

FALL 2009

A M A Z I N G
GRACE

Grace Lutheran School

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Meet Kendall Grigg: New principal

by Gwen Gotsch

“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

Kendall Grigg, the new principal of Grace Lutheran School, says it doesn't take long before you know that Grace is a place where children are nurtured, included, and guided to be the best they can be. She felt it within two minutes of walking into Ellie Schnack's kindergarten classroom, at an open house for parents of prospective students.

Kendall and her husband, Jeremy, were new members at Grace, and as parents of a preschooler, they had received a phone call inviting them to the event. They liked what they saw at Grace School and enrolled their daughter, Vaden, in Senior Kindergarten in the fall of 2008.

“I'm amazed every day at what Grace teachers do for children. They rally for kids.”

One thing that concerned Kendall about Grace School was that the principal, Hugh Kress, was about to retire. Kendall had taught at Holy Family Lutheran School in Chicago and John Walsh, a public school in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood, and was working as an administrator at Chicago City Day School. She knew from experience that finding the right person to serve as principal was critical to Grace's future. So she knew it was important to participate in the call process and attend one of the parent meetings sponsored by the Principal Search Committee.

Kendall had no plans to leave Chicago City Day. She liked everything about her job—except the time she spent commuting from Oak Park to Chicago's north side. But at the meeting, as she listened to the discussion among parents and search committee mem-



bers, she started to think about whether she might be the right person for the principal position at Grace.

After many conversations with family and friends, she applied for the job, and on a winter day in early 2009 she interviewed with the search committee, the faculty and staff, parents, and students. At the end of that day, she says she didn't know if she would be a good fit for the school, but she was more certain than ever that she wanted her own children to be educated at Grace.

Vaden Grigg is now a first grader and brother Jack is enrolled in Grace's new three-year-old preschool program. Their mom now occupies the principal's office, though she is more often found elsewhere in the building, greeting students, helping with instruction, and talking with teachers. What fun is being an educator,

Grigg, Continued on page 3

GRACE
LUTHERAN
CHURCH
& SCHOOL

New web site for Grace School and Church keeps parents and congregation informed

Need to know whether the girls' basketball team has early or late practice?

Need a copy of the word sheet for Christmas Eve?

Want to know how to enroll a child in Grace School?

Need a link to Ms. Holm's Learning Media Center home page, so you can use a kid-friendly web database?

Wondering if anyone has taken an interesting field trip lately?

Need information from last week's Friday Note?

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You can find all these things and more on the school pages of Grace Lutheran Church and School's new web site, launched last February. (To view the site, go to www.graceriverforest.org.) The site features pages with basic information about Grace School for parents who may be interested in enrolling their children, along with news pages that are updated often. Tech-savvy parents or those who aspire to be well-organized can subscribe to the online calendar or add individual school events to their own calendars with just a click of the mouse. Parents and students can also download forms, supply lists, and other essential information, or link to PowerSchool, the online password-protected gradebook used by teachers and viewable by parents.

Grace parents have been quick to use the new site. Most have been receiving the Friday "Principal's Note" via email for several years. "I'm getting fewer phone calls about dates and times for school events," says Barb VanHeukelam, one of the staff people at Grace's reception desk. "I assume that's because people are checking the web site." The visitor-tracking data on the site reports that the school and church calendars are the most-visited pages.

Keeping the site up-to-date is a team effort, shared among various Grace staff members. Verna Offermann, who coordinates room schedules for church and school, handles the church's web calendar as well. Eileen Maggio enters school

"The web site reflects the active Grace community and its focus on living out the gospel."

events, and Communications Coordinator Gwen Gotsch posts school and church news. Technology Coordinator Lyle Mortensen is also involved in web site tasks.

"The web site reflects the active Grace community and its focus on living out the gospel," says Gwen. "People from outside the church and school who visit the site will see that there is lots going on here and that we value education and children."

