

**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**

## “Nobody wants to win more than Sarah Lueking”

*Dear Grace Cross Country Family,  
Once upon a long time ago, I was a runner at Grace.*

**S**o began an email message this fall to the “Grace Cross Country Family” from Sarah Lueking McCabe (’81) who had a story to share about “running the block” with Mr. Mortensen in gym class.

“The block,” of course, is the one-mile perimeter of the Concordia University and Grace properties, familiar to generations of Grace students who have run or walked the distance in gym class and in after-school practices.

*Sometimes we would run the block during gym class, and I fondly remember racing Mr. Mortensen with great determination as we turned the last corner onto Bonnie Brae. He was a fast guy in the 1970s!*

When asked for details, Sarah talks about the pace of the run: “Mr. Mortensen and I would start out at this easy pace down Division. Every time we turned a corner the pace would pick up. There was never a discussion. Turn left on Augusta and the pace ramped up again. By the middle of Augusta it was “I’m gonna win today.” Bonnie Brae [the last leg] was an all-out sprint back to the church.”

Grace School did not have a cross country team back then, but Sarah credits these one-on-one competitions with Mr. Mortensen with igniting her love of racing—and of winning. As a middle-distance runner at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minn., she ran the anchor leg on



**Sarah Lueking McCabe and daughter Catie. Sarah is Catie’s cross country coach at Westview Hills Middle School in Westmont, Ill.**

relay teams. Sarah once overheard her coach, Chris Daymont, tell another coach, “We’re always going to anchor Lueking in the relay. Nobody wants to win more than Sarah Lueking.”

“Through college I loved to race,” she says. “I did not love to work out necessarily, but I loved to race.... My coach, Chris Daymont, is a dynamic woman and I feel like a lot of my coaching is very much affected by her. She had an inclusive policy. Anybody can be on the team, but if you’re going to be on the team you’re going to work hard.”

Sarah put that coaching philosophy to work during 21 years of coaching cross country and track at Oak Park River Forest High School, starting in that job right out of college. “I was

**McCabe, continued on page 3**

# Die neue Frau (the new German teacher)

*Amazing Grace* introduces die neue Frau—Grace School's new German teacher—Erika L Lyle. Dan Lehmann interviewed her for *Amazing Grace*. (Edited for clarity and brevity.)

## **Amazing Grace: Tell us about yourself, your story.**

**Erika Lyle:** I was born in Fargo, N.D., while my dad went to college. Later he went to seminary and was ordained so I was a Lutheran pastor's kid and we moved around, mostly in Wisconsin. In high school I took German, which was taught by a native German speaker. I then majored in German at Concordia College (Moorhead, Minn.), but I really had no idea what I wanted to do.

My junior year I studied in Jena, Germany, and really loved it. With my major course work complete I decided to be a teacher. That took my senior year and an extra semester of classes for teaching in grade, middle and high schools. I

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## A M A Z I N G GRACE

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received my license to teach foreign language from the state of Minnesota.

I taught English in Martin, Slovakia, in 2004-5 at the Center for Christian Education. Before I left I met my future husband David (Lyle, Grace Church's senior pastor). I returned from Slovakia to Wisconsin. I taught all levels of German for three years at Oshkosh (Wis.) North School. Dave and I married during that time and then spent seven years in South Carolina where our children Greta, Anders and Torsten were born.

## **AG: Why study a foreign language, and why German?**

**Erika Lyle:** The world is becoming so small, thanks to the ease of travel, the internet and television. It's a great advantage to not only speak another language but to also know the culture of other people. Learning how other people think and their experiences is really important.

German is especially important to us as Lutherans plus it is also the language of a country with great engineering, technology, innovation and business. German has a practical application in today's world.

## **AG: What's it like to teach children in all grades at Grace?**

**Erika Lyle:** It's challenging to figure out how to engage students at such different stages of learning. I have a pretty good idea what sixth, seventh and eighth graders are capable of. It's hard to know what the younger ones can do. You figure it out, even though it means teaching older ones grammar and the accusative case and first graders songs. But I must say it is fun.

