

# GRACE

Grace Lutheran School

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*“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**

## Where the action is! Mrs. Reddel’s 28 years in first grade

by Bill Pullin

How in the world is it that Paulette Reddel can be retiring from her job as first-grade teacher at Grace School? Paulette, a person who is always ready to say yes? Yes, I will learn to play bass clarinet. Yes, I will teach first grade. Yes, I will go on that field trip with a busload of children who are so excited they can barely stay in their seats. Yes, I will work with changes to the program here no matter how much extra planning and effort it means for me.

Perhaps retirement is an option because part of always saying yes is being open to new adventures. Paulette doesn’t have specific ideas about retirement, but how can it not be good? Everything else has worked out.

Perhaps she is just ready for a quiet moment after 28 years of being in the center of the storm at Grace School. There have been many changes in the time she has spent at Grace: the arrival of computer technology in classrooms, the unforgettable installation of air conditioning, the blessing of art and gym teachers who give her a few moments to herself during the school day. And running alongside these changes has been the perpetually crazy mosaic of activities, requirements, and surprises that define first grade.

After graduating from Concordia, Paulette taught fourth grade in Milwaukee before



**First grade is a year of tremendous personal growth and character building.**

returning to the Chicago area to marry her husband, Stan, also a teacher. She taught third grade and then first grade at St. Andrew’s Lutheran School in Park

Ridge. After a few years off to care for sons Scott and Mark, she was open to an invitation from Grace School principal Jerry Koenig to apply for the first-grade job at Grace.

### Why first grade?

Paulette left college thinking she would teach middle grades—fourth, fifth, and sixth graders. But then she discovered the importance of first grade—“that’s where the action is,” she says. Aside from the obvious short attention span, general fidgetiness and excessive curiosity of the average first grader, what does that mean?

The action, Paulette says, is the heart-warming reaction of first graders as they take on the basic building blocks of education, the building blocks that first-grade teachers know are essential to success in school, work, and life. First graders are open to everything—to being a part of the church, to learning about reading and writing, to exploring differences in places

**Reddel, continued on page 3**



## Fine Arts Festival delivers valuable feedback and fun

By Gwen Gotsch

Playing the piano, singing, drawing, making sculptures—these are not competitive sports. There are no relay teams in choir, no last-minute instructions in the team huddle in art class. Yet just as in sports, students who participate in the arts benefit from opportunities to measure their own work against others and receive critical feedback.

Grace School artists and musicians find these kinds of experiences at the annual Fine Arts Festival hosted each spring by Trinity Lutheran School in Roselle.

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### A M A Z I N G GRACE

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Students participating as soloists and in ensembles and small choirs spend the day at Trinity, rehearsing with a mass choir or band and performing for judges. The day culminates in an evening concert featuring the “best of the best.” Nine schools participated in this year’s Fine Arts Festival, on April 13.

Grace School’s music teacher Janel Dennen spends weeks preparing students for these performances, assisted by Grace Cantor Michael Costello. The process begins with determining who will sing in which groups and what music they will perform. The 5-8 grade students meet with Ms. Dennen during lunch periods. They have ideas, favorite songs, aspirations. She provides the experience that helps students choose music that is both fun to sing and appropriate for their skills.

Getting ready for the festival is fun. “You get to practice while you eat lunch with your friends,” says fifth grader Sophie Lange. “And you listen to what others are singing.”

Sophie participated in vocal ensembles that sang “Do, Re, Mi,” the perennial favorite from “The Sound of Music,” and “I Feel Pretty” from “West Side Story.” Her friend, Olivia Kibler, noticed that “singing with your friends makes you less nervous.” Julia Weaver, another ensemble member, agreed, adding that “if you did terribly, at least you did terribly together.”

**“It’s great for them to get feedback from professionals.”**

(For the record, the girls’ performance received a Superior rating and a blue ribbon, with 67 out of 70 possible points. They also reported that the judge was surprised to learn that they were only in fifth grade!)

A group of eighth grade girls from Grace entered the Small Choir category singing “Oye,” a lively contemporary song accompanied by piano and percussion. They were invited to perform on the evening “Best of the Best” concert, where the audience joined in clapping along to the lively South American rhythms. Eighth graders Sebastian Lira, piano, and Isabella Rossi, violin, were also invited to play on the evening concert program.

The fifth through eighth graders also sang for judges as a full choir. “It’s great for them to get feedback from professionals,” said Ms. Dennen.