In the months ahead, Gwen hopes to post more school news, so that parents and congregation members can read about and see pictures of the fun things that happen at Grace and see pictures of field trips, guest speakers, sports tournaments, and special days like Mrs. Calhoun's Old-Fashioned Day. "There's a lot more we can do with this web site to build community. It's a valuable, ever-changing tool that helps us all stay connected."

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.

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she says, “if you can’t be around the kids?”

“I’m amazed every day at what Grace teachers do for children,” she said in a recent interview. They “rally for kids.” Decisions are based on what’s best for the kids. This, she says, is one of Grace’s strengths, that the school and its teachers meet kids where they are as individuals. Some children are ready to read in kindergarten, others are not. Some children need the extra attention that Special Education Coordinator Maureen O’Connor is able to provide in small group settings. Instead of competing for academic success, students at Grace develop a love of learning. Grace fosters a sense of vocation in students by giving them the confidence and motivation that will help them use their talents in service to God and the community.

Kendall’s experience as a junior high teacher taught her that “kids are kids,” and they all can achieve when supported by their families and communities. She’s a big fan of arts education, having written yearly grant applications to bring Pilsen-area artists into the neighborhood school where she taught. She was a reading specialist at Chicago City Day before moving into administration.

When asked about challenges Grace faces, Kendall mentioned the ongoing task of curriculum development. Currently she is focusing on making more math options available, so that students are not pushed into higher levels of math before they have developed the necessary thinking skills.

Looming ahead is the challenge of teacher retirements. Many of Grace’s experienced teachers will retire in the next decade. Kendall sees the experience of current Grace teachers as an asset to new teachers joining the faculty. This is a great place to be mentored, she says, by teachers who know a lot about teaching and are still willing to learn more.

“One of Grace’s strengths is that the school and its teachers meet kids where they are as individuals.”

Kendall uses the words connection, community and conversation often as she talks about Grace School and her job as principal. As an administrator, she has learned that parents and teachers need to be heard, so she spends a lot of time listening. She’s glad that the school makes parents welcome in its classrooms, and that the school is a part of the larger church community. She and her husband have experienced the many ways families can get connected at Grace. They cross paths with other parents at many levels—school activities, bible study, Sunday School, even playing bunco. These connections and all the ongoing conversations strengthen the community that supports children at Grace.

One of Kendall’s most important jobs as principal is to articulate what Grace is about to the church community and the geographic community. She is part of a group of administrators from both public and private schools in the Oak Park-River Forest community that meets regularly to talk about what’s good for kids. She welcomes Grace members and alumni to the school and invites them to share their special skills and knowledge with the students. And she’s always ready for conversation with children, with teachers, with parents—with anyone who’s interested in what’s good for kids.

“This is a great place for new teachers to be mentored,” she says, “by teachers who know a lot about teaching and are still willing to learn more.”

Grace Church and School CALENDAR

December 13, 2009

Advent/Christmas concert, 4:00 p.m.
Reception follows.

December 20, 2009

Youth Bell Choir concert, 9:45 a.m.

December 24, 2009

Children’s Christmas Service of Lessons and Carols, 4:15 and 6:00 p.m.

December 24, 2009

Christmas Eve Worship Service with Holy Communion, 10:45 p.m.

December 25, 2009

Christmas Worship Service, 10:00 a.m.

January 13, 2010

Grace PTO, Mother-Son event

January 31, 2010

Bach Cantata Vespers, 3:45 p.m.
Cantata #123, “Leibster Immanuel, Herzog der Frommen” (Dearest Immanuel, Ruler of the Righteous)

February 5, 2010

5th-6th grade play, *The Tempest*, 7:30 p.m.

February 28, 2010

Bach Cantata Vespers, 3:45 p.m.
Cantata #54, “Widerstehe doch der Sünde” (Stand Firm against Sin)

March 2, 2010

All-School Choral Festival 7:00 p.m.

