From the Pastors

Dear Church Family,

It has been a wonderful five years and we have loved every (well, almost every!) minute as we have journeyed together with you here at North Raleigh United Methodist Church. And now we look forward to our new journey in retirement.

During our careers we have served many wonderful churches, but it is a special blessing to say that these last five years have been the very best of our ministry. Being able to work together is part of it, but even more important has been the sharing in ministry with the many dedicated and talented members who serve Christ along with us at North Raleigh.

We celebrate that our new pastors, Duke Lackey and Ashley Will, will lead North Raleigh UMC into a future filled with promise and possibility. Or to put it another way, when it comes to the ministry and mission of our church, the best is yet to come!

As for us, we will continue to treasure North Raleigh and look forward to hearing of great things happening in the next few years. We are going to retire in Raleigh, and hope to see many of you around town (It is customary for retired United Methodist clergy not to worship at their former church, at least for a year or so.)

Finally, we pray God’s blessings upon all who have traveled this journey with us at North Raleigh... and thank you for the remarkable privilege of sharing ministry with you during these past five years.

Pastors’ Letter
A five-year journey

Hallelujah, Alleluia!
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by Geoff Mueller

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Our children’s small gift grows God’s kingdom.
from www.amazima.org

Love Your #Selfie
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Go Now in Peace
A celebration of two pastors’ ministries
HALLELUJAH, ALLELUIA!

The Alleluia Choir ministry has blessed many children and families, including my own. The choir is for kids in grades 3-5 and usually performs two musical numbers each year: a Christmas pageant and a spring musical. At the beginning of each season the kids get a CD and a book with the entire musical. My family would put the CD in the family minivan and leave it there until the performance was over. The songs were repeated on the way to soccer practice, on the way to church, and on the way to the grocery store. Usually, I would even know the songs pretty well by the time the performance arrived.

The setting is Saturday morning rehearsal on the day before the big show. Tomorrow night the Alleluia Choir will be presenting the Christmas pageant Miracle on Main Street for the congregation. Director Karen Reardon watches and listens as her granddaughter, Gabrielle Groom, leads the choir through the choreography they have been learning for the last several months. Karen wanders back to the sound board where her grandson, Chase Groom, is working the computer with the karaoke sound track. "Oh dear," Karen says. "I'm not sure they know this song yet..."
There have been many stressful moments in the Saturday rehearsal before the performance. Some kids are coming and going to judo or soccer practice, so sometimes there has never been a full dress rehearsal before the big show. In musicals like It’s Cool in the Furnace, some kids were still having trouble pronouncing Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. But part of the miracle in shows like Miracle on Main Street is that somehow it all comes together. It is sometimes a bit of a “miracle” that everything goes as planned.

Motivating all this and pulling it together is Karen Reardon. She absolutely loves the kids and loves the music. But besides the thrill of the performance and working the music, each show gives the opportunity to teach a little bit about faith. For example, the kids learned about the life of Esther, in Esther-ordinary Faith. Or the show Amerikids taught the children a bit about the faith of some of the founding fathers of our country. Many of the Christmas pageants contain great lessons about kindness and giving, including Meet me at the Manger and Miracle on Main Street.

Often for the Alleluia Choir productions, NRUMC’s facility coordinator, Tim McWilliams, is called upon to engineer set props such as this three-sided, rotating house facade for Miracle on Main Street.