“You learn how you can improve,” said Sophie. And judges “teach you things,” according to Julia, who was excited to learn how to play an accent on her violin from her judge at the festival.

Grace students also entered art work in the Fine Arts Festival. Seventh grader Madelyn Virzi received a Best of the Best award.

**Reddel, continued from page 1**

and cultures and languages, to surprises and discoveries.

As someone who grew up in Kansas, Paulette knows the importance of having a strong foundation. In Tornado Alley, if a family didn't have a strong basement, there was no guarantee of safety and no place to take refuge in a storm. And life does have storms. Presenting young children with fundamental knowledge and principles and giving them permission to do what they can do with these building blocks builds a strong foundation and gives them a durable base of operations to face challenges as they move through life.

Paulette tells a story about how wonderfully her young students surprised her with their openness to responsibility and their delight in new discoveries. The first and second grade children's choir she leads was asked to sing at the funeral of a church member. This person had been homebound for years and was not known by any of the children. But when the choir sang with heavenly beauty and sincerity from the back balcony during the service, Paulette could see and hear and feel that they knew the importance of giving and of being an active part of the church community. It was clear that their religious education and their musical training gave them a solid foundation for witness and service.

During two different school years, children from the Grace congregation with Down syndrome have been part of Paulette's first-grade class. It is easy for adults and even older children to isolate or ignore children who may look and act differently than their peers. But because of the openness and generosity shown to all in the first-grade classroom at Grace, her students welcomed these classmates. Both times, one particular student took the lead in showing warmth and interest, communicating effectively, and helping integrate these friends into the



first-grade community. And the class as a whole followed the example of these leaders.

### **An open outlook**

In Paulette's home, there is a large picture window that looks out on the street and the neighborhood. It shouldn't surprise you that Paulette felt that this was far too blank an outlook on the world. She and Stan commissioned John Curran, a Grace Church member who is a stained glass artist, to create a large stained glass panel to hang in the center of the window.

She describes the artwork this way: If you could "turn off" your soul, you would see nothing more than a collection of lines and shapes in the picture: triangles, squares, parallelograms, circles, etc. But if your heart is open to the beauty of life and the miracle of creation, what you see is glorious flowers rooted in the earth and reaching for heaven.

This vision is an apt symbol for Paulette Reddel's career as first-grade teacher at Grace School. Yes, first grade is a hodge-podge of rapid-fire activities and unrelated tasks for teachers and students alike to scramble to get done. But overriding

### **Presenting young children with fundamental knowledge and principles and giving them permission to do what they can do with these building blocks builds a strong foundation.**

this hodge-podge, holding everything together, is a true understanding of the promise of childhood, acceptance of curiosity and individuality, and the discovery of a sense of community. Put them all together and first grade is a year of tremendous personal growth and character building.

We're grateful to God that for 28 years Grace students have been blessed by Paulette's guiding hand and most of all, by her vision of life in God's creation. In the fall of 2018, Grace's current preschool teacher, Ramona Koetke, will take charge of the first-grade classroom, which will continue to be an active, welcoming, curious learning community.





## Cameron Lewis still making an impression

By Matt Dominis

**G**race alumnus Cameron Lewis (2014) is graduating from Fenwick High School this spring, and he's staying as busy as he can.

"It's definitely a good thing to be busy, especially in high school," says Cameron, 17. "If you have too much free time you might wind up in the wrong things."

Avoiding the wrong things isn't a problem for Cameron. In addition to staying on top of his studies at Fenwick, he's active in civic programs, school groups, and is president of the local teen chapter of Jack and Jill, a mentorship program that nurtures future African American leaders.

Cameron's study habits, positive self-image and upbeat personality have made an impression on his Fenwick teachers. His freshman world history teacher,

*"It's definitely a good thing to be busy, especially in high school. If you have too much free time you might wind up in the wrong things."*

Dr. Jerry Lordan, nominated Cameron for an optimism award this year and got Cameron involved in the Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation's Future Philanthropists' Program.

Dr. Lordan has been an advocate and mentor for Cameron and praises him as a "diligent, punctual, and industrious" student and a young man with a "well-developed set of personal values."

Cameron plans to study political science at Howard University in Washington, DC, in the fall. After earning his de-

gree, he'd like to pursue a law degree and eventually live and practice law in the Chicago area. (Cameron already has family role models in the field: his cousin, Alex Lewis, is finishing his second year of law school at Yale, and Alex's father, Jeffrey Lewis – Cameron's uncle – is a practicing attorney.)