March 18, 2010

Grace PTO Mother-Daughter event

March 21, 2010

Bach Cantata Vespers, 3:45 p.m.
Cantata #1, “Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern” (How Lovely Shines the Morning Star)

April 4, 2010

Easter Worship Services,
8:30 and 11:00 a.m.

April 25, 2010

Bach Cantata Vespers, 3:45 p.m.
Cantata #4, “Christ lag in Todesbanden” (Christ Lay in Death’s Strong Bands)

Growing younger: Grace adds new preschool class

by Lisa Files

Photos by Sarah Brewer '09

The stained glass windows in the new Grace Lutheran preschool shed light on ten squirmy three-year-old children sitting on an alphabet-letter rug. During circle time, they talk about the next holiday.

“Does anyone know the name of the boat the pilgrims used?” asks new preschool teacher Christie Pascavis.

“The Mayflower,” says one little girl.

Christie locks eyes with her aide, Ellie Bravo, in surprise. “Very good!” she responds enthusiastically.

Singing songs with hand motions, reading stories, making crafts (Pilgrim and Native American hats today), gym, and recess provide the structure for Grace’s new three-year-old preschool. Enrollment is at capacity with 16 children in school from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. No more than 10 are in the classroom at the same time however, because parents can choose to send their 3-year-olds for two, three, or five mornings a week.

Three years ago, veteran kindergarten teacher Ellie Schnack proposed the idea to expand Grace Lutheran by adding a three-year-old class to a school that formerly started at age four, with junior kindergarten. The church nursery was deemed the most obvious location for this new class, but changes were



necessary.

First, the church nursery moved to a larger space in the lower level. Then, what had once been two smaller nursery rooms divided by a wall became one larger open space with an essential potty, partnered with two small sinks.

Christie filled out the rest of the space with a mini-kitchen, books, puzzles, dolls, and the ever-popular sensory table (currently filled with rice).

Although Christie’s background involved training corporate adults, recently she felt a calling to teach young children. She holds a Northwestern University master’s degree in education and last year began a second master’s in early childhood education at Concordia.

Members at Grace since 2006, Christie’s family is knitted into the Grace community as well. Six-year-old Madeleine attends first grade, and four-year-old Benjamin is in junior kindergarten. Meanwhile, two-year-old Jonathan spends his mornings at Concordia University’s early childhood center. Thankfully, Christie’s husband, Travis, helps her juggle family, work, and another advanced degree.

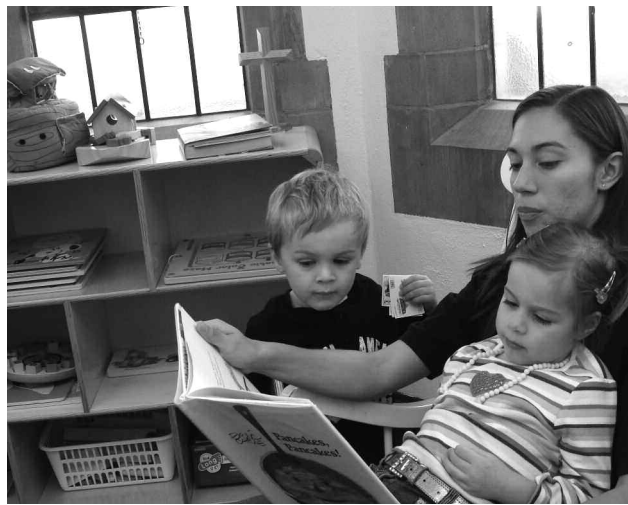


“I’m learning to live in the moment rather than thinking about to-do lists,” she sighs.

Teacher’s aide Ellie Bravo has skills to complement Grace’s preschool classroom. Formerly working for Concordia’s Early Childhood Center was good preparation for Ellie’s current post. With a degree in exercise science, planning gym classes and age-appropriate games has been an easy task for her.

Christie admires three different educational philosophies which she blends





ABCs or write letters, but they can figure things out and they are learning how to learn.”

