

The Grove Echoes

August 2026



HICKORY GROVE UMC

Hickory Grove,

Thank you for your support both to me and to our church while I've been away on Renewal Leave. One of the gifts of this time set apart from the church is the opportunity to be a guest in worship. I visited many different churches for worship – from college campuses to established churches, in styles like traditional to contemporary, to services in my native language and services not in my native language. One surprising theme emerged: At the majority of churches, no one asked me my name or got to know me. For example, at one church I needed help navigating to where their service was located. One person overheard and was kind enough to “lead the way,” stopping by the bathroom while I walked into their worship space one. Later, my guide was nowhere to be found. They didn't try to sit near me to continue the budding relationship or conversation. The entire time we walked to the service (it was a big building) I was not asked anything about me such as “Is this your first time?” or “What brought you here to the church?” or “How did you find the church?” When I found a seat, no one (neither laity nor the pastor) greeted me either. By greeting I don't mean a simple “hello!” or “Welcome!” or “I'm glad you're here!” I mean that no one expressed interest in learning my name and getting to know me. There was no small talk or deep talk... there was no talk at all. In another church, a meal followed the service. My husband Matthew and I sat down at a table with a group of people who seemed to be regulars. We said hello, and then they ignored us the entire time, only talking to each other and the people they knew the best.



This is not to say that these communities of faith were *not friendly*. People were certainly *friendly*! But what does it say about our collective willingness to go deeper with strangers among us? We can see throughout the Gospels that Jesus's ministry was about relationships. Relationships in this year of our Lord begin by learning someone's name, getting to know them on a deeper level. Perhaps think of it as “friend-dating.” How can a person feel a sense of belonging or friendship or be interested in coming back or participating in a discipleship class if the people worshipping around them don't care to know anything about them?

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Hickory Grove United Methodist Church

6401 Hickory Grove Road ♦ Charlotte, NC 28215 ♦ 704-537-4686

Office Hours: Monday - Thursday 8:30am - 12:15pm

Grove Echoes (continued)

I am sorry to say, I have witnessed this at our church, too. Too often we welcome guests, but don't get their name. Maybe we do get their name and introduce ourselves, but we don't say or ask anything further like "What brings you here?" "Is this your first time?" "I've noticed you've been back a few times. Tell me more about yourself" or "How can I pray for you today?" Maybe even "Are you new to Charlotte?" "Do you have family nearby?" "What do you do for work?" "What have you been up to this week?" Those kinds of get-to-know you questions are vital for a church that wishes to grow. It might all seem invasive or silly small talk, but relationships *have* to begin somewhere. It shouldn't be an interrogation. Don't be too shy to share about yourself and your spiritual needs, as well!

Last winter, one of you suggested that we have name tags for our combined services to better get to know one another as there are many of us who have been at this church for a long time and yet still do not know each other's names. Years have passed, folks have come and gone, we have four different services, and not knowing names is awkward! It is my hope and prayer that we will grow in not only our relationships with one another across services but also that the guests in our midst will experience Christian hospitality on a deeper level beyond friendliness through each of us. As the saying goes "practice makes perfect" and we are on our way to perfection in Christian hospitality, one greeting, one name tag, one potentially-awkward conversation at a time.

Grateful to be back with you,

Pastor Caitlin

hello...
I'M BACK!

SUNDAY SCHEDULE

Traditional Service: 9:00 AM (Sanctuary)

Sunday School for all Ages: 10:00 AM (FLC and Education Bldg.)

Contemporary Service: 11:00 AM (Family Worship Center)

African Service: 11:00 AM (Sanctuary)

Afternoon Adult Bible Study (Spanish) : 1:00 PM (Family Worship Center)

Latino Service: 2:00 PM (Family Worship Center)

Church Staff

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African Ministry

Greetings, Hickory Grove Family, Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I pray that you are enjoying a blessed and refreshing summer. Rhema and I are deeply grateful to God, our District Office, and the Western North Carolina Annual Conference for the privilege of continuing to serve alongside you here at Hickory Grove. It is a joy and an honor to be part of this wonderful family of faith.

As we begin a new conference year, our prayer is that God will renew our hearts with fresh passion, deeper faith, and greater opportunities to carry out Christ's mission of making disciples for the transformation of the world.



As part of this new season of ministry, the Bishop and the Western North Carolina Conference Cabinet strongly encourage the participation of each congregation's Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) Chairperson, Lay Leader, Church Council Chairperson, Finance Chairperson, and Board of Trustees Chairperson and senior pastor in the Healthy Transitions Training on Sunday, August 23, 2026 at 3:00 p.m. at Assurance United Methodist Church, 9700 Mt. Holly-Huntersville Road, Huntersville, NC. Registration is required by August 9. We encourage all designated leaders to register and attend this important training as we continue strengthening the ministry of our congregation.

Additional, August is filled with exciting opportunities for ministry, learning, and fellowship. We eagerly anticipate our annual Vacation Bible School, where children, youth, and volunteers will gather to grow in God's Word through worship, learning, and fun. We invite everyone to participate, volunteer, and support this vital ministry.

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Grove Echoes (continued)

As another school year begins, we lift up our students, teachers, administrators, and school staff in prayer, asking God to grant them wisdom, protection, strength, and success throughout the year. In preparation for the new school year, our African Ministries will also host a Back-to-School Event this month. Please watch out for additional information regarding the date and time.

This month, many within our church family will celebrate birthdays and wedding anniversaries. Rhema and I extend our heartfelt congratulations and pray that God will continue to bless each of you with good health, abundant joy, and many more years of His grace and faithfulness.

