester, class of 1960

Larry Amling, class of 1961, gift to Troop 66 Boy Scouts.

Linda Schneider Tjaden, class of 1961

Robert Meyer, class of 1962

Robert Nicholas, class of 1962

Nancy K. Pilafas, class of 1962

Dale Herman, class of 1967

Ronald Menna, class of 1976

George Reinhardt, parent of alumni **Greg** (1984) and **David** (1986)

William and Carol Ewald, parents of **Kerry** (1987) and **Nathan** (1992)

Hope Bell, parent of **Heather**, class of 1991

Gary and Ackli Howell, parents of **Ivy**, class of 2003

FACULTY NOTES

Carolyn Douma, resource teacher at Grace for many years, died on December 10, 2010. See article on page 2.

School Magazine Sale

Support Grace School by ordering or renewing magazine subscriptions online at www.qsp.com. The Grace Lutheran School code number is 425005342.

High School Choices

This year's Grace graduates have been accepted to the following area high schools:

Chicago High School for the Arts
 Elmwood Park High School
 Fenwick High School
 Glenbard West High School
 Marian Catholic High School
 Mount Carmel High School
 Oak Park River Forest High School
 Rauner Noble Charter School
 Riverside Brookfield High School
 St. Ignatius College Prep
 The Ogden International School of Chicago
 Timothy Christian School
 Walther Lutheran High School
 Willowbrook High School
 York High School

CLASS REUNION

The **Class of 1971** is planning a class reunion for the weekend of June 26, 2011. Plans include a casual Saturday evening of cocktails followed by dinner.

On Sunday classmates will attend the worship service at Grace together, followed by brunch in Fellowship Hall and a tour of the much-changed school. The class invites all teachers and staff from their graduation year as well!

The Class of 1971 had many friends who graduated in other years, so the reunion is also open to other Grace alumni.

Please contact Kevin Cronin at ezsign4u@hotmail.com for more information or if you would like to help plan the event!

Have you earned an advanced degree? Gotten a new job? Reached a goal? Achieved a significant milestone?

Tell us! Please take a moment to update us! Send email to alumni@graceriverforest.org or write to 7300 Division Street, River Forest, IL 60305.

A Graceful Evening



Spring Gala!

Grace Lutheran Church and School's "A Graceful Evening" benefit for Grace School, held in March 2011, raised over \$21,000 for new science and technology curriculum at Grace School. Over 200 Grace church members, school parents and staff members enjoyed an elegant buffet dinner and live and silent auctions.

Two of the live auction items gave bidders the opportunity to make out-right gifts toward the purchase of science and technology resources.

A number of eighth-grade students helping with the dinner (below) donned lab coats during the live auction as a reminder that proceeds from the evening would go to the purchase of new science materials for the school.



"It was fun seeing the bidding wars between the adults during the live auction. It's great how much money they raised for the new Science and Technology curriculum.."

—Matthew Buchbinder



Grace Church and School CALENDAR

April 24, 2011, Easter worship services
8:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.

April 29, 2011, Confirmation Witness
Service, 7:00 p.m.

May 1, 2011, Confirmation at Sunday
morning worship service, 11:00 a.m.

May 13, 2011, *A Technicolor Promise*,
junior kindergarten to fourth grade
musical retelling of Noah and the flood,
7:00 p.m.

May 22, 2011, 3:45 p.m. prelude
Bach Cantata Vespers, "Praise God in
his kingdoms," ("Ascension Oratorio")
Homilist: David Heim, editor, *The
Christian Century*

June 1, 2011, Graduation service and
reception, 7:30 p.m.

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