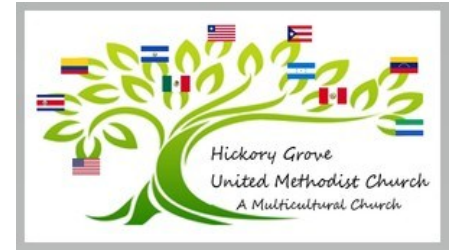


The Grove Echoes

May 2026



HICKORY GROVE UMC

In April, a small group from our church traveled to Alabama on a pilgrimage through some of the most sacred and painful landmarks of the Civil Rights Movement. We walked through the Legacy Museum, spent time at the Rosa Parks Museum, and experienced a powerful performance of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Each place told the truth about our nation's history with both honesty and a call to remember.



One of the most powerful moments of the trip was hearing from a woman who was just 15 years old during the Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights Marches. She witnessed the violence of March 7, 1965—what we now call “Bloody Sunday”—and as a young Black girl, it shaped her lifelong passion for civil rights. Her story was not abstract history; it was living testimony. It reminded us that the struggle for justice is not distant. It is personal. It is embodied. It is ongoing. Throughout the pilgrimage, one phrase stayed with us: “good trouble.” These are the words of John Lewis, who called people of faith and conscience to get into “good trouble, necessary trouble” for the sake of justice. As United Methodists, this language resonates deeply with our theology. John Wesley taught that faith is not only about what we believe, but how we live. Through what he called “works of mercy” and “works of piety,” Wesley insisted that loving God and loving neighbor are inseparable. Grace is not passive—it is active. It transforms us, and then sends us into the world to participate in God's healing and justice.

This is what we call sanctification: the ongoing work of God's grace shaping us into people of love. And sometimes, that love looks like disruption. Eastertide makes this even more clear. The resurrection of Jesus is not just a comforting promise—it is a radical declaration. It proclaims that the powers of sin, death, and injustice do not have the final word. In many ways, resurrection is the ultimate act of “good trouble.” It disrupts systems of oppression. It challenges the status quo. It calls disciples out of fear and into courage.

On our trip, we also spent time reflecting on white privilege and the role of the church—both in perpetuating injustice and in resisting it. That is not easy work. But it is holy work. Wesley himself spoke out against slavery in his time, calling it the “sum of all villainies” and writing his *Thoughts Upon Slavery* in 1774. Our tradition does not allow us to turn away from hard truths.

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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

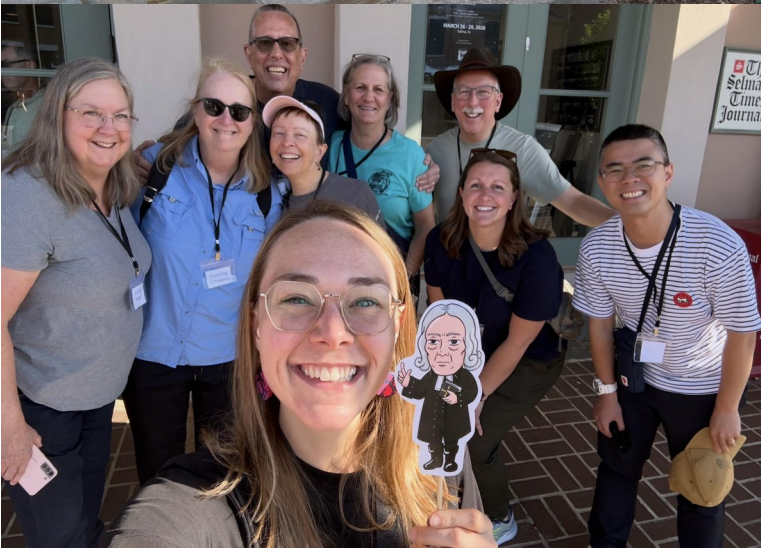
Grove Echoes (continued)

And here we are, in 2026. We are living in a time when divisions run deep, when questions of justice, truth, and belonging continue to shape our common life. It can be tempting to retreat into comfort, silence, and apathy. But our faith—especially in this Easter season—calls us into discipleship that is active, courageous, and rooted in love.