She continues, “Reggio Emilia is about meeting children where they are and bringing things to their space.” In the spring, they will focus on a pond unit, bringing sticks and logs to touch and feel in order to make learning concrete. Hands-on

learning through nature is a strong component of the Reggio philosophy.

With so many preschool choices available, what makes Grace Lutheran’s new preschool stand out?

Christie says, “We offer a nurturing and strong Christian environment. Learning about God is not just for Jesus time. It’s intertwined in everything we do. Sure, we pray before snack time and read Bible stories, but if a social interaction goes awry, we talk about how we’re supposed to behave and what God wants us to do.”

The light shining through the stained glass windows onto circle time reminds children of where they are and who they are in Grace Lutheran’s new preschool. Christie concludes circle time with little voices singing, “This is the day that the Lord has made.”

Christie took a Project-Based approach earlier in the year when the children started making pizza out of playdough. She let their interest guide the curriculum. The dramatic play area became a restaurant; they took a field trip to Concordia’s cafeteria; and two chefs visited the class to work on recipes and measurements.

The bulletin board outside Christie’s classroom confirms their focus. Each child finished the sentence: “I’m thankful for...” Food earned the highest number of responses, with candy, Mommy, and toys tying for second place.

“I thought, ‘Let’s go with that idea and see where it takes us,’” Christie explains. “With the Project-Based approach, the children feel ownership. They develop leadership skills and a sense that they are good learners. It’s not that every child here can say the

into her own unique pedagogical style. “Grace Lutheran is Play-Based. We believe children give meaning to what they learn through play. That’s their context, their way of understanding what they’ve learned.”

Two additional educational philosophies she applies are the Project-Based approach espoused at Concordia University and Reggio Emilia, an Italian philosophy.



Curt Hinson: Learning to play

by Nancy Carr

On November 20, teachers and students at Grace participated in a workshop that Principal Kendall Grigg hopes will not only change some playground games, but also help students think creatively about getting along with others. During her first days at the school, Mrs. Grigg saw students coming to her office “in tears” about feeling left out of recess games, and she thought of workshop instructor Curt Hinson, who developed the PlayFit program to teach children cooperative play and problem solving. Mrs. Grigg said Hinson’s program “transformed recess” at Chicago City Day School, and that PlayFit should work well at Grace because “it’s in line with the kind of inclusivity we’re teaching in the classroom.”

Hinson said that students learned several games during his time at the school, including games he has developed and modifications of traditional games, such as kickball and musical chairs. One of the students’ favorites was Guard the Cookie Jar, in which four or five guards hold balls between the feet while other students try to take the balls. If a student succeeds in capturing a ball, he or she becomes a new guard. If a student doesn’t succeed, he or she must try to take a ball from another “cookie jar.” This game, like all those Hinson teaches, seeks to keep all students actively involved. “One of the problems with traditional play can be too many kids standing around, not getting a turn,” he said.

The teachers and administration at Grace seem motivated to help students learn new ways of playing, Hinson said. “The staff sees the value of teaching these games – they were interested and enthusiastic about doing it,” he said. He added that some students came to him

Hinson’s PlayFit program is focused on helping all children participate in play and learn to communicate and solve problems.

afterwards and thanked him for teaching the games, and “that doesn’t happen at all schools.”

Hinson, who holds a Ph.D. in kinesiology, has been teaching play workshops full-time for 11 years, after spending 16 years teaching elementary school. The PlayFit program grew out of his own experiences watching students during recess, and is focused on helping all children participate in play and learn to communicate and solve problems. In addition to developing and conducting PlayFit workshops, he has written three books on children’s fitness and play.