There have been many stressful moments in the Saturday rehearsal before the performance. Some kids are coming and going to judo or soccer practice, so sometimes there has never been a full dress rehearsal before the big show. In musicals like It’s Cool in the Furnace, some kids were still having trouble pronouncing Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. But part of the miracle in shows like Miracle on Main Street is that somehow it all comes together. Part of the miracle is that the show was fabulously attended and supported by the congregation, giving the kids a lot of love for their hard work. And maybe part of the miracle was that Chase Groom piped in some of the CD recording to help the kids with a song they didn’t quite know. But really the miracle is in the blessings of music and spirit given to the kids and congregation by the Reardon and Groom families. Many thanks for all the kindness and love you have shared.
If you are at North Raleigh
United Methodist Church during the week, you’ve no doubt seen Chase Groom. Whether he’s running audio visual equipment for the Alleluia Choir, leading a middle school boys’ small group at youth group summer camp, or helping church members navigate the Church Life app on their phone, Chase is around. Chase is a member of a group of young adults who have sacrificed time and other interests to focus on serving our youth and children’s ministries in some capacity (Worth Knight recently became our youth band coordinator and Sydney Ferrell is a regular at The Big Idea). Chase paved the way; he stuck around when many were leaving for four-year universities or careers away from North Raleigh. I interviewed Chase primarily to introduce you to him, certainly not to single him out or cover him with accolades—he actually doesn’t like that. Chase is just a normal 22-year-old doing extraordinary things in his church. I interviewed him because he’s one of several amazing young adults we have at North Raleigh who have opted in. I think he is a young man who is answering God’s call to ministry. If you see him, take time to affirm his gifts for ministry and thank him for what he does for our community of faith. I don’t think we can ever do that enough—for any of our students, young people, or adults.
We’re at the end of a full day at North Raleigh United Methodist Church and we’re getting ready for youth group tonight, so thanks for letting me steal you away from the stuff you’re doing. Many North Raleigh people know you, know your family, but for those who don’t know who you are and what you are about, go ahead and introduce us to Chase Groom.

So I’m an adult youth leader here, and I work with high school and middle school youth as well as the children’s ministry. Most every week I’m helping lead youth groups, creative ministries, youth band, and attending Youth Council meetings. I’ve got five siblings: three brothers and two sisters. I’m the second oldest and I still have two of my siblings in the youth program (Austin and Gabriel), one just went to college (Madison), and one will be in the youth program in a couple years (Grayson). I’ve been at North Raleigh my entire life and I was baptized here. I grew up in this church from back when the new Sanctuary wasn’t even built, when the current Fellowship Hall was my Sanctuary. I remember going into youth group and I didn’t really have a 6th to 8th grade youth group at all. They had UMYF here but it didn’t really do anything, and we had a youth minister who got paid to come to be here and teach us a little bit and maybe play a game every once in a while but that was it.

What was it like to watch the youth ministry grow? You told me once that your youth group started with 12 kids. I can still name the 12 kids that were here, and it’s crazy to me that we continue to grow. Over the years we were challenged to bring friends and had competitions to invite more people. We would reach out to our neighbors and our circles of friends in the neighborhood and in school. We really pushed to make this place grow and got to the point where you couldn’t even tell it was an original kid anymore and that’s when I think it started to really flourish.

What made you stick around and choose to serve in different youth ministry leadership roles? You’ve chosen an unusual path and our youth ministry today is stronger because of it. So talk about how the choices you made and how your decisions about your future and your work career have affected how you serve here at North Raleigh United Methodist Church.

Right when I was 18 and graduated high school, I took a position at Harris Teeter for Assistant Customer Service Manager that took a lot of my time. I was working every single weekend, working the long hours, always attached to work and it really took me away from this church from 18 to 19 years old. After that point I left to finish another semester at Wake Tech because I couldn’t work full-time and do full-time school. So I then took a position with my dad, Mike Groom.

...I can now know exactly what they experienced and potentially work with confirmands in the future and keep them accountable on their journey as they join the church...

What type of business?

He owns a marketing company and we work directly with phones and when people wait on hold, we create ways for them to be engaged, reduce hang ups, or for them to learn more about that company. After taking that position, I had a little bit more flexibility in my schedule. I’ve never been the best at school or ever excelled at school. I was always your average kid and I stopped going to Wake Tech because I saw a good life and career with my dad. I really enjoy working for him and we’ve done well with the business, continuing to grow. I don’t work any weekends and that’s great because I can spend all the time at church on Sundays that I need to. I can show up around 5 and 6 o’clock on weekdays for youth group to hang out with kids, take them to dinner, take them to lunch, and really engage in their lives. I think if I’d gone to four-year University, this never would have been an opportunity for me because I would just now be one year outside of a four-year degree. So for me, I would never have any connections with any these kids, or as strong. I would never have been able to develop the sense of closeness and community with them. I can now hang out and catch up with these kids much as possible, but I strongly believe that wouldn’t have been possible if I had chosen a four-year University like ECU or UNCW, or NC State where I was planning to. So Wake Tech was a great opportunity for me to stay local but now I’ll be venturing...
I really connect with the younger generation of people, all the way down to the little kids. Though I seem to spend more time working with youth, I think I’m really the right age connecting with everything we do together at North Raleigh.