“Good trouble” today may not look exactly like it did in Selma in 1965. But it still asks something of us. It might look like telling the truth when it is inconvenient. Listening to voices we have ignored. Examining our own assumptions. Standing alongside those who are marginalized. Refusing to accept injustice as normal.

Our pilgrimage did not give us easy answers. But it did remind us of who we are called to be: People of resurrection. People shaped by grace. People willing to follow Jesus—not only in belief, but in action. Many of us are now asking the question “Where do we go from here?” In this season of Eastertide, may we have the courage to go and step into “good trouble.” And may we trust that God is still at work—bringing new life, even now, out of the broken places of our world.

-Pastor Caitlin



HGUMC members with former HG Associate, Laurie Knoespel, who served HGUMC from 1998-2005

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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Pastor Caitlin is going on Renewal Leave!

As previously announced in the April 2026 edition of the Grove Echoes Pastor Caitlin will be taking a renewal leave from May 27 through July 19. This means her last day in the office will be Tuesday May 26, and she will return on Monday July 20. This is not a vacation, but an intentional time set apart for rest, prayer, study, and renewal—so that she may return with deeper spiritual grounding, renewed vision, and greater capacity for ministry among us. Below are some FAQs regarding Pastor Caitlin's leave, including her substitute!

Some FAQs:

Why is Pastor Caitlin taking renewal leave now?

This is a normal and encouraged rhythm for sustaining long-term ministry. In a constantly connected and often anxious world, burnout is a real concern for clergy. Our conference supports renewal leave with funding and support so that pastors can step away before reaching that point. On a personal note, this timing also aligns well with Pastor Caitlin's family life, as her husband Matthew will graduate with his PhD in May. After many years of full-time ministry and study, this is a meaningful opportunity for renewal.

Is Pastor Caitlin coming back?

Yes! Healthy pastors help cultivate healthy churches. Renewal leave creates space to listen for God, grow spiritually, and to return with fresh energy for the work we all share. Pastor Caitlin looks forward to returning—especially as we head into VBS and all that lies ahead in our life together. She along with Pastor Candido and Pastor Colston will be returning to HGUMC for the 2026-2027 appointment year!

Who will be preaching at the Traditional and Contemporary Service on Sundays?

Rev. De Hillyer, retired UMC Elder will be covering for Pastor Caitlin during her Renewal Leave. He is being provided to us by the Metro District and will lead worship at both the Traditional and Contemporary services from June 14 through July 19. More information about Pastor De will be included in our June edition of Grove Echoes. In addition, Pastors Colston Morris and Candido Albino, along with our youth and United Women in Faith, will lead combined services on May 31 and June 7.

What happens if there's a death, crisis, or wedding?

Pastoral care will continue without interruption. Rev. De Hillyer, along with Rev. Colston Morris and Rev. Candido Albino, will be available as needed. Please contact the church office or refer to the bulletin or website for their contact information.

Will Pastor Caitlin be checking email or answering texts/calls?

To fully honor the purpose of this renewal leave, she will be stepping away from the day-to-day responsibilities of the church and will not be checking email or responding to calls or texts during this time. Thank you for respecting this boundary, which allows for true rest and renewal. Pastor Caitlin will follow up on messages after she returns the week of July 20.

How can we support Pastor Caitlin while she's away?

Your prayers are deeply appreciated—for renewal and rest. You are also encouraged to continue supporting the life of the church. You may find opportunities to step into new roles or serve in different ways—lean into those moments. Remember: "liturgy" means "the work of the people." The life and success of our church belongs to all of us.

If you have any questions for Pastor Caitlin before she leaves, please feel free to reach out to her or to Mary English-Tri (SPRC) at maryalison.english@gmail.com

African Ministry

Sincere greetings to all of you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The month of May is a special time in the life of the church as we celebrate our beloved mothers and honor their love, sacrifice, and unwavering faith. We will also be conducting confirmation classes for our young people as they continue to grow in their spiritual journey and commitment to Christ.