The less-competitive games Hinson teaches address issues that seem nearly universal in schools. Having taught workshops in all 50 states and over 900 schools, Hinson said that every school he has visited has banned football at some point because students were getting hurt. During his day at Grace Hinson taught students “a new way to play football” that should help prevent the game from getting too rough. “It’s common to take games away instead of teaching kids an alternative way to play,” Hinson said. His goal is to help schools take time to teach students other ways to play, so that they can solve problems on the playground for themselves.

Fourth-grade teacher JoEllyn Dorsey is already seeing results from the workshop. “We have already used three of the games during gym, and students came up and said ‘This gym was fun,’” she said. Both less- and more-competitive stu-



dents enjoy the games, she added. “It’s great that the kids are learning non-competitive games that are fun – nobody has to win, nobody has to lose.”

Mrs. Grigg noted that the goal of the program is not to eliminate competition, but to ensure that it doesn’t become overwhelming or lead to students being excluded. “This way they are dealing with competition they are developmentally ready to handle,” she said. She also saw the day as an important part of staff development, because teachers are often not taught skills to manage student behavior in gym or on the playground. “This is changing the way we think about recess. It’s not just turning the kids loose, but also guiding them during this time. We’re seeing it as a teaching opportunity to guide kids socially and help them learn to solve problems.” She hopes that Hinson can return in August to lead a games day to kick off the school year.

Teaching children better ways to play has implications far beyond the playground, according to Hinson. His games address the social hierarchy of the typical playground.

“Unless you break up this hierarchy, you don’t change the playground,” Hinson said, and this can be hard to do. But all students benefit when it is broken up, because there is more play, and less bullying and injury.

THANK YOU!

We gratefully acknowledge and thank alumni who have given gifts to Grace (March 2009 through November 2009):

Bill Kuhlman, class of 1958

Lee and Cindy Kleidon, parents of alumni
Krista Kleidon Port, class of 1987 and
Jonathan Kleidon, class of 1991

Linda Schneider Tjaden, class of 1961

CLASSNOTES

1958 Bill Kuhlman, enjoys playing the organ at church and synod events and family reunions. He has been helping to write a history of Luther College.

Marj Koenig, wife of former Grace Principal Gerald Koenig, died October 30, 2009. She will be fondly remembered for her good work and smiling face at Grace.

10 Top ten donor opportunities

- 1 Girls' volleyball uniforms, \$500
- 2 Art resource books for the library, \$250
- 3 Sponsor a student at Grace, \$6300
- 4 Document camera for classroom use, \$500
- 5 Music stands, \$35 each
- 6 Table covers for the junior high bell choir, \$500
- 7 Additional chimes for the junior high bell choir, \$100
- 8 Classroom set of ActivWands for whiteboards, \$1600
- 9 Sponsor an issue of *Amazing Grace*, \$2,000
- 10 ActiveSlates for whiteboards, \$400

Tell us what you've been up to!

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



CLASS REUNION

The **Class of 1979** held its 30th year reunion the weekend of Sept. 11-13. The reunion rallied 14 alumni, many spouses and additional attendees from other Grace classes. Ms. Kruse, Mr. Koenig, Mr. Mortensen, Mr. Bouman, and Pastor Lueking made guest appearances. Some alumni traveled from Arizona, Idaho, Iowa, Minnesota and Oregon. The unanimous sentiment was, "Why did we wait so long to do this?!"

The weekend began on Friday night at the Ale House rooftop restaurant in Oak Park, where we enjoyed a wonderfully warm evening filled with great conversations. We were "graced" with the presence of our esteemed teachers, mentors and pastor from our school days, which provided even more laughs and memories of our time at Grace.

College choices

Grace's Class of 2005 graduated from high school last spring. Their college choices include:

Baylor University
Bradley University
Carthage College
Claremont College
Columbia College
DePaul University
Dominican University
Hope College
Iowa State University
Lewis University, Joliet
Macalester College
Marquette University
Middlebury College
North Park College
Northwestern University
Triton College
University of Arizona
University of Illinois
University of Illinois at Chicago
Valparaiso University
Washington University, St. Louis

In addition, one graduate is serving in a mission program in Switzerland.