How do you see your role changing in the lives of these youth, with the challenges they experience now, and the things they are encountering?

I think that the kids keep me accountable and I keep the kids accountable as well. I can see that the kids are becoming more and more open to talking with me, and I love to serve in kind of a “big brother” role. They also understand that I’m an adult and that I won’t agree with all of the choices they make, but I’ll try to steer them in a better direction, one that they may not realize is available to them through other relationships they might have.

What advice do you have for lay people who are answering God’s call to serve at North Raleigh? If somebody is looking to serve but they think that the high school kids are scary and the middle schoolers are wild, for instance. How might you encourage them to give youth ministry a try?

They are all great to work with! They are in the critical stages of their lives and they are trying to shape what their future will look like. I think that any leader coming in can definitely think back to when they were in high school, and what they wanted to see in a leader. If they can take that and then try to give that to the kids, I think they’ll be connected really well right from the start.

But you don’t feel like the high school kids are hard to work with?

Ha, no, not at all.

What kind of things do you do when you’re not here?

Like hanging out with your friends, sports, music, what kind of things do you like to do?

When I’m not here I’m working throughout the week at my job, but other than that I love to exercise if I can, working out. I recently found a new love for cycling and it’s a great source of exercise for me. I like to hang out with my friends while watching some sports on television, maybe hang out at the apartment. That’s a good time for me. I also try to hang out with my family as much as I can outside of church life. I live about five minutes away from them, so it’s pretty convenient to go over to hang out or have family dinner, or to just see my brothers and sisters outside of this building. So outside of here, you’ll find me doing the same things, and sometimes hanging out with the youth, but also with my friends and family.

You went with us on the confirmation retreat a couple weeks ago; what did you bring back from that? What did you see there that has really had an impact on you or has been hard to forget?

Well to start, my confirmation journey was not exactly your average confirmation journey. Back when I was in sixth grade, we had a mentor for each youth that they worked with, and mine was the pastor of the church at the time, and it was tough for him to get free. My mentor and I met one time throughout my entire confirmation journey for the whole semester, and then I was confirmed on confirmation Sunday. So for me to go to the retreat and see what these kids are learning in class every other week, and also the confirmation weekend at Lake Junaluska, and to really take what they’ve learned and put it in action, that’s cool to see… that even though I didn’t get to experience that as a middle schooler, I can now know exactly what they experienced and potentially work with confirms in the future and keep them accountable on their journey as they join the church.

Chase lost his older brother, Chris, in a tragic automobile accident in 2008. Since then, he has worked with The Chris Groom Memorial Fund, established by his family to bring something good out of devastating loss. Turn the page to read more about this part of Chase’s life.
Chris Groom Memorial Fund

While driving to his work in October 2003, Christopher Groom was killed in an auto accident. Just days after this tragedy, the Groom family learned of a selfless gift to charity their son secretly made in the year before he died.

After attending services at North Raleigh United Methodist Church during the 2002 Christmas season, Chris handed Pastor Bob O’Keef an envelope. “Chris said that his little brothers and sisters were going to have a great Christmas,” O’Keef recalled. “He then asked if I would take the envelope and see that some children got toys with it.”

Although he earned only minimum wage, inside the envelope was $100 in cash, a gift Chris wanted kept secret from everyone, especially his parents, Mike and Suzanne.

“The fact that he did it didn’t surprise me because he’s just a good kid and obviously cared for others,” said the pastor.