To those celebrating birthdays and anniversaries this month, we extend our heartfelt wishes for a joyful celebration, God's abundant blessings, and many more years of life and love.

As we approach the summer months, we are mindful of the many activities, travels, and family commitments that come with the season. While we enjoy this time, let us remain steadfast in our faith, committed to worship, and connected to one another as a church family.

Let us continue to pray for one another, encourage one another, and walk together in love as we seek to glorify God in all that we do.

May God continue to bless each of you and your families.

With love and blessings,

Pastor Colston



Latino Ministry

This May, we are reminded that our faith is meant to be shared. Jesus calls us to be His light in the world, reaching out with love, compassion, and kindness to those around us.

May we look for simple ways to serve—through our words, our actions, and our presence in the community. Each act of love is a reflection of Christ's grace.

Let us go forward this month with open hearts, ready to serve.

Grace and peace,

Rev. Candido Albino



Preschool News

It's May already? That means we are wrapping up another year of faithful ministry to preschool children and their families. We thank God for the opportunities we have had this year impacting our Preschoolers and being impacted by them as well.

We are very excited to host our Pre-K class families for a special graduation program on Friday, May 15 at 11:00. "Going on a Picnic" will be a musical celebration followed by graduation ceremonies. Please come out and celebrate with us on this day!

I want to take this opportunity to thank our amazing staff – Diann Moore and Jillian Lertserikul (Ones), Kim Rogers and Coleen Owens (Twos), Cindy Scavotto and Wilmer Trotter (Threes), Edith Rivas (Pre-K, 4/5s), and Patty Smith (music) and Sarah Amedio/Derek Harrell (FitKids). These ladies/gentleman do such an amazing job working with the children and each other. This school year went well and we thank God for his faithfulness and for such amazing and staff members!

Our Year in Review – During the 2025-2026 School Year, our Preschool:

Served 46 different children and their families

Collected hats and gloves for We Care ministry in November

Collected 189 canned goods for the We Care ministry in December

Hosted a Christmas program for parents and family members in December.

Collected 167 canned pasta items for the Snack Pack ministry in February

Had Music Class, Bible Stories, and FitKids and ScienceKids classes each month. Students learned nine Bible verses and songs that help them remember these verses.

Hosted the Butterfly Farm in April where children and staff got to feed and hold butterflies and learn about their lifecycle.

Made Easter goodies that were distributed to the shut-ins.

It's hard to believe that we are getting close to the end of this school year. We remember God's faithfulness and his blessings on allowing us to be in ministry to preschool age children.

We've had an amazing year! God is good - ALL the time!

Until September,

Sharon Freeze





Financial Need at HGUMC

Hi Friends,

Unfortunately, we have had a couple of unexpected expenses arise. We had to replace the windows in the Parsonage. I know it seems like the house was built just a few years ago, but it was 1991. It was time to replace and not continue to repair. The cost to replace is \$29,985. In addition, we had to replace an AC unit in the Pre School building. Again, time to replace and not repair. The cost is \$20,900.

So now we could use some additional financial assistance. These were not anticipated expenses and they were not in our budget. If you can give a little extra to help, it would be greatly appreciated.

Please note these donations to the "Building Repair and Maintenance" fund. If you desire, you can also note the donation is for the Parsonage Windows or AC Unit.

God bless you and thank you for all you do for Hickory Grove United Methodist Church,

Thank you

HGUMC Staff meets butterflies!!!!

We love having a preschool on our campus!



Mental Health Awareness Month

Facts and Tips with Liz Holloway

Since 1949, the month of May has been recognized as Mental Health Awareness Month. Intending to recognize mental health struggles, connecting people to services, and ending the stigma, this month highlights the need for more mental health services and how many individuals are affected. Per the National Institute of Mental Health, 1 in 5 adults in America live with a mental health illness; of that number, 6% of the adult population have what is defined as a “serious” mental health issue that results in a limitation of one of more major life activities. Untreated mental health illnesses can impact one’s life in multiple aspects, such as financial, familial, and physical health, this month highlights the importance of understanding and prioritizing mental health.

