

Union News

May 2026



"The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth."

Psalm 145: 18

"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."

James 4: 8

"Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior."

Isaiah 45: 15

"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?"

Psalm 13: 1

Dear friends and covenant partners of Union Community Church,

Check out the verses above... so which is it? Is the God we follow near to us or far away? Is God easily accessible or hidden? Is it possible that God could be both? The broken-hearted person unable to sleep or feel God's presence at 2AM might say God's far away. The person who just heard God's calming voice of peace while his mom passed away would say God is very near. So which one is it?

Jason Bryant, in "When the Bible Refuses to Behave: Why God Speaks in Paradox-and Why the Church Keeps Trying to Fix It," argues that "it is a feature of [our] God [that He] reveals himself through hiddenness." All you have to do is look at Isaiah 45:15 above. Isaiah writes that God is hidden then immediately follows that statement saying that God is also Israel's savior. How can a savior be hidden? Bryant argues that "the hiddenness and nearness [of God] persist, side by side, because both are true."

How can God be both hidden and present? Well, there are a bunch of possible reasons for it:

- (1) Sometimes God is not actually hidden, he's just not appearing how or where we want to see him. We want God to do something particular in our life in a particular way, and if God doesn't work within our expectations, we don't notice him.
- (2) When you read a verse like Matthew 7: 7-8, we can see that God wants us to seek him, to ask after him, to knock at his door. Sometimes God might hide because he's waiting to for us to pursue him instead.
- (3) Maybe God's presence in our situation, would actually not be beneficial. Maybe his true presence would scare us into or out of action. God wants us to respond to him out of faith. He does not want us to be scared into a relationship with him or scared away from him.
- (4) It's also possible that God's hiddenness could somehow lead us to help another. Maybe God wants us to help one another believe in some circumstances.
- (5) Or maybe God does not need to appear to us directly in a certain circumstance because coming to earth as Christ was enough. Maybe we can find God's nearness in the word and deeds of Jesus from the Gospels sometimes.

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May Elders

Carol Beasley
Claire Cabral
Gary McGinnis

Communion

May 3

Stated Session

May 17

Nursery Helpers

May 3- Vicky & Fiona
May 10-Pam & Twilah
May 17-Melody & Shelly
May 24-Allison & Maddie
May 31- Kim & Jordan

Continued from front page

All of these are possibilities. But in his book, Bryant, argues another possibility. He writes that God is just bigger than we are. Bryant argues that some things about God might not make a whole lot of sense to us because we aren't God. We might be able to think like God at times but we do not think as God does. We don't know what it is truly like to be God. We don't know what it is like to reason like God. We don't truly understand what it means to be able to see all of creation all at once or to be able to look into the hearts and minds of every person. We don't really have a clue why it would be important for God to at times seem so close but at others to seem so far away.

Scripture does not say that God main hope for us is that we come to understand him or his ways perfectly. But what Scripture DOES seem to point out over and over again is that God ultimately wants a personal relationship with us. A relationship that involves faith, love, trust, and hope. How is that best achieved for each of us? God would know far better than you or me. And maybe that requires a God who reveals himself through hiddenness.

Sincerely in Christ,
Pastor James

WORSHIP FOR MAY

Did you know that last year marked the 1700 year anniversary of the Nicene Creed? In worship for the majority of the month of May we will be exploring some of the significant portions of this creed. It is a powerful statement that highlights the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. But even more importantly it affirms the profound mystery of the three-in-oneness of God. We will finish up this sermon series on May 31, Trinity Sunday, with a special service that highlights what it means to have a faith built on the foundation of our incomprehensible yet knowable Triune God!