O’Keef stirred many emotions when he tearfully revealed this secret gift at Chris’ funeral. The story so impressed family members and friends that the Groom family was inspired to expand on the gift Chris made, setting up a memorial fund in his name to help less fortunate children.

Later, the family envisioned an even greater tribute, the Chris Groom Memorial Golf Tournament. Through this event, they hope to grow Chris’ loving gift into a much larger fund for the needy children their son sought to help that Sunday in church.

Out of their terrible loss, the Groom family has found a way to honor their son and give meaning to the tragedy that took him at so young an age.

Web: www.ChrisGroom.com
Facebook: TeamChris19

For more information, scan this QR code with your mobile device or visit www.chrisgroom.com.

Hearts & Hammers is an NRUMC-sponsored ministry that assists those that need home repairs or general handyman jobs performed at low or no cost.

Charter member Dave Wells writes here about what Hearts & Hammers does and provides answers to questions members might have.
I have been involved in countless Hearts & Hammers projects. Some of the projects have been quick and have needed little skill while others have required a lot of planning and engineering. One of the more complex jobs is building a wheelchair ramp which require a lot of preparation and in some cases, city inspections.

Oddly enough, one of the seemingly easiest of projects turned out to be quite puzzling—replacing the battery in a smoke detector.

We received a service request from a homeowner to replace the battery in a smoke detector that was chirping. The home had high ceilings so an extension ladder was required to do the job. We arrived at the job site and quickly determined that indeed the detector was emitting the familiar chirp indicating that it was time to replace the battery. The ladder was quickly dispatched to the living room and the battery promptly replaced. Job completed.

Not so fast, another chirp was heard. We inventoried the remaining smoke detectors and decided we should replace those batteries also. Fortunately, those were not as high and could be addressed with a shorter ladder. Batteries replaced, job completed!

Another chirp... how can this be? You can imagine how puzzled we were and had to step back and assess the situation. Another chirp... and another. The sound seemed to be coming from the living room and the battery needed to be replaced.

Some of the seemingly easiest projects can turn into an adventure that calls upon our best troubleshooting skills! Or possibly we just need to be careful not to base our actions upon previously held assumptions, notions, or habits.

We are often asked who is eligible to receive Hearts & Hammers support. Let me share with you the answer to this question: any homeowner who has a need but has no pity on himself, how can the love of God be in him? We will perform household repairs for those who cannot afford them, free of charge. To those who can afford to buy materials, we will provide labor at no charge.

If there is any doubt whether or not a job qualifies, we always recommend submitting a Request for Service Form and having a conversation about the need. More often than not the homeowner and job qualify, and a team is promptly dispatched to address the need. On some occasions, the person requesting service is seeking advice or consulting, and we can help by making a referral to one of the professional handymen who attend our church.

Let me close with this scripture that calls us to action: This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. – 1 John 3:16-18

Frequently Asked Questions

Does the ministry support needs outside of our congregation?

Yes, the Hearts & Hammers ministry extends beyond our congregation and into our community.

What are the most common jobs addressed by the ministry?

- Miscellaneous inside house repairs: toilet repairs, sink repairs, ceiling fans, and lighting.
- Miscellaneous outside house repairs: porch repairs, roof repairs, deck repairs, staining and painting.
- Wheelchair ramps.

How is the ministry funded?

To date, the ministry has been funded by donations from members of the congregation as well as by those receiving repairs or service. Donations are always welcome and needed. Please contact the church office if you would like to make a donation to the ministry.

How do I submit a request for service?

First step is to fill out a Request for Service Form, available on the church website (www.nrumc.org/hearts-hammers/) or you can call the church office to obtain the form.

What happens once I submit a request for service?

- You will receive a call from the coordinator to review the request;
- A team (normally a team of two) will visit to assess the need and determine the materials and skills required to complete the job;
- The coordinator will schedule the job based upon the homeowner’s availability and the availability of volunteers.

How can I learn more about the ministry or become a volunteer?