## **AG: How are you approaching the curriculum?**

**Erika Lyle:** When people found out I was the new *Frau* I got lots of comments from parents of their children testing up in high school placement. My goal is to maintain a good, solid program that kids will continue in high school, that has them prepared and that has them enjoying the language and culture.

## **AG: What's it like working so close to your family?**

**Erika Lyle:** A year ago the idea of being in the same building with my family would have seemed weird. Now I hardly remember they're here, except when Torsten walks by and comes in and gives me a hug. After school the children come into the classroom to be with me. Their school day is not a mystery and I find that neat. I'm enjoying this much more than I ever thought I would.

## **AG: What's your favorite German phrase or word?**

**Erika Lyle:** Squirrel, which is *Eichhörnchen*. German is stereotyped as a guttural language that sounds like clearing the throat. *Eichhörnchen* is certainly that!

**McCabe, continued from page 1**

mindful of being excited about every kind of kid on my team and making sure every kid felt like she had a place, while still looking to be a high quality program.”

Sarah also served as part-time Youth Director at Grace Church in those days but eventually joined the faculty at the high school. She taught American history and three levels of psychology classes, including a class called “Human Behavior” which she describes as “Life 101.” Guest speakers included her father, Dean Lueking, now Pastor Emeritus at Grace. One of his talks was on “How do you know when you’re ready for marriage?” In another he told students what it was like to be a high school student during World War II.

Sarah is married to Mark McCabe, the girls’ cross-country coach at Hinsdale Central High School. They have two daughters. Older daughter Grace was born on Day Three of the 1999 cross-country season, a Wednesday, and mother and daughter were back at practice the next Monday, thanks to a little extra support from Sarah’s assistant coach, Amy Christopher McGrail, another Grace School graduate (’90). Daughter Catherine (Catie) was born in 2005.

Sarah led a busy life as a teacher, coach and mother, until one fateful day when Grace, then in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, asked, “Mom, when do I get to be on a team?” It was a life-changing question for Sarah. Grace’s parents were busy coaching but had not yet made time for their daughters to participate in athletics.

“I couldn’t be the mom I wanted to be and be the Oak Park head coach. I had to step out and that was hard. Coaching is my calling.” Sarah actually made an appointment to talk to her dad about what she was contemplating. When she asked, “How can I think about giving this up?” he said, “You know, Sarah,



**Everyone in the McCabe family—Mark, Catie, Sarah, and Grace—is involved in track and cross country.**

when I retired at Grace, I had no idea how much I would enjoy what I’m doing today. And it will be the same for you. Don’t be afraid of that.”

“And so,” she says, “I stepped out of the world I loved and volunteered as a cross country coach at Westview Hills Middle School in Grace’s 6<sup>th</sup> grade year.”

She loved it. “I feel so fortunate getting to have the fun of coaching my own kids (and frankly, controlling their training). And placing in their heads all kinds of foundational ideas, like how do we understand competition. We race better when we’re competing. It brings out the best in us. It’s an honor to be the one who gets to share those responsibilities.”

Grace is now in high school and is running on her dad’s teams at Hinsdale Central. Sarah, now the head cross country and track coach at Westview, is coaching younger daughter Catie.

How is middle school coaching different from high school? “There’s no crying in middle school. They’re just so new. For many of these kids it’s their very first experience with athletics. They don’t put the same kind of pressure on themselves. They just are excited.

“It’s so much fun to watch these kids grow and challenge themselves. I can’t think of anything I’d rather do.”

Sarah’s email to the Grace cross country team described how “having the chance to be on a cross country team (and track and field, too) is a wonderful gift in life.”

*You are practicing pushing yourself to work even when you are tired. You are gaining time management skills. You are learning about strategies to deal with all kinds of nervous feelings. You are setting goals. You are making friends. (Teammates are a special kind of friend.) You are finding out that you are tougher than you thought! You are learning so very much; lessons you will take with you wherever you go in life.*

Outside of coaching, Sarah describes herself as in “way over my head” as a volunteer at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Hinsdale. She teaches Sunday School and, pushing herself again, is writing new lessons for the Sunday School curriculum. She also sings in the choir. “When we sing a piece by [Grace member] Carl Schalk I announce to all the altos, ‘hey—I know this guy. And Paul Bouman too.’”

