

The Grove Echoes

June 2026



HICKORY GROVE UMC

About The Rev. DeForest “De” E. Hillyer, Jr.

The Rev. DeForest E. Hillyer, Jr. grew up in New Jersey, but has lived in the south since 1961 when he enrolled at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. He lost his way, flunked out his senior year, but eventually graduated from UNC-Wilmington.

De retired in 2008 from the Western NC Conference of the UMC following 39 years of ordained ministry. His last appointment was with Covenant UMC in Charlotte. Since then, he has served 17 short-term interim positions (usually 1-6 months); HGUMC will be his 18th adventure in ministry.

De served in the United States Marine Corps from 1965-1970, with two tours at Camp Lejeune and a 13-month tour in I Corps, Vietnam. He was there from January 1968 to February 1969.

For the past 14 years, De has served as Battalion Chaplain for Warrior Wellness Solutions, a 501(c)(3) non-profit that serves wounded, ill, and injured warriors, their families, and caregivers. Their programs focus on veterans and service members who have incurred a physical or mental injury, illness, or who were wounded during their military service.

De has written a daily Facebook devotional blog at "From the Hill" since 2012. He also has a page at "De Hillyer" where he posts daily inspirational and challenging quotes, encouraging readers to live a good and useful life.

De is married to the former Bonnie Colledge of Bethel Park, Pennsylvania. They live in Harrisburg, and have four adult children and one almost 25-year-old grandson. De and Bonnie have worshiped at Harrisburg UMC since July 2008. De enjoys golf, playing guitar, and walking. Bonnie scrapbooks almost every day; she also enjoys walking.

Should you need to reach De during an emergency, call him on his mobile phone: (980) 253-4724. He leaves it on 24 hours a day. You can also reach him by text or email: friartuck43@gmail.com.

De is looking forward to serving you for six weeks from 14 June to 19 July as he covers for Pastor Caitlin while she is on Renewal Leave. Please pray for him as he ministers among us.



Hickory Grove United Methodist Church

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

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

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

Rev. Caitlin Lai

Senior Pastor
clai@hgumc.com
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Rev. Colston Wuor-Gabie Morris

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Rev. Candido Albino

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Patrice Wesley

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African Ministry

Greetings Hickory Grove Family,

I bring you greetings in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

The month of June is special to me because, according to my parents, I was born during this month. That makes June especially meaningful in our family. One of our children, Randy, also celebrates a birthday this month. Rhema and I would like to extend our heartfelt wishes to all who are celebrating birthdays and anniversaries in June. May God bless you with joy, good health, and longevity.

As we enter this month, I am excited for several reasons. One highlight will be celebrating our young people who will be confirmed this month. This is a significant milestone in their faith journey, and we rejoice with them and their families.

I am also looking forward to attending the Annual Conference, scheduled for June 18 –21, 2026, at Lake Junaluska, as we gather for the business and ministry of the Church.

The month of May has been challenging for some within our church family. Several have experienced the loss of loved ones, while others are facing illness or caring for family members battling sickness. During these difficult moments, it is my prayer that God will strengthen, comfort, and sustain each of you.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate all of our graduates on your accomplishments. We celebrate your success and pray that this next chapter of your life will be filled with blessings, prosperity, purpose, and continued success. Keep striving and continue the amazing work you have already begun.

It is my prayer that God will continue to bless our time together as a church family as we worship, serve, and grow in faith.

Blessings,

Pastor Colston



Latino Ministry

As we welcome the month of June, let us remember that God's faithfulness remains constant in every season of life. Summer brings opportunities for rest, renewal, and time with loved ones, but also reminds us to stay connected to God through prayer, worship, and service.

Galatians 6:9 encourages us: *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."* Continue walking in faith, showing kindness, and trusting that God is working in and through you.

Thank you for your love, commitment, and support of our church family. May June be filled with peace, joy, and many blessings for you and your family. Sharing some pictures from the month of May 2026.

Grace and Peace,

Rev. Candido Albino



Preschool News

Thank you so much for your support of the preschool ministry at HGUMC during our 65th school year! We finished our year on May 22 and on May 15 we had 8 Pre-K students that graduated and are now ready for kindergarten. We are thankful to each of you who have prayed for us through this year. We are so grateful to God for his constant goodness. We will be back in September with a new group of students.