More information is available on the church website (www.nrumc.org/hearts-hammers/). Volunteer forms are available there also, or you can call the church office for our contact information. The ministry is always in need of volunteers.

If I become a volunteer, how often will I be asked to help?

It all depends on the frequency of jobs and your availability.
In June of 1739, Methodism’s founder John Wesley penned words which have helped to guide Methodists ever since: “I look upon all the world as my parish.”

In other words, from the beginning we Methodists have understood our calling to bring help and healing not just to our own church and not just to our own community, but rather to the entire world.

And here in 2017, the United Methodist Church continues to live up to this calling. Every local congregation sends a portion of its gifts to the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries, which funds ministries literally around the world.

Did you know that the UMC supports more than 350 missionaries in 60 countries? Here are just a few of your missionaries, and the work you help to support:

Mozart M. K. Adevu is serving as the Africa regional coordinator for the Sustainable Agriculture and Development Program for the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). He is based in Accra, Ghana, West Africa.

Yvonne Agduyeng is serving for two years with International and Migrant Ministries in Frankfurt, Germany. She was commissioned in August 2016.

Michael Arteen is serving as chaplain and director of spiritual life at Bethlehem Bible College (BIBC) in Palestine/Israel. He was commissioned in May 2016.

Clara Mridula Biswas is serving as a community worker in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. She works with the “poorest of the poor,” especially children, in slum areas and garbage dumps to facilitate their transfers to relocation and rehabilitation centers.

David Martins is also serving for two years as a teacher with the Lord’s Mountain Orphanage in the Zambezi District of Zambia. He was commissioned in September 2016. Lord’s Mountain puts a strong emphasis on education for neglected and abused children.

Dora Canales Nuñez, a professor at Wesleyan Theological Seminary in Lima, Peru, is working with the Peruvian church to shape a curriculum appropriate to Peru and to Wesleyan theology.

Jennifer Moore is serving as a Christian educator with The United Methodist Church in the Republic of Macedonia. She was commissioned in May 2016.

Russell Takudzwa Rusike is serving for two years as a teacher with the Lord’s Mountain Orphanage in the Zambezi District of Zambia. He was commissioned in September 2016.
In 2016, the Children’s Ministry sent a portion of their budget to Amazima, a charity based in Uganda. Amazima Ministries International was founded by Katie Davis in 2008. The organization, based out of Franklin, Tennessee, feeds, educates and encourages the orphaned, poor, and vulnerable in the country of Uganda. The name chosen for this ministry represents what Katie longs to see take root in the lives of everyone who comes in contact with the ministry. In Luganda, the local language, Amazima (Ah-mah-zeemah) means “truth.” Amazima Ministries desires to reveal the truth of God’s unconditional love through Jesus Christ to the people of Uganda.
The people of Amazima show their love for God by obeying His command to care for the least of His people and make disciples of all nations. Every outreach program of Amazima Ministries, whether education sponsorship, feeding, vocational assistance, or community outreach, is accompanied by Biblical teaching and spiritual encouragement. They know that nourishing the physical needs of these people is not the ultimate goal. They long to see them fed spiritually and restored into a right relationship with God.

Katie’s Story
In December of 2006, 18-year-old Katie Davis traveled to Uganda for the first time. She was immediately captivated by the people and the culture, and knew she would be back. Less than a year later, Katie returned to Uganda to teach at an orphanage and it has been home ever since. Despite her own plans, God led Katie to found Amazima Ministries in 2008 and made her a mother to 13 beautiful girls by the time she was 23. The word “Amazima” means “truth” in the native Luganda language and speaks to Katie’s desire to see lives transformed, relationships restored, and communities changed through the truth of Jesus Christ. While Amazima has lived out its mission through a variety of programs and outreaches over the years, its mission has always been to live out the love of Jesus by educating and empowering the people of Uganda and communities it serves.

Today Katie resides in Uganda with her husband Benji and their 14 children. She is the author of New York Times Best Seller Kisses from Katie. Although Uganda has seen a lot of urbanization in the past few years, the majority of Ugandans are still subsistence farmers — working tirelessly to provide enough to feed their families.