As we reflect on the month of July, we remember those among us who experienced the loss of loved ones. We extend our deepest sympathy and continue to hold you in prayer. May the Lord, who is near to the broken-hearted, surround you with His comforting presence, strengthen you with His unfailing love, and grant you His perfect peace.

Finally, thank you for the warm welcome, encouragement, and support you have shown us following our reappointment to Hickory Grove. We are excited about all that God has in store for our congregation and look forward to partnering with each of you as we grow in faith, serve our community, and share the love of Jesus Christ.

May the Lord richly bless you and your family throughout this month. We look forward to worshiping and serving with you as together we continue to be the hands and feet of Christ in our community.

Grace and Peace,

Rev. Colston Wuor-Gabie Morris

Liberian Independence Day 2026!

The Liberian Community of Greater Charlotte proudly and joyfully concluded its vibrant three-week celebration of Liberia's 179th Independence Anniversary, held July 12–26, 2026.

The celebration began with a heartfelt Thanksgiving Service, setting a tone of gratitude and unity. It continued with a memorable Gala Scholarship Fundraiser, bringing the community together in support of education and opportunity, and culminated in a lively Festival in the Park and Recognition Reception. This final event honored the Class of 2026 graduates and proudly celebrated the first two recipients of the organization's inaugural scholarship awards.

This remarkable milestone stands as a powerful reflection of the community's deep commitment to honoring its heritage, strengthening bonds of unity, and investing boldly in the success of future generations.

The Liberian Community of Greater Charlotte extends sincere and heartfelt appreciation to Hickory Grove United Methodist Church, Senior Pastor Rev. Caitlin Lai, Pastor Colston Morris, and the entire church family for their unwavering partnership, warm hospitality, and generous support in making this unforgettable celebration a resounding success.





Latino Ministry

Dear Church Family,

As we begin the month of August, I thank God for the privilege of continuing to walk this journey of faith together. I also want to express my heartfelt gratitude for your prayers, kind words, and loving support following the passing of my sister in Puerto Rico. Your compassion has been a great source of comfort to my family and me during this time of grief.

God's Word reminds us, *"But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength"* (Isaiah 40:31).

My prayer is that this month will be filled with renewed hope, steadfast faith, and opportunities to share Christ's love with others. May the peace and grace of our Lord be with you and your families each day. I am sharing pictures from the Community Prayer Sunday for the Venezuelan people that were affected by the earthquakes.

In Christ's love,

Rev. Candido Albino



Preschool News

In just one month, we will be welcoming our preschoolers back to school and excited to begin our 68th year! 68 years – WOW! We certainly hope to celebrate this milestone with you throughout the year. School begins Tuesday, September 8 and we are excited to share this ministry of HGUMC to over forty five children and their families. While the preschool operates within its own budget, we certainly could not offer an affordable program without the support of the church for building use and cleaning. We are offering a much needed service in our community. Thank you HGUMC for this ministry!

The Preschool will host our annual open house for parents and preschoolers on September 3. Before that date, we will be mulching the playgrounds, getting the classrooms ready and praying for a successful year of helping these little ones grow in their knowledge of all things and making sure that they know who Jesus is and how much he loves them.

We covet your prayers as we prepare to begin this school year. One of the songs we teach our children says that “God is with us, every day - Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday too! Be blessed by the God who is with you every day.

Sharon Freeze

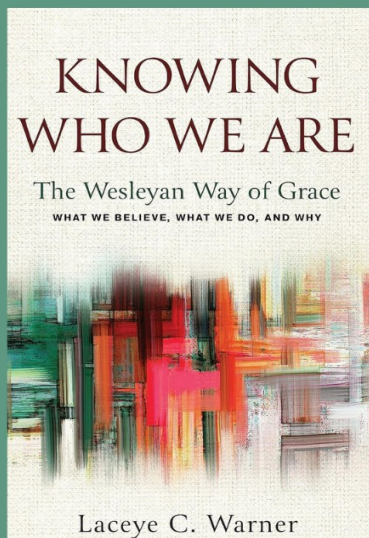


♥ Welcome to
Preschool!!

Wednesday Night Book Study

At annual conference this summer, each delegate received Dr. Lacey Warner's book "Knowing Who We Are: The Wesleyan Way of Grace." Living in what we affectionately call "the Bible belt," it's common to hear someone say "all churches are the same."

And yet the truth is we have different kinds of churches with different systems and different core values and different ways we emphasize living out our Christian faith. What makes United Methodism different than other denominations? For one, we live out our lives in a Wesleyan way. What does this mean? You are invited to join Pastor Caitlin in the Trinity Room on Wednesday nights at 7pm as we grow in our understanding of being Wesleyan Christians and United Methodists. We will read one chapter each week (read prior to each session), with the first session on Wednesday August 19th and concluding on Wednesday September 23rd.



Wednesday Night Book Study is Back!

When? Wednesdays at 7pm, starting August 19th through September 23rd

Where? Trinity Room

Need help getting the book? Let the church office know at 704-537-4686

Join Us!

Memorials and Honorariums

(received in the office by July 30th).

If we receive your donation after that date, the Memorial/Honorarium will be listed in the September Grove Echoes.

Memorial:

Nokie Tuttle

Snack Pack: Jean Long

Honorarium:

Gary Little (birthday)

WeCare: Fred and Deborah Parker

Kathy Coates (birthday)

WeCare: Fred and Deborah Parker



Donations for Hickory Grove Elementary School

Sneakers-small kid's sizes 11-13 & 1-3

Uniforms-blue or khaki pants/white or blue short sleeve collared shirts

(Sizes 4 - 10 most needed)

Play-Doh

Belts- small sizes

Put donations in the teal bins in front of the church office or in the FWC lobby!