Lectionary Series: First Church Sermon

May 3- Acts 2: 42-47, "First Church Sermon... Awe-Full"
-Celebration of the Lord's Supper

Sermon Series: 1700 Years of the Nicene

May 10- Psalm 139: 1-14, "1700 Years of the Nicene... The Whole Kit and Kaboodle"
-Mother's Day

May 17- 1 John 5: 18-21, "1700 Years of the Nicene... Jesus is [fill in the blank] God truly, fully, completely, essentially, actually."
-Ascension Sunday

May 24- John 15: 26-16:4, "1700 Years of the Nicene... Inevitable Steps"
-Pentecost Sunday/ Memorial Day Weekend

May 31- 1 Peter 2: 1-10, "1700 Years of the Nicene... Pointing at Ourselves"
-Trinity Sunday

Lectionary Series: When in Rome

June 7- Romans 4: 13-25, "When in Rome... No Interest"
-Celebration of the Lord's Supper



TRINITY SUNDAY SPECIAL SERVICE

This month, join us on **May 31st** for a special service emphasizing the **Trinity**. We will take time in worship celebrating the blessings we receive from each part of our Triune God! There will be special music, special speakers, and a special time of prayer! That's 3 real cool things all in 1 service... sort of makes sense for Trinity Sunday!!

Flourishing Team News

MAY DISCIPLESHIP CHALLENGE: ACTS OF SERVICE

We hope that April's discipleship challenge of incorporating more gratitude into your life brought you a closer relationship with God. This month we can reflect that gratitude into helping, sharing, and caring love of God for the world. **May's discipleship challenge is acts of service.** Let's look for opportunities to be the hands and feet of Christ as we find ways to be a blessing to those around us. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Everybody can be great because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need to have a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love." Stay tuned for specific suggestions of ways to serve each Sunday in church this May. You might even write about how your attempts to be Christ's hands and feet are going on Facebook or in the comment section of this challenge on our webpage.

www.union-communitychurch.com/discipleshipchallenge



5th SUNDAY FLOURISH PRESENTATION

This Month has a **5th Sunday on May 31st**. There will be no Sunday School on this date. Instead, we invite all to join **Union's Flourish Team** in the **Fellowship Hall**. There will be some **breakfast goodies** to eat from **8:45-9:15AM**. Then the Flourish Team will talk a little about what they have been working on and what is next here at Union! Come fill your bellies and your heads! It will be well worth it!!

PRAYERS, MEALS, AND MORE

Union is a church that truly cares for one another and the Mentorship & Care Committee wants to help us get even better at it!! If you are talking with folks at church and hear about someone going thru a life changing event (temporary or permanent... small or large), we invite you to contact one of our "Prayer, Meals, and More Coordinators." Our committee will contact those individuals to see if there is anything as a church that we can be doing to lend a helping hand (maybe with prayer, a meal, or something else)!

Please contact:

- Kennedy Bajek– (803) 579-2261, 18kennedywade@gmail.com
- Junior Thompson- (704) 865-5696

GOOD NEWS RISING OFFERING UPDATE



Thanks to everyone who participated in our **special offering, Good News Rising**, this Easter. Your kindness helped us bring in **\$1,129!** These donations were split 2 ways.

- (1) Half went to **Synod of the Nile's Pastoral, Outreach, and Missions Council**. Our donation will be dedicated to the ongoing work of the Sharabeya Evangelical Church in Cairo. The church is going through major renovations to better reach out into their community.
- (2) The other half was given to **PARS Theological Center** (the largest seminary for Iranian Christians). It will be used to help provide scholarships for students in Iran (or part of the Iranian diaspora) so they can be trained in theology and church leadership skills.

PENTECOST OFFERING

Each year on Pentecost, Union takes a special offering to support the work of evangelism in the world. Church Planting is one of the leading ways evangelism occurs beyond the individual level in the United States today. New churches can be started in interesting places and imaginative contexts where there aren't many other churches or Christ is not being proclaimed as he should. This year's **Pentecost Offering** will be on **May 24** and used to support new efforts of **church planting** put on by **ECO!** We hope that you will participate!





UNION ENSEMBLE PRACTICES

The Union Ensemble will practice right after church on **May 24th** to work on new anthems! Hope to see you there!

5 CENT A MEAL– CAM

On the **first Sunday in May**, we have a special offering at Union to support various local missions. Our **5 Cent a Meal Offering** this month will benefit Crisis Assistance Ministry. Please give as you are able!



BOOK CHICKS

Join us monthly during our Book Chicks book club meetings for some food, fun, and fellowship! For more information or to find out what book we are reading, please reach out to Kim Morrison. Our next meeting is **Monday, May 18th, at 6:30 PM.**

WOMEN'S SMALL GROUP

The **Women's Small Group** will meet on **Monday, May 4 at 5:30 PM.** Come and enjoy a fun evening of Bible study, refreshments, and fellowship. If you don't already attend, we would love to have you join us.



