

The Grove Echoes

September 2026

HICKORY GROVE UMC



Over the past few weeks, we have been exploring Dr. Lacey Warner's Knowing Who We Are: The Wesleyan Way of Grace together on Wednesday evenings. Her book invites us to consider: Who are we, and what does it mean to live as people shaped by God's grace?

At the heart of Wesleyan theology is the conviction that grace is not simply something God gives us at the moment we become Christians. Grace surrounds us, comes before us, meets us where we are, and continues to shape us throughout our lives. God's grace is always at work—calling us, transforming us, and empowering us to become more like Jesus.



Dr. Warner reminds us that our identity begins not with what we accomplish, how successful we are, or even what we believe we are capable of doing for God. Our identity begins with God's love for us. We are people who are loved by God, invited into relationship with God, and called to extend that same grace and love to others.

This has made Wednesday nights more than simply a time to learn about Wesleyan theology. It has become an opportunity to reflect upon what grace looks like in our everyday lives: How is God already at work in us? Where are we being invited to grow? How might we become people who offer grace more freely to one another and to our wider community?

And we aren't finished yet! Our Bible study will continue through September 23. There is still plenty more for us to discover as we explore what it means to know who we are as people of grace.

Whether you have been part of the study from the beginning or are just now hearing about it, you are welcome to join us. You don't have to have read every chapter or have all the answers. Come with your questions, your experiences, and your willingness to grow.

As we continue this journey together, my prayer is that we might come to know more deeply who we are: people who have received God's grace, people who are being transformed by grace, and people who are called to share that grace with the world.

Grace and Peace,

Pastor Caitlin

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

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African Ministry



As we enter the month of September, I give God thanks for God's continued grace, mercy, faithfulness, and love toward us. The Lord has brought us through another month and continues to bless us as individuals, families, and as the Hickory Grove United Methodist Church family.

I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone who assisted with our back-to-school Jamboree, especially Sister Precious Gibson and LIBAC. It was a wonderful time filled with fun activities, fellowship, and laughter. It was truly a joy to see so many of you come together to support our children and families. Thank you for helping make this event a success!

September is a month filled with opportunities for worship, fellowship, ministry and service. As we continue to grow together in Christ, let us remain committed to being the hands and feet of Jesus in our church, our community, and wherever God sends us. We are excited to welcome the Steven Trowen Nagbe UMC Distant Members Fellowship to Hickory Grove from September 4–6, 2026. This gathering will be filled with worship, fellowship, ministry, and meaningful activities. I encourage everyone to join us as we welcome our brothers and sisters and share in this special time together.

I also encourage each of you to remain connected to the life and ministry of the church. Your presence, prayers, participation, and support make a difference. Let us continue to encourage one another, care for those who are hurting, celebrate with those who are rejoicing, and faithfully proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Rhema and I extend our warmest birthday and anniversary wishes to everyone celebrating during the month of September. May God bless you with many more years of life, love, joy, and abundant blessings.

We also extend our deepest condolences and prayers to those who have experienced the loss of loved ones. May God's comfort and peace strengthen you and your families during this difficult time. May you find comfort in the promise that God is near to those who are hurting and broken-hearted.

As we look ahead to the many activities and ministries planned for September, I pray that we will approach each opportunity with joyful hearts and a spirit of unity. "May everything we do bring glory and honor to God" (1 Corinthians 16:14)

I also encourage everyone to support our Food Sale Fundraiser on September 26, 2026. This will be our first food-sale initiative, and we hope it will grow into a quarterly or annual event that helps support the ministry and mission of the church. Your participation, generosity, and support will help us continue serving others, strengthening our ministry, and making a positive difference in the lives of those we serve.

May God continue to bless you, your families, and the entire Hickory Grove family. I look forward to worshipping, serving, and fellowshiping with you throughout this month.

Blessings,

Pastor Colston

Back to School Jamboree with LIBAC!