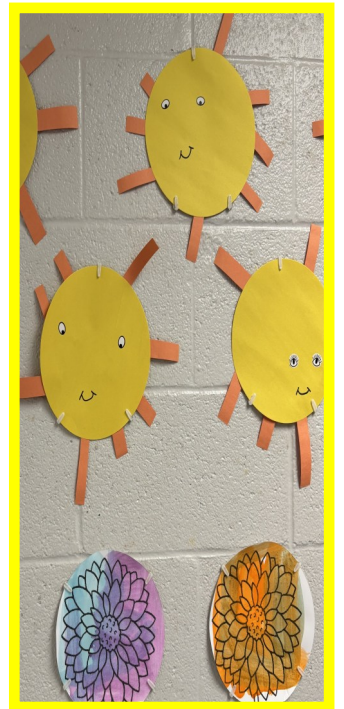
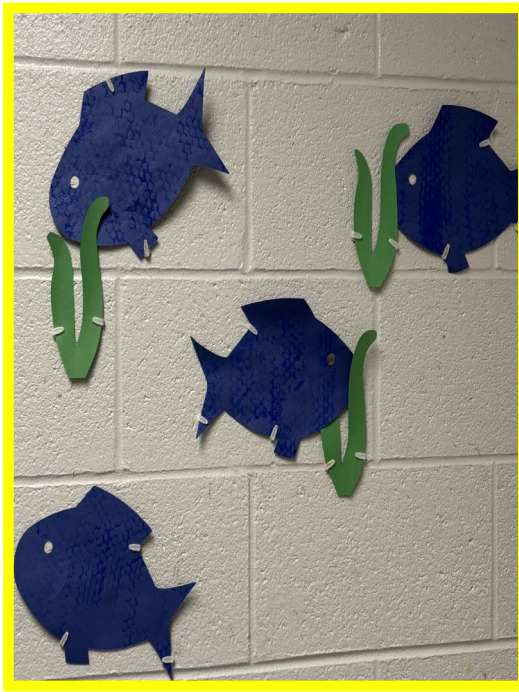
Enjoy the summer!

Sharon Freeze

Preschool Director

CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATES





We are ready for summer! Are you?



The Preschool wants to acknowledge Mrs. Patty Smith who has worked with our preschoolers for the past 25 years as either the Music Teacher, a classroom Teacher, or Substitute teacher. She also has served and is currently serving as the Chairperson for our Preschool Board of Directors. May 15 was her last day of teaching our children music here at HGUMP as she retired from this role. Mrs. Smith, as she is known to our preschoolers, has inspired a love of music in so many children and we have enjoyed singing, clapping, dancing, playing instruments with her. She will continue as the Board Chair so she will still have an active and hands-on role with our preschool for a while longer. We want to recognize and thank her for sharing her love of children and of music with us for so, so long and when you see her please congratulate and thank her for a job well done! We love you Mrs. Smith!



Congratulations to the Class of 2026!!!



Mya Roberts

Graduating from: Rocky River High School

Post Grad Plans: Attending UNC Greensboro as an honors student majoring in Health Sciences on a pre-med track

Iseman Ruphene Yates

Graduating from: Myers Park High School

Post Grad Plans: Attending UNC Greensboro majoring in Interior design



Deontee Weh

Graduating from: Julius L. Chambers High School

Post Grad Plans: Joining the Army or Air Force

Congratulations to the Class of 2026!!!