Katie Davis Majors, founder of Amazima and author of Kisses from Katie.

Beading Circle
At the beginning of 2010, Amazima Ministries started the Masese Women’s Beading Circle, because we saw the need to develop a self-sustaining vocational program for mothers in the Masese community. Amazima’s desire is to empower these women, to provide hope for their families, and to see the Gospel to take root in their lives.

Every week, a group gathers. Benches form to make a circle. Ladies come carrying their little ones, out from their homes, up from their mats, leaving their cooking saucepans. They gather to sell their necklaces, but more importantly, they gather to see their friends, share their hurts and victories and hear about the Gospel. These 31 ladies have become friends of Amazima, and they all have a story.

Every week, women spend hours sitting on their banana fiber mats or old wooden stools, surrounded by their children and community members, making paper beads. These beads are made from recycled magazine paper, sealed with a shiny finish and threaded along with tiny glass beads to create handmade, unique, Ugandan necklaces and bracelets. Because of the Beading Circle these ladies are now able to rely on a steady income, which has allowed them to be able to turn away from work that was harmful and dangerous. Before, they had few options on how they could care for their family, so they turned to prostitution, alcohol brewing and trash picking. But their current job allows them to feed their families, send their children to school, purchase plots of land and even build their own homes. The greatest transformation that Amazima Ministries has been blessed to see is how these
ladies are now able to care for and support their neighbors and community members who are in need. Before they were employed, you would have seen these ladies focusing all their efforts and energy to fight for the survival of their families; now there are often testimonies of how these women have invited in or cared for their community members and neighbors that are not related to them.

Scholarship Program
In 2008, Amazima learned about an epidemic present in sub-Saharan Africa that still exists today. Oftentimes, parents and/or guardians are forced to give up their guardianship to orphanages simply because they’re unable to provide the most basic needs for their children: food, medical care, and education. Children who have living, healthy family members can and do become orphans overnight.

As they began to speak with parents and guardians who were dropping their children off at local Ugandan orphanages, a simple solution arose. If they could provide food, medical care, and schooling funds for their children, their families were more likely to stay intact. Amazima started in 2008 by meeting these basic needs of just 10 children, ensuring they remained in the care of their own families rather than in an orphanage. That numbered 150 before the end of 2008 and by 2016, Amazima’s partners were helping provide over 700 children with daily meals, education, medical care, and discipleship. What started as a small sponsorship program grew to include mentoring, vocational training, and feeding outreaches. Though the program has grown and evolved throughout the years, the mission has never wavered. It remains, “To live out the love of Jesus by educating and empowering the people of Uganda and the communities we serve.”

The Amazima School

After four years of planning, designing, building, and much prayer, that dream became reality. On February 13, 2017, The Amazima School opened for its first day of classes.

Located on 70 beautiful acres just off the Nile River, upwards of 800 vulnerable children will receive an exceptional Christ-centered classical education.

A classical Christ-centered secondary school, it exists to equip Ugandan students with the tools of learning to enable them to live fully for the glory of God. It emphasizes academic excellence, servant leadership, and nurturing relationships.

Amazima provides every student with a loving home, invested house parents, excellent teachers, nutritious food, great extra-curricular opportunities, strong academics, and vocational studies all within a biblical worldview. They believe God made each of these children in His image which gives them infinite and eternal value. The Amazima School is a unique and transformational opportunity to educate and empower the young people of Uganda with God’s love.

To learn more about Amazima, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit amazima.org

Just the Beginning
As you learn more about Amazima’s work in Uganda, this ministry hopes that you continue to see the call to discipleship in what they do and how they do it. It is their belief that the Bible defines the act of caring for others in a way that is strengthened by relationships that mirror the discipleship model of Jesus Christ and that is only possible through Jesus Christ himself. There is much yet to do in service to our great God, and they are well pleased to serve and work in a way that encourages others toward the way and the truth and the life.
Love Your #Selfie

Each time we take students from youth ministry on a retreat, we remind them that we are going to see Christ at work in the world. We hope that together, we can learn to look for the ways that God is acting in our midst to show us and teach us about love through those we meet and experiences we share. It is also important to remind them that they are Christ to the world. We can experience God’s love through one another, hear God’s message of hope through one another, and work together to share the hope of Christ with all we meet when we leave our buildings and enter the world.