Latino Ministry

Dear Hickory Grove, as we begin September, I invite you to ask: What new thing might God want to do in my life? Perhaps it is renewing your prayer life, becoming more present in worship, reconnecting with someone, serving in a new way, or inviting someone to church.

As a congregation, may we enter this new season with hope. God is not finished with us. There are still people to love, lives to touch, neighbors to serve, and good news to share. I ask you for your prayers for the Latino Service members and for all Hickory Grove brothers and sister.



Preschool News

September has arrived along with 47 students and 7 teachers for our Weekday Preschool! We are very excited about our 68th school year which begins on Tuesday, September 8.

This year's staff includes the following ladies:

Diann Moore and Jillian Lertserikul - One Year Olds

Kim Rogers and Christine Sullivan– Two Year Olds

Cindy Scavotto and Wilmer Trotter – Three Year Olds

Edith Rivas – PreK (4/5)

Michelle Smith and Sandy Goodwin – Music

Derek Harrell – FitKids

We covet your prayers for our staff, children and their families as we embark on this school year. Please pray for good health, safety and all kinds of learning opportunities. We would also like you to pray that we would truly be the hands and feet of Jesus to these precious children and their families.

Wanting to do more? We always have children and their families that could use a little help. We do what we can and your gift would allow us to do more. Just note on your church giving “Preschool Fund”. Please contact Sharon Freeze at 704-537-4658 or prechool@hgumc.com if you have any questions.

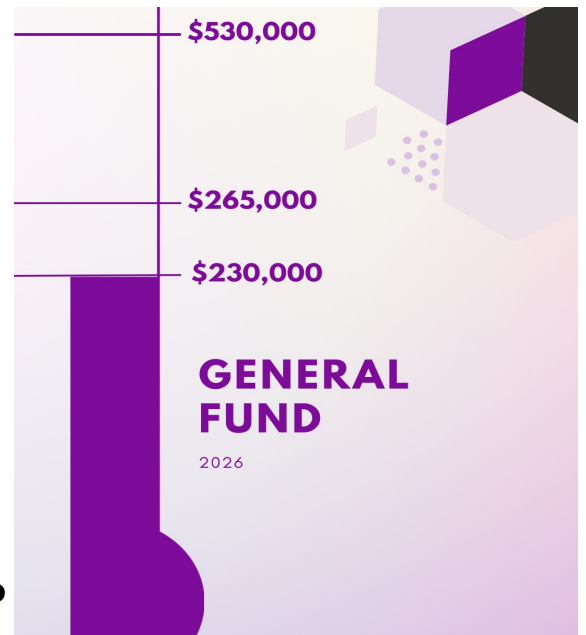
Looking forward to sharing our preschool year with you,
Sharon Freeze, Director



From the Finance Chair, Randy Bunnell :

2026 1H Year Financial Update :

2 Corinthians 9:11 / “Sowing Generously” states : “You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.” I like The Message translation : “He gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God.”



Unfortunately, we are considerably behind budget through the 1st Half of 2026. We have received approximately 86% of our YTD Budget (\$229K vs \$265K). In addition, our expenses have far exceeded our receipts (\$276K vs \$229K) and our YTD Budget. Therefore, I’m asking you to do what you can to assist our church. Please make sure your pledges are up to date and please donate what you can to erase the deficit. We must continue to keep our church financially stable. Please continue to give to support our wonderful church !! And please continue to pray for HGUMC !! I know our Lord will continue to bless you in all the work you do to further His kingdom !!

	YTD June 2026 Actuals		YTD June 2026 Budget
	General Fund		General Fund
Receipts	\$229,908		\$265,000
Expenses	\$276,845		\$265,000
Variance	(\$46,937)		\$0

	YTD June 2026 Actuals		YTD June 2026 Budget
	Building Fund*		Building Fund
Receipts	\$37,685		\$41,500

*Our monthly note payment for the FLC Building is \$6625. As mentioned in previous Grove Echoes, we still have a reserve, but that will go away quickly if we do not hit the monthly need of \$6625. Please continue to see what you can do to help bring this Fund back up to the monthly note level – thank you so much for your efforts. If we all work together we can do great things in our community – pray hard and thanks again for supporting HGUMC !!

