



# Amazing Grace



Grace Christian Academy

*A School of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*

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## "Grace Completely Changed My Life"

Although Maria Azurdia is a substitute teacher for Cicero District #99, this is not the only career that keeps her busy. She's the co-founder of "Buen Fruto" (Good Fruit), an organization that serves the less fortunate of Central America and Chicago area immigrant residents. Maria has also written and published a bi-lingual children's book based on her two boys and published a Christmas comic book for the Town of Cicero. We were thrilled when she agreed to talk with us about her time as a Grace student.



Maria with her two boys, Sebastian and Jonathan.

Maria was 13 years old and in 8th grade when she and her younger sister Cecilia were enrolled at Grace. "Although I was extremely upset about the transfer at first, and even resented my mother for having done such a thing, this single year at Grace completely changed my life and the focus of my entire future" declares Maria. "We all knew each other at Grace, from Pre-K to 8th grade...it was great! We all bonded, we were family."

At Grace, Maria became involved in many groups and activities, including cheerleading, volleyball, band. The Grace Notes choir, however, was her favorite activity because she loved the traveling this group entailed. Singing in the choir and being expected to interact with members of other churches instilled in Maria the confidence to try new experiences and travel to new places when she

was older. "I was willing to take a 3-month long internship at Yosemite National Park in California with 14 complete strangers. I have also studied abroad in Venezuela, traveled to conferences in Texas and traveled to Mexico without hesitation, fear or cultural barriers, which I definitely had prior to attending Grace."

Algebra was a difficult subject, so her teacher Mrs. Carrier offered after school tutoring to those needing help. "That extra tutoring gave me a firm foundation in accounting and bookkeeping, which helped me to earn a living in college," commented Maria. Mrs. Carrier was also responsible for another life changing event. Maria explains, "Through her home church congregation, Mrs. Carrier was able to find a willing family to sponsor me. They paid for my full 4-year tuition so that I would be able to attend Walther Lutheran

High School. I had no idea about [this gift] until the couple stopped by Grace days before our 8th grade graduation to tell me the news. Now how's that for a life-changing year!" She declares, "My faith in Christ was solidified in the most crucial of ages, my teenage years, thanks to the decision my mom fearlessly took and the blessing of the staff who embraced me while attending Grace."

This feeling of family is one of the reasons that Maria chose to send her two boys, Jonathan and Sebastian to Grace. "I wanted them to grow up learning about Jesus at an early age. I want them to learn all the kid's Sunday School songs and to see examples of how a Christian acts. Grace school is not like any school, its family. I feel that they are safe, loved and cared for by all the staff. I felt it almost 17 years ago, and in coming back again with my boys, I feel the same love and understanding again!"



Jonathan and Sebastian on their first day of school.

## Grace Improves Enrollment, Programs and Outreach!

Welcome to a brand-new school year! **God has blessed us with 107 students**, and we are excited to have this opportunity to tell them about Jesus and his love while we provide them with a quality education. We are always working to improve our programs for our students and our outreach to the community.

Grace is pleased to announce the hiring of two new staff people. Ms. Melissa Marcial has been hired as our school's admissions



counselor. Melissa will be our liaison for the community, helping our school to increase its presence and visibility. Grace also welcomes Ms. Jenna Gathmann. Jenna is our new 3rd and 4th grade teacher, courtesy of the LEAPS program from Valparaiso University. More information about both new staff members will be in our next newsletters.

Another change for our school is the revival of our choir, the "Grace Notes", with Ms. Sara King as director. Auditions have taken place and rehearsals will be starting soon. We look forward to hearing the choir sing, and will be scheduling performances at churches later in the year.

Another change at Grace is our enrollment in the free or reduced price hot lunch program. We are working hard to meet the many state requirements, with the

intention of being operational by October 1. This program will be a blessing to many of our students, allowing them access to a hot meal at a price their family can afford.

Grace is still actively pursuing our bus program, which we plan to have in operation before the end of this month. This bus will help our students to have safe and reliable transportation while raising our visibility in the community.

We praise God that he has allowed us to continue to serve as a beacon for our community.



## Thrivent Donors Continue to Impact Ministry

Thrivent has long been a partner with Grace, supporting us with funds, assistance and advice. Since March of this year, the following donors have directed \$3810 towards our school and its ministry, either through a Thrivent Choice Dollar designation OR through Thrivent's automatic deduction program "Simply Giving".

Linda Scholfield	Robert Ander
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Marlene Luedke	Kenneth Voight
Elizabeth Strege	Cynthia Kovach

If you are a Thrivent member,

we remind you that in 2013, recurring direction will be discontinued for Choice Dollars. Please be on the look out for more information regarding the changes to this program.

## LWML AND UKANDU PREPARE GRACE FOR NEW SCHOOL YEAR

Getting ready for a new school year is always a challenge, and often the work begins *months* before school starts. This summer was no exception, with many projects, both large and small being completed.

Grace would like to thank the many members of UKANDU who toiled at our school in June. This group framed and installed a wall and door in our ball storage area so that school equipment can be secured away from sports items. They also installed hot air hand dryers (and all the electrical wiring needed) in both bathrooms, painted the gym, cleaned the playground and did general maintenance.

Grace would like to thank the

many LWML members and friends who came in early August to help us get ready for the first day of school. These workers were amazing, cleaning layers of "antique" dirt, washing curtains, fixing plumbing issues, weeding our flower beds and helpfully doing whatever was needed to make our building clean and presentable for the first day of school. Special thanks to Jan Gerzevske for organizing and running this event for our school.

Grace has truly been blessed to have groups like these willing to assist our school with their time, treasures and talents!



Ruth Pralle was one of the many LWML workers assisting in our school prep days.