Class of 1979 reunion attendees

(in order left to right): Diana Wilkie Buffie, Kurt Koenig, Sam Brooks, Susan Magnusson Hooker, Aimee Gourlay, Tom Faszholtz, Anne Lehmann Bopp, Lisa Brown Carlson, Debbie Berghaus Conley, David Jezl, David Luthringer, Larry Atwood. *Not pictured:* Brian Nichols and Felicia Cataldo Mirable.

On Saturday, we boated and dined at the Burnham Park Yacht Club compliments of **Susan Magnusson Hooker** and her husband, Dennis. Later that evening U2 played at Soldier Field which carried over into the harbor for enjoyable background music.

Tours of the church and school were led by Mr. Mortensen on Sunday morning. For those of you who haven't been back in the last ten years – it's amazing! The 1999 remodeling/addition provided additional classrooms and much needed space to accommodate the constant changes in education – very impressive. We concluded our reunion by sharing in worship together at the 11 a.m. service.

Each of us has certain memories of our Grace School days that will be imprinted on our lives forever. The one impression shared by all was the meaning of relationships and how our experiences at Grace really instilled that sentiment. The influence of our teachers, combined with the loving and respectful learning environment provided at Grace, all centered in Christ, created an important element of who we are today. This may be one reason why so many of us decided to attend the reunion!

The Class of 1979 strongly encourages you to plan and /or attend your Grace reunion. With help from the "Amazing Grace" mailing list, email, Facebook and Google, we were able to find all but six alumni from our class. What fun it was to begin to reconnect via the internet before we met again in person!

—Diana Wilkie Buffie, '79

Feed My Starving Children

Chicken! Veggies! Soy! Rice!

For two hours, 16 stations of eight or nine students measured dry ingredients into a nutritious food package that will provide six highly nutritious meals. Grace students from third grade to eighth grade gathered at Concordia's South Gym on October 29 to assemble the powdered and dried foods, and seal and label the packets.

Feed My Starving Children is committed to feeding God's starving children hungry in body and spirit. The approach is simple: children and adults hand-pack meals formulated specially for starving children, and the meals are shipped to more than 60 countries around the world. Under the direction of Bill Duey at Concordia, students from Grace, St. Vincent's, St. Luke, Walther Academy and a group of 70 students from Oak Park River Forest High School assembled 16,956 packets of nutritious food over a span of five packaging sessions in two days. Together the children packaged 101,736 meals for children and their families.

"18,000 children die everyday as a result of starvation or starvation. My hometown has 18,000 people. What if they all died in a day?" says Bill Duey. "But by addressing this need, we fed 278 children for an entire year in just five packaging sessions."

A Minnesota businessman started **Feed My Starving Children (FMSC)** in 1987 after he saw devastating hunger on a mission trip to Honduras. FMSC worked with



food scientists at Cargill and General Mills corporations to design food to meet the nutritional needs of a young, malnourished child. To distribute the meals FMSC has established partnerships with major global distribution non-profit organizations and missionaries. These partnerships allow FMSC to reach starving children throughout the world by leveraging the partner's in-country expertise. This means that the packaged meals have the best chance of getting directly to those in need.

In preparation for the event, Concordia



students went to Grace's classrooms and talked about world hunger.

Third grade through eighth grade students helped to assemble packets of nutritious food at Concordia University Chicago.

Reaching into her pocket, a Concordia student pulled out 17 cents in change. Each FMSC meal costs just 17 cents, and in the U.S., that's pocket change! In response to this, the fourth graders raised \$122.54 by collecting pocket change. The sixth-grade students filled M&M tubes with change and collected \$77.48.

94 percent of all donations to FMSC goes directly toward the food program.

Through partnerships with Grace and other area schools, Duey hopes that next year they can package over 1 million meals. Contributions are welcome and can be made to Concordia, designated for Feed My Starving Children.



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