Summer Reflection with Bishop Carter: Love Boldly

First of Three Meditations on the Vision Statement of The United Methodist Church: Love Boldly

Scripture Reading: Matthew 22:34-40

The calling we undertake in the present moment is to represent our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And if we are to express that calling in the present moment, we will find ourselves engaged in two actions.

We will **love boldly**.
And we will **serve joyfully**.

To love boldly is to love my neighbor, to love the stranger, to love your enemy. It is to love without the expectation of receiving love in return.

In this way love is not a transaction. It is not conditional. In this way love is transformational. It is the gift of the greatest resource you have, your time, all of your time, in order to be a sign of God's love wherever you are, in a small town, in a large city, in a hospital or school or mission field.

Love is sometimes contrasted with law. Jesus was asked a question by a lawyer, and he spoke not about laws but about love.

To love is the first and greatest commandment of Jesus. To love is to bear the first fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Law is transactional. You will gain certain rights through being licensed, commissioned, or ordained. This is the church law, the *Book of Discipline*.

Love is transformational. You are making promises, undertaking vows, placing yourself under the authority of others, the laity in your local churches, a superintendent, a bishop.

And people will be under your authority. Do not use the role from a human point of view. This is the flesh. This is the law. Allow the fruit of the Holy Spirit to change you. To love boldly is to bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

This is not a transaction. This is transformation.

A transformation I hope for you is that you will come to love the people you serve. This will be a risk that you take. It is a question that many people ask about the pastor who comes to serve among them. Does this pastor love us?

Now two important words about love. First, love does not harm, love does not violate. Ministry is a sacred task, and those we serve have sacred worth. Second, love sometimes requires that we say the hard thing. Love is not telling people what they want to hear. That is not love.

The prophets loved the people. That is why they could say and do hard things. And this is one of the ways love can become bold.

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I want you to know about the ministry of Derry Barnhardt, who was a local pastor in this conference, and has gone on to be with the Lord.

Derry joined our pastoral team during my years in Winston-Salem. He had previously served in Lexington, and what I want to share happened there.

Derry came to be the pastor of a church in Lexington. One of their members, he quickly learned, was in prison, two hours away, serving time for murder. Derry began to visit the young man every week, on Saturday, a four-hour round trip drive. Derry was a good shepherd. He loved his people. And they began to love Derry.

After more than a year of these visits, another resident of the prison was overheard to confess to the murder of which the young man in Lexington was being held. And the member of the church was released.

The church rejoiced, the prodigal son was returning home, they threw a feast. And Derry's ministry was celebrated. You might think that was the end of the story, but it was not.

Derry received a letter from the inmate who had committed the murder, whose name was Rickie Lee Sanderson. He wrote to Derry, "*Would you come and visit me?*"

And so, Derry made the trip to the prison. He knew the way. And he continued, week after week, Saturday after Saturday. He was a good shepherd. Did the church celebrate what Derry was doing? Not quite. Over time Rickie Lee came to love Derry, and to know that God loved him, through Derry. That's transformation. He asked if Derry would be present at his execution. Derry was present. He asked if Derry would preside at his burial. Derry did preside.

This is loving boldly. It involves risk, and energy, and stretching the boundaries of who God loves. Rickie Lee Sanderson could not do anything for Derry, other than make his life more complicated. Not a transaction. A transformation.

Now, can we get theological just for a moment?

Imagine that you and I are Rickie Lee Sanderson, and we are imprisoned in some way, by sin or addiction or the way we have been traumatized or the harm we have done to someone, and imagine that Jesus came to find us in those places.

He descended into hell.

Jesus does find us in those places and asks us to die to something, so that we might live. It begins when we know that someone loves us.