### **A leader at Jack and Jill**

Cameron already is demonstrating his leadership potential as president of the Western Cook County Teen Chapter of the Jack and Jill organization. His mother, Joyce Lewis, got him involved in Jack and Jill and before this year he served a year each as the secretary and vice president of the teen chapter.

As president, he leads the group each month through an activity and a two-hour meeting agenda. One important

**Grace principal Bill Koehne (left) and Dr. Jerry Lordan, Fenwick High School history teacher, congratulate Cameron Lewis (2014) on his award from the Oak Park Optimists Club.**

part of his leadership, he notes with a chuckle, is “getting a bunch of people to get a task done.” He appreciates Jack and Jill for helping him to make friends at different area high schools, including Lane Tech and Walter Payton High School.

Cameron also volunteers his time in the Future Philanthropists Program, a teen leadership initiative that introduces students to the process of community philanthropy. Adolescents study community needs, evaluate grant requests, conduct site visits and ultimately award \$25,000 to charitable organizations that serve Oak Park and River Forest. Many students apply to the program from area high schools, but only 25 are accepted each year.

On March 20, during the primary election in Illinois, Cameron served as an election judge at an Oak Park precinct. “It was a long day, but it was a good experience,” he recalls. “They say it was one of the largest primaries they’ve had at that site.” Cameron voted for the first time in the primary (he was eligible because he will turn 18 before the November general election). Acting as a judge and watching Oak Park residents cast their votes helped him feel a part of the community in a new way, Cameron says.

At Fenwick, Cameron has been active in the Broadcast Journalist Club and Student Council, and he played on the boys basketball team during his freshman and sophomore years. His teachers nominated him to be a student ambassador, hosting junior high school students visiting Fenwick for shadow days. He’s been involved in the Annual Student Leadership Conferences that involve Oak Park River Forest High School, Fenwick and Trinity.



**Cameron met former Illinois governor and Fenwick alumnus Pat Quinn at Fenwick’s graduation on May 25.**

### Study skills

Balancing time between academics and a plethora of extra activities requires a lot of organization and time management, Cameron says. His teachers at Grace helped him learn both.

He attended Grace from senior kindergarten through eighth grade, and found that he fit in well at a loving, small-school environment “where everybody knows everybody.” The study habits he picked up helped him move without much difficulty into a demanding college prep school like Fenwick.

He thanks Grace for helping him get used to academic challenges – and noted that some of his classmates weren’t as ready. At Grace, “they don’t take it easy on the homework, especially in the sixth, seventh and eighth grades,” Cameron says. “I got in the habit of just sitting down there and chugging though the homework.”



**Cameron and Grace alum and current Fenwick student Isaiiah Curry are in a two-year leadership program with the Future Philanthropist Program, pictured at the Grant and Commencement program in May 2018.**

*At Grace, “they don’t take it easy on the homework, especially in the sixth, seventh and eighth grades. I got in the habit.”*

He says Grace also taught him to not be shy about going to his teachers for help. Plus, he learned in seventh and eighth grades to jump onto Khan Academy, the online learning site, to get extra help on a tough lesson – “I still use it today.”

For Cameron, the hardest part of entering Fenwick was learning to navigate around a much bigger school. But overall, “that transition for me to high school was pretty easy,” he says. “I give all the credit to Grace Lutheran for that.”



Bruce Plotkin Photography

**Mark Lamos (1960), director of plays, musicals and opera, received the 2018 Distinguished Alumni Award at A Graceful Evening.**

## A Graceful Evening

The 2018 Distinguished Alumni Award at A Graceful Evening was presented to Mark Lamos (1960), a director of plays, musicals and opera. He began his career in the theatre as an actor but soon moved into directing. He has worked in regional theatre, on Broadway and also in opera. Lamos currently the artistic director of Westport Country Playhouse, a nationally recognized, not-for-profit, professional theater in Westport, Connecticut. *The New York Times* has called him “a poet of the theater.” In his video message accepting the award he encouraged Grace students to consider careers in the arts.

A Graceful Evening, the annual benefit for Grace School, raised \$90,000 for the school's operating budget and for the Fund-A-Need Campaign, which will support a major technology upgrade for the school.