With life, we are not immune to dealing with daily stress, occasional sadness, and other feelings that can feel intimidating and overwhelming. There will always be moments in which your mental health is challenged, but if daily tasks seem too intense, you’re sleeping too little or too much, your appetite has noticeably increased or decreased, and you experience feelings of extreme sadness, you may be experiencing depression. Depressed feelings after a loss, such as the death of a loved one or an unexpected life change, are to be expected, but if you feel as if you cannot process these feelings and proceed with daily tasks, please reach out to a professional for help. Another common mental health need that is often overlooked or downplayed as daily stress is anxiety. Daily worries turn into anxiety when you find these worries persistent and overwhelming, interrupting your normal routine and thought patterns. If either of these diagnoses goes untreated for too long, you may begin to experience side effects such as irritability and a negative impact on your diet and sleep schedule.

If you find yourself struggling with mental health, there are many options for you or your loved ones who may be struggling. Some mental health issues, such as daily stressors or situational anxiety, can be reduced and handled by learning coping skills such as mindfulness and grounding. For moments when you are feeling intense worry and show physical signs such as increased heart rate, focus on the sensations around you (i.e. what you see, feel, hear, smell, and taste). If you find yourself having moments where you are surprised by your behaviors or emotions, try journaling for further reflection or to simply get your thoughts out. Other dilemmas, such as continued depressive symptoms, feelings of suicidality, or hallucinations, may require further interventions, such as seeking out mental health counseling or psychiatric interventions. Most insurances cover mental health therapy, but please check your plan to ensure coverage. In addition, most mental health agencies, such as Sanctuary Counseling Group, offer financial assistance such as sliding scales or scholarships.

To find out more information about mental health, mental health services, or to set up an appointment with a professional, such as myself, please visit www.sanctuarycounselinggroup.org. If you or a loved one are experiencing suicidal thoughts or a mental health emergency please contact your local mobile health crisis or 988.

Liz Holloway LCMHC-A

LHolloway@scgnc.org



Memorials and Honorariums

(received in the office by April 30th).

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

Memorials:

Floyd Sistrunk

General: Nancy and JW Scercy

SnackPack: Robbie Bost

WeCare: Jean Long

Tom Benton

General: Nancy and JW Scercy

Patty Marks

SnackPack: Jeff and Channing Kirkpatrick

Richard White

SnackPack: Jeff and Channing Kirkpatrick

Travis Bunn

SnackPack: Koinonia Class



The Family of Floyd Sistrunk is so grateful for your kindness and support during Floyd's illness and death. We so much appreciate the cards, calls, visits and prayers. He loved his church family.

-Katherine Sistrunk

Easter Sunday at HGUMC



SAVE THE DATE!

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



United Women in Faith Sunday

May 31st at 11am in the Sanctuary
Join Us!

Call to Prayer Luncheon for Women

Join the United Women in Faith after the UWF combined service on May 31st for a call to prayer luncheon. All women are invited to bring a cover dish and a friend!

GRADUATION AND CONFIRMATION



Sunday

Join us on Sunday June 7th at 11am in the
Sanctuary to celebrate our Confirmands and
Graduates!

GRADUATES, PLEASE GET YOUR NAME, SCHOOL,
PHOTO, AND POST GRAD PLANS INTO
ESTRIBLING@HGUMC.COM BY MAY 20TH



Confirmation Retreat

Saturday, May 16th
10:00AM to 6:00PM
at Hickory Grove United
Methodist Church

REQUIRED FOR ALL
CONFIRMANDS!

If you have any questions, contact Lori
Kodikara or the church office

YOU'RE INVITED

Children and Youth Lunch

MAY 3, 2026

12:30pm to 1:45pm
Children in the Trinity Room
Youth in the Parlors



MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH
TALK WITH SPECIAL GUEST, LIZ
HOLLOWAY, THE THERAPIST THAT
MEETS ON HGUMC'S CAMPUS!