Her Christian faith remains a central part of Sarah’s life. “I am so grateful for the foundation of grace in my life; of course first is the gift of grace from God. And, it was Grace Church and School that served as the ideal place to instill that foundation.”



## Big fun, little stage

*Kindergarten and Early Childhood classes treated to puppet-show magic*

By Matt Dominis

On Fridays at 9:30 a.m., teachers Kathy Brooks and Jackie Johnson bring magic and puppets to Grace's early childhood and kindergarten students, presenting fairy tales, fables and holiday stories on a brand new puppet stage.

The wooden theater, nearly six feet tall and large enough for two adult puppeteers sitting on chairs, came to Grace's junior kindergarten room this August. Barbara and Allen Morris, grandparents



of two young Grace students, donated \$2,500 at Graceful Evening this spring to fund the stage. Kathy designed the theater and her brother-in-law, Chris Kubacki, built it to her specifications.

"It's just gorgeous," says Kathy, Grace's junior kindergarten teacher. "He made it like a piece of furniture. It's a real treat."

"Puppetry is my passion," Kathy acknowledges; she's been putting on puppet shows since she was in fifth grade. Every fall she buys a new set of puppets to build up her immense cast of animals, people and fantastic creatures. "I have a puppet closet and have – I don't know – 300 puppets in there?"

Kathy and Jackie, Grace's kindergarten teacher, try to use as many puppets as possible in each performance, and they've brought to life a range of characters with their own personalities and quirky character voices. "We have so much fun ... back there – I think we have more fun than the children do." The stage has a simple peephole in front, which lets the puppeteers watch the reactions of the PK, JK and SK audience.



The weekly puppet shows are just 15 or 20 minutes long, and Kathy says they've helped the children in the early childhood program to build listening skills. When small children watch TV shows or read a picture book, "they have a lot of background elements that they don't have in a puppet show." With puppetry, more is left up to the child's imagination. "They have to really pay attention to follow the plot."

Off the stage, Kathy uses puppets in her classroom teaching to explain a lesson or introduce a new subject – or just to talk to the children. "Everything goes easier when a puppet is saying it. A puppet can't really reprimand, they can only be friendly."



## S C H O O L N E W S

**Community recognition**

The Optimist Club of Oak Park hosted its annual luncheon on Thursday, November 16, recognizing students from area schools. Congratulations to seventh grader Owen Augustine for being nominated to represent Grace School at this event. Congratulations also to Fenwick High School's representative, Grace alumnus Cameron Lewis ('14).

**Scholastic Bowl champions**

Congratulations to the Grace Scholastic Bowl team for taking 1st place overall out of five schools at the Walther Scholastic Bowl competition on Tuesday, December 5. The math team of Carina Scholtens, Callah Barnes, and Emma Dominis came from behind in the last two questions to win by one point. The social studies team of Adam Sanders, Aiden Koehne, Emily Weaver, and Erika Schroeder also took 1st by a one-point margin. The science team of Fincher Douma-Wahlen, Isabella Rossi, Gavin Weaver, and Emmet Southfield finished third.

**Walther Science League**

On Monday, November 12, two- and three-person teams of students from Grace participated in a science competition at Walther Christian Academy. Three Grace teams of 6th graders placed in the top six of the 20 teams in the competition. Congratulations to the team of Luca Buttita, Harry Niermann, and Hendrik DeVries for placing 1st overall, Anna Scholtens, Alyse Ryniewicz, and Eunice Ho for placing 4th, and Sophia Augustine, Ivy Darrow, and Kilee Wilkins for placing 6th.



**Coach Brooks congratulates Owen Augustine and his parents, Jade and Andrew, at the LSA state cross country meet on October 14. Owen set a new school record and qualified for the national meet in Wisconsin.**

**Volleyball News**

Congratulations to Coach Kristine Washburn and the girls volleyball team for competing in the LSA state tournament for the first time in 20 years! The boys' volleyball team, coached by P. E. teacher Kristi Underhill placed 5th at the LSA state tournament, and Michael Yumlu was named to the all-tournament team. Way to go, guys!