Grace School students brought in \$2,600 for the Fund-A-Need Campaign. They met their fund-raising goal, which meant they got to duct-tape Principal Koehne to the gym wall during all-school festivities on Thursday afternoon, March 15.

# Annual FUND

for Grace School

The Annual Fund for Grace School helps support the school's operating budget, making it possible for us to continue to serve a diverse student body. Your gift to the Annual Fund is an investment in our current students and in the future of Christian elementary education. Help us continue to prepare children for lives of discipleship through Christ-centered, academically excellent education.

**Give online at [graceriverforest.org](http://graceriverforest.org), or send your check to the Annual Fund for Grace School, 7300 Division Street, River Forest, IL 60305.**

## THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

**Our heartfelt thanks go to these donors who made gifts to the Annual Fund for Grace School between December 13, 2017, and May 3, 2018.**

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# CLASS NOTES

**1957 James Spurrison** passed away on April 24, 2018.

**1958 Bill Kuhlman** played organ recitals in Tucson and Phoenix, Ariz., Akron, Ohio, and Ellison Bay, Wis., in 2017. Bill and his wife, Yvonne, now split their year between Tucson and Decorah, Iowa.

**2015/16** Sisters **Kersten** (2015) and **Samantha Brayton** (2016) played side by side on the Elmwood Park High School girls basketball team this season and were featured in a January article in the weekly *Elmwood Park Elm Leaves*. Kersten, a junior, was elected team captain. The girls have been playing sports together since 5-6 grade girls basketball at Grace.

## Girls track team takes 2nd place at state meet

The Grace School girls track team took home the 2nd-place trophy from the Lutheran Sports Association's state meet, held on the Concordia track on May 19 and 20. The boys team finished 8th overall, out of 60 Lutheran schools that sent athletes to the meet.

Seventh grader **Zawadi Brown** took 1st place in the girls 400 meter run and 2nd in the 800. Grace's girls relay teams took 1st in both the 4 x 200 and the 4 x 400 relays.

Seventh grader **Owen Augustine** placed 2nd in the boys 1600 meter race, with his seventh-grade classmate **Isaac Cummings** placing 5th. The boys took 4th place in both the 4 x 200 and 4 x 400 relays.

# Grace Church and School CALENDAR

Friday, May 18, **junior high musical "Finian's Rainbow Jr."**

Saturday and Sunday, May 19 and 20, **LSA State Track Meet**

Wednesday, May 30, **Graduation**, 7:30 p.m.

Friday, June 1, **Closing worship**, 8:30 a.m.

Friday and Saturday, June 8 and 9, **Youth Ministry Rummage Sale**

Monday–Friday, June 11–15, **Vacation Bible School**

Saturday, June 16, **"Something Delightful"** Renovated kitchen dedication and celebration, 5 p.m.

Tuesday, August 21, **First day of the 2018–19 academic year**

Sunday, September 23, **Oktoberfest**, 4–7 p.m.

## High school choices

Each year Grace School graduates continue their education at a variety of public and private high schools throughout the area. Students in the Class of 2018 will be attending these schools in the fall:

- Elmwood Park High School
- Fenwick High School
- Lyons Township High School
- Oak Park River Forest High School
- St. Ignatius College Prep
- The Chicago Academy for the Arts
- Trinity High School
- Walther Christian Academy
- Whitney Young Magnet High School



**Tori Robinson, Ava Massmann, Zawadi Brown and Livy Crame, Grace's 4 x 400 relay team, took first place at the LSA state track meet finals on May 20.**

Other top finishers included sixth grader **Aaliyah Thurman** (4th in the 200, 7th in long jump), seventh grader **Livy Crame** (7th in discus), fifth grader **Tori Robinson** and eighth grader **Ava Massman** (6th and 7th, respectively, in the 400).

The Vikings are coached by parents **Glen Steiner** (weight throws) and **Jay DeVries** (jumps), junior high teacher **Brian Schultz** (sprints, hurdles, relays), and head coach **Rich Brooks**, who doubles as Grace's facility manager.



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*Address service requested*

## First graders recreate their own happy Rizzi birds

After studying New York artist James Rizzi, first grade students went to town creating their own compositions called "Rizzi Birds."

Their work was displayed at the annual student art show in May.

The students liked how Rizzi adds human characteristics to animals and inanimate objects. They agreed that Rizzi's work made them feel happy, calm, cheerful and creative.