Jesus loves me. This I know.
For the Bible tells me so.

And that is bold love.

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While we were yet sinners Christ died for us. When we love boldly there is a transformation. This changes the one who loves and the ones who are loved. And in God's economy it is never clear who is loving and who is being loved.

It is a relationship. Love is the greatest commandment, love of God, love of neighbor. Love is the fulfillment, the completion of the law, Jesus did for us what we could not do in the law. Law is easy, love is hard. When we love our enemies it will be misunderstood or criticized. When we love out loud it will be accused of being political.

I had the privilege last winter of walking one day with William Barber in eastern North Carolina. Early in the morning he said to a few of us, *"today we have to convince people that we love them, even people who do not agree with us."*

Today, how are we being called to convince people that we love them? How are we being called to love boldly?

(This reflection is taken from Bishop Carter's sermon on the Ordering of Ministry at the Western NC Annual Conference, Lake Junaluska, June 20, 2026.)



WEEKLY

SUMMER
REFLECTION

REFLECTION

- Love is not a transaction, it is transformation.
- Christ calls us to love our neighbors, strangers, and even our enemies.
- Bold love asks for nothing in return and reflects God's grace.
- Through love, God transforms both the one who loves and the one who is loved.

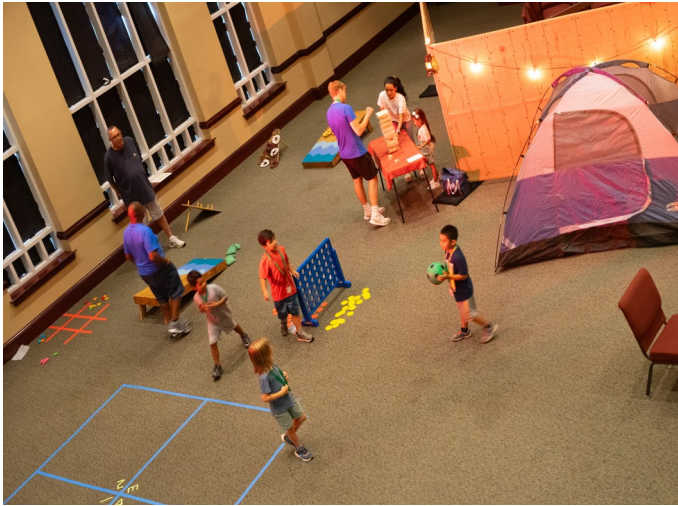
Love Boldly

LIVING BOLD LOVE

- Love with courage and compassion.
- Speak truth with grace.
- See the sacred worth in every person.
- Let Christ's love shape your life and ministry.

"YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD... AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

Vacation Bible School @HGUMC!



WE NEED YOUR HELP!

HGUMC SNACK Pack

Program

An illustration of several hands of different skin tones reaching upwards, each holding a red heart. The hands are arranged in a circular pattern, with some in the foreground and others in the background, creating a sense of unity and support.

Hickory Grove Elementary started back to school this week! SNACK Pack needs your HELP! One shopping trip to Sam's Club can cost around **\$700** and that might last us **3 weeks**. The prices of food items continue to rise. Every week **48 kids** are sent home with **2 breakfast items, 2 lunch items, 2 dinner items and 4 snacks**. Please consider donating to SNACK pack!

Contact Jennifer Stribling at 704-617-2520 for questions, concerns, or to volunteer.



FALL FESTIVAL

Will be...

***Saturday October 18, 2026
12pm-3pm***

Next Planning Meeting

September 8th at 7pm

***Link in Weekly E-News and
on the church calendar!***

hickorygroveumc.com

Memorials and Honorariums

(received in the office by August 30th).

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

Memorial:

Margarita Albino

WeCare: Jeff and Channing Kirkpatrick

Honorarium:

Kathleen Robinson

General Fund: Wayne Whiteside, Betty Nunn

Robin and Jimmy Boyles

Building Repair and Snack Pack: Randy Bunnell



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!