**Service projects**

Grace School students again filled stockings with toiletries and other necessities for clients served by The Night Ministry in Chicago. Proceeds from a "Pizza Fun Lunch" in November were used to buy items such as socks and toothbrushes, deodorant, supplementing donations collected by the Grace Church's Social Ministry Committee. Sixth graders led their younger classmates in stuffing the 75 hand-sewn fleece Christmas stockings. The project has grown year by year—this year a total of 91 stockings were delivered to The Night Ministry!

**Another successful season for cross country**

Grace's cross country team competed at the Lutheran Sports Association state meet in Bloomington on October 14, where seventh grader Owen Augustine took 2nd place, set a new school record, and qualified for the national meet in Mequon, Wisconsin on October 21. The girls' team took 5th place overall at the state meet with an amazing come-from-behind finish and qualified as a team for nationals. The boys team finished 9th overall at the state meet—they're a young team, with great promise for the future.



**Grace students in grades 3-6 worked together to fill Christmas stockings for clients of The Night Ministry in Chicago.**

**Enjoy a fun evening out at  
A Graceful Evening**

**March 17, 6 p.m.  
Oak Park Country Club**

Tickets are \$100 per person and \$950 for a table of ten. They go on sale in January at [GraceRiverForest.org](http://GraceRiverForest.org).

A Graceful Evening is the biggest fundraiser of the year for Grace School. The annual benefit includes a cocktail hour, sit-down dinner, the presentation of the Distinguished Alumni Award, and an informal after-party with music. It will be a fun evening as we celebrate St. Patrick's Day! Come and bid on special auction items, meet old friends, get to know new ones, and celebrate Grace School.

**Support  
A Graceful Evening 2018**

**Sponsorship**

**Gold \$2,500.** Includes a full table at the event and a full-page ad in the program.

**Silver \$1,000.** Includes two tickets to the event and a full-page ad in the program.

**Supporter \$250-\$999.** Includes a full-page ad in the program.

**Advertise in the program book**

We're happy to help you create an ad, or send us ready-to-print copy.

Full page     \$200  
Half page     \$125  
Quarter-page \$75

**Donate an auction item**

Tickets, gift certificates, unique experiences, private parties, classes —we welcome your donations!



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 May 19 and December 12, 2017.**

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**For more information contact the event chairs at [agracefulevening@gmail.com](mailto:agracefulevening@gmail.com).**



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## CLASS NOTES

**Opera premiere.** “And did the world with devils swarm, all gaping to devour us...” an opera about Martin Luther to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, was composed by Hollis Thoms ('62). The piece received its premiere by the Bach Concert Series on November 4 and 5, 2017, in Harrisburg, Penn., and Baltimore, Md. and underwritten by the Christopher Foundation. Joining the ensemble were three of Hollis' children who are professional musicians: Jason Thoms, baritone; Sonja (Thoms) Winkler, oboe; and Jonas Thoms, horn.

### At rest in Christ

**Kristoffer Grahnke ('01)** passed away on July 24, 2017, after three and a half years of living courageously with ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease). During those years, Kris blogged at [gronksgrace.blogspot.com](http://gronksgrace.blogspot.com) and raised thousands of dollars for ALS research, backed by his Gronks' Grace fundraising team which included many Grace School classmates. In October of 2017, Grace School students donated a tithe of the proceeds from their Walk With Grace Walkathon to the ALS Association in Kris's memory. Kris is survived by his wife, Michelle (Jamerson), who taught art at Grace School from 2012–2014, his mother, Gwen Gotsch, brother Kurt ('07) and sister, Eliza (who attended Grace School 1996–2002). Kris was a special education teacher and continued to teach for two years after his diagnosis, managing his classroom from a power wheelchair at Whitman Post Elementary School in Rockton, Illinois. In Kurt's words, “He never stopped fighting for anyone he loved, and he had love for a lot of people.” You can read more about Kris' journey with ALS in the Fall 2015 issue of *Amazing Grace*.