Dr. Samantha Kodikara

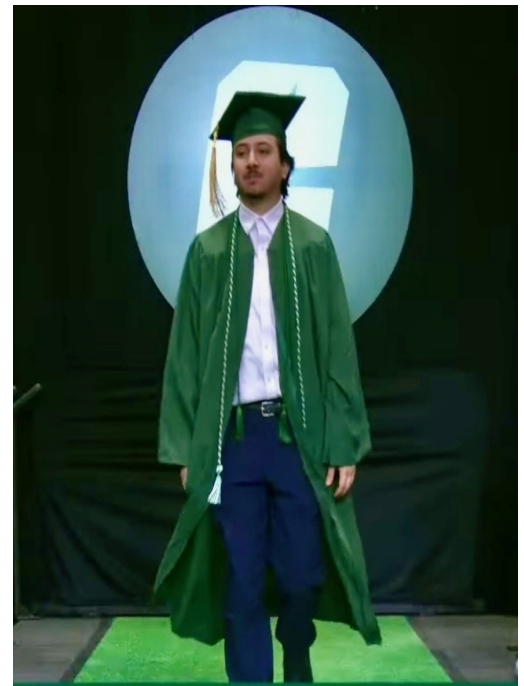
Graduated from: UNC School of Medicine 2026

Post Grad Plans: internal medicine residency at Wake Forest Baptist Hospital

Sheahan Kodikara

Graduated From: UNCC 2026 Bachelor of Science in Social Work

Post Grad Plans: Work in the Charlotte area as a Social Worker



Memorials and Honorariums

(received in the office by May 30th).

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

Memorial

Travis Bunn

Snack Pack: Betty Nunn



Honorariums:

Mike Dulin

Building Repairs: Anonymous

VBS Planning Meeting

The next VBS meeting will be Sunday June 28 during the SS hour at 10am in the Trinity room. Vacation Bible School dates are Monday August 3 - Wednesday August 5 .Please join us if you are interested in volunteering!

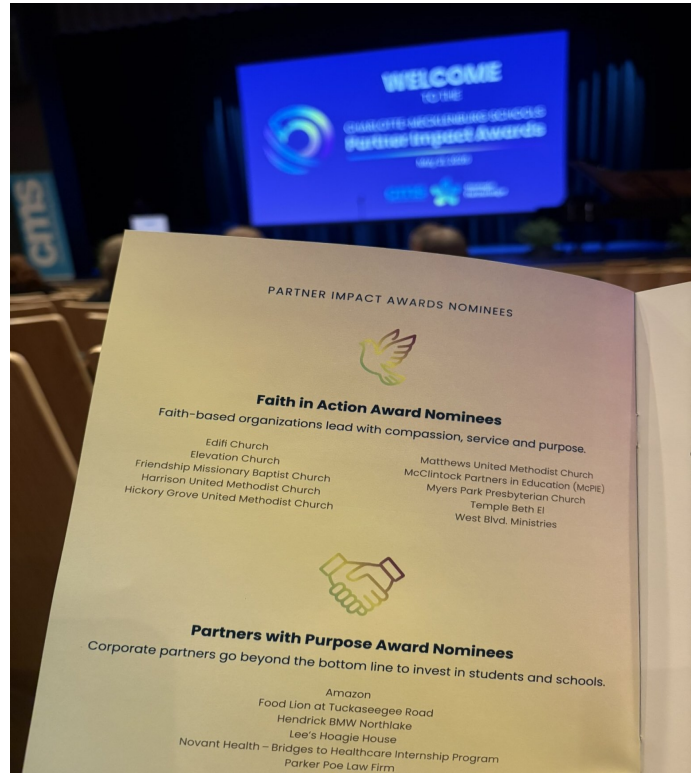
Craft Closet Cleanout

There will be a clean out of the craft closet in the basement of the sanctuary right after service, on June 28th and lunch will be provided for anyone who would like to help us. Please contact Jennifer Stribling, Lori Kodikara, or the church office if you have any questions.

SAVE THE DATE!

Monday August 3 - Wednesday August 5
for Camp Firelight Vacation Bible School!





This May Pastor Caitlin represented Hickory Grove UMC at the Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools inaugural Impact awards. HGUMC was anonymously nominated for the "Faith in Action" award, which means our community of faith is making an extraordinary impact on the children in our community. In addition to Hickory Grove UMC, Harrison and Matthews were two other United Methodist churches nominated and Myers Park Presbyterian Church received the award. What this says to our church and community is that people are watching! It also says that our witness as a church to our wider community is that we lead with compassion, service, and purpose. We give thanks to God that THIS is our witness as people committed to living out the Gospel of Jesus Christ! When we support students and teachers, we strengthen the entire community. And we do not have to do this work alone!