This January we had the privilege of taking twenty-seven amazing middle school girls to Camp Don Lee for a girls-only retreat. We spent our time together dancing, singing, growing friendships, exploring the ways God is calling us, and living into Christian community. There is nothing quite like the atmosphere created by students when we are away from home. It is an environment that lends itself to unapologetic inclusiveness and creates space for more honest and authentic conversation. The time away also provides us with the unique opportunity to focus fully around one theme or lesson and then leave with ways to apply it at home. While weekly youth group offers teaching moments, retreat allows for further unpacking of one particular message, and time for self-reflection among trusted friends and leaders. The girls were challenged to find the places in their own lives where the message sticks, so that they might better understand the Gospel and what Jesus means in their lives.

Our girls need to see women in leadership and have opportunities to be encouraged by them, so that they have the confidence to live into the life God has created them for.
The theme for our weekend was Love your #Selfie. It was broken down into four talks about self love, lies we tell ourselves, remembering that God is bigger than us, and that in Christ, we can shine. The girls were inspired and challenged to think beyond their circle, and empowered to know that they can make a difference. The girls were greeted Friday night by a message from Bishop Hope Morgan Ward. She offered encouragement to fully embrace the experiences of the weekend together. The girls quickly took note that the entire program staff for the retreat was comprised of women. This included camp staff, retreat and worship leaders, small group leaders, and chaperones. One of our 7th graders expressed, “Seeing all-female leadership was inspiring because it proves that women can make a difference in the world, too, not just men.” How important for our young people to see strong female leaders so that they can know they too are called and gifted to lead and to serve! Our girls need to see women in leadership and have opportunities to be encouraged by them, so that they have the confidence to live into the life God has created them for. This retreat offered a place where the girls did not have to imagine how it may look to lead one day, but rather, they witnessed it.

Worship knit the weekend together from start to finish. On Friday night the sound of all the girls singing filled the worship space like a choir, and set the tone for all of our worship gatherings. Words invoking the Holy Spirit carried through the room. No one held back or feared judgment for how she chose to participate. As the weekend drew on, the girls became more comfortable with one another, truly worshiping as one body, aware of all its parts and coming together in Christ. Many students were called upon to help lead during worship by reading scripture, designing altar space, or lighting candles. All were gathered in small group discussions after each worship service to prayerfully consider the message they’d heard and share reflections. In this way, they were encouraged to be active listeners and participants in whatever ways were most comfortable for each of them. Throughout the weekend, each small group prepared an artistic expression of the lessons learned, and shared them during the final worship service.

Beyond worship and small groups, the girls were encouraged to form friendships and community. We gathered for meals family-style and shared in serving one another and cleaning up after. The retreat directors offered fun activities like dancing and campfires with s’mores, and team-building activities like a ropes course. Girls were invited to explore various forms of prayer, and to live fully in the beautiful surroundings of God’s creation there on the water. We met Saturday morning early with a gorgeous sunrise over the water as we began our day in prayer and thanksgiving, and we ended the day watching the sunset, absolutely grateful for the richness of ways we had all experienced God in that day.

I came home after the retreat feeling like I need to not only feel like I am “more than my selfie” but to help others realize it as well. I am no longer scared to talk about my faith and share God’s word now that I know just how powerful it is.
One of the prayer groups explored music as prayer and wrote these words. I hope that this can be our church’s prayer too, that we can follow their example by declaring:

We are called to welcome,
We are called to teach,
We will build Your kingdom,
We are Your love.

We are called to worship,
We are called to sing,
We will build Your kingdom,
We are Your love.
ENCOURAGING PEOPLE ON THEIR JOURNEY TO DISCOVER EXTRAORDINARY LIFE IN CHRIST

nrumc.org