**Jeffrey Ritsert ('08)** passed away last summer in Redmond, Washington, after a “too-short life of kindness and laughter.” The obituary for Jeff noted that during his years at Grace he demonstrated “an amazing aptitude for door-to-door sales during the annual Cub Scout popcorn drives.” He graduated in 2010 from Oak Park River Forest

## Open House

for Prospective Students and Parents

**Wednesday, January 24,  
6:30–8 p.m.**

Families interested in learning about enrolling their children in Grace School are invited to an Open House at Grace School on Wednesday, January 24, 6:30–8 p.m. There will be opportunities to tour the school, talk with current Grace students and their parents, and meet the teachers.

**Call the school office (708-366-6901) for more information about enrollment for the 2018-19 school year. Or visit [GraceRiverForest.org](http://GraceRiverForest.org).**



High School, where he excelled in musical theater. During high school he also sang with the Madrigal Choir of Grace Episcopal Church, loving the music and the friends he made there. Jeff attended Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. In 2014, Jeff and good friends from Knox moved to a shared home in Redmond, Washington, where they produced a monthly-or-so podcast on gaming ([volcanobakemeat.wordpress.com](http://volcanobakemeat.wordpress.com)) and were selected to present at the 2017 Emerald City Comic Con in Seattle. “Jeff was full of laughter and kindness,” wrote his parents. “He was smart and funny and game for any adventure. But the depression he fought from childhood on eventually became more than he could bear, and in the early hours of August 24, 2017, Jeff took his own life. Those of us who knew and loved him are left with emptiness and pain. At the same time, we are grateful for the wonderful memories we have of Jeff and thankful that he is no longer suffering. Rest in peace, Jeffrey. The kindness that flowed from your gentle heart truly changed the lives of those who knew you.” Jeff is survived by his parents, Larry Ritsert and Elaine Pierce, and his sister, Trinity Pierce ('00).

## Grace Church and School CALENDAR

Dec. 24, **Christmas Eve worship.** Lessons and carols led by the children of Grace, 4:15 and 6 p.m.

**Holy Communion,** 8 p.m.

**Candlelight Holy Communion,** 10:45 p.m. (music at 10:30)

Dec. 25, **Christmas Day worship,** 10 a.m.

Dec. 31, **New Year's Eve worship,** 7 p.m.

Jan. 1, **New Year's Day worship,** 10 a.m.

Jan. 6, **Epiphany worship,** 4 p.m.

Jan. 24, **Open House** for prospective families, 6:30–8 p.m.

Feb. 2, **A Graceful Evening Trivia Night,** 6:30 p.m.

Feb. 23, **5-6 grade play,** 7 p.m.

March 12–16, **Lutheran Schools Week**

March 16, **Grandparents Day**

March 17, **A Graceful Evening,** 6 p.m.

March 23, **Grace Chili Cook-Off and Family Fun Night**

April 1, **Easter Sunday worship,** 8:30 and 11 a.m.

April 27, **School Talent Show**

May 5, **Confirmation Witness Service,** 4 p.m.

May 6, **Confirmation,** 11 a.m.

May 18, **7-8 grade musical,** 7 p.m.

*Address service requested*

## There's a lot more to handbells than just ringing

When the Strike Team, the Grace School handbell ensemble, gets on the Walther Academy bus to travel to local assisted living facilities for concerts in December, students learn a lot more than just musical skills. Director Lisa Wolfanger asks her eighth grade ringers to plan and lead the move, with all the challenges of loading, unloading, setting up and taking down bells, hand chimes, cases, tables, music stands, foam and table coverings.

As part of the presentation, students are also challenged to learn new social skills, as they visit with residents and tell them more about handbells. This year the Strike Team brought Christmas music to Bethesda Rehab and Senior Care in Chicago (photo) and to Brookdale Assisted Senior Living in Oak Park.

The handbell ensemble also joined the choirs of Grace School to lead the annual services of Lessons and Carols on Christmas Eve.



**Eighth grader Nathan Blazenko shows a Bethesda resident how to ring a hand chime.**