GOLDEN GIRLS CIRCLE

We will meet on **Monday, May 4 at 11 AM** in the Fellowship Hall. We welcome all women to attend.

BINGO

Our next event is **May 21st at 3 PM.** This monthly outreach touches the lives of many at **Terrace Ridge Assisted Living.** We always need people able to help those in the residence who have limitations with their eyesight, hearing loss, or fine motor issues! Consider joining the ministry this year! **This will be our last BINGO until fall,** so we hope you can join us!



MAY HAPPY YEARS

Our next event is **Wednesday, May 20 at 12 PM.** Bring your favorite salad to share!



PLUGGED IN WITH KIDS

The Flourishing Team is hosting a fun event on **Sunday, June 7th directly after church.** The youth of Union are ready to teach our congregation about some of the new technology that is available to use! Mark you calendars and come for lunch and then some fun interactive presentations where you can learn about AI, Chat GPT, using QR codes and more! You may be shocked to see what all is out there!

DON'T MISS OUT

CHURCH PICNIC

This year Union's annual Church Picnic will be at the church **May 30, from 11AM-2PM**. As usual, there will be an opportunity for you to join in for the Fun, Fellowship, and Food! But there will also be a program where you can learn about and try the Spiritual Practice of Pilgrimage/ Prayer Walks (don't worry people of all mobility levels will be able to participate)!!

SCHEDULE

11AM-12PM- Arrival, Fellowship, & Fun

12PM- Bedazzling Bingo

12:30-1PM- Lunch

1-2PM- Prayer Walk/Pilgrimage Program



You might be asking what you can bring to the event! 2 things actually! First, we encourage you to bring a snack or dessert to share. Second, we hope that you might bring a Bingo prize from home. What is something (unused) that you have just lying around? Maybe it was a gift you were given but could a new home? Maybe you were going to start a "new hobby" that never really took off? We hope to have the most interesting Bingo prizes ever this year!!

CHILDREN AND YOUTH END OF SCHOOL YEAR CELEBRATION



All **children** and **youth** are invited to an end of the school year celebration on **May 31**. We'll stay after church and have lunch together before heading to the **Clover School District YMCA outdoor pool**. This is a fun pool with slides for both younger and older children. Admission will be paid for children and youth. Parents are also welcome to attend, but will need to pay for themselves. Talk with one of the Kids of the Kingdom or Youth leaders for more information.

SUMMER CONGREGATION SONG REQUESTS

During the month of **May**, we will be collecting **song requests** from you! Every summer the hymns and praise songs we sing during worship are chosen from the congregation's favorites! So, we invite you to look through our hymnals, be listening to Christian radio, and maybe even dig out a couple favorite remembered songs from your childhood! Just drop your requests in the offering any Sunday in May and we will do our best to make your song part of our worship all summer!!

YOUTH CONFIRMATION CLASS INFO MEETING

Are you in our youth program (upcoming 6th Graders thru High School) but have not gone through a confirmation class yet? We invite you and a parent to join us in the prayer room for a couple minutes after worship on **May 17th** as we talk a bit about the program and schedule when our next confirmation class would make the most sense for everyone! Hope you can be there!



DON'T FORGET TO WEAR RED

Each year at Union we decorate the sanctuary in red for the 3 special services: Ascension Sunday (May 17), Pentecost (May 24), and Trinity Sunday (May 31). Pentecost is traditionally a day for the body of Christ to wear red in remembrance and gratitude for the gift of the Holy Spirit. But all 3 Sundays would work (you'll match the front of the sanctuary)!



PRAYERS NEAR AND FAR



Mother's Day Prayer

May is Mother's Day! Please take time to pray for all the mothers in our community: mothers who are pregnant and full of fear, hope, and expectancy, mothers of young children who are tired as they are pulled in so many directions, single mothers who can feel like they are carrying the burden of parenting alone, mothers of multiple children who work so hard to give each kid the attention they need, mothers of older children and adults learning to allow their children to make their own mistakes, mothers grieving the loss of a child, and all the mothers out there who worry as they strive to parent as God directs them.

Please also keep in prayer churches within ECO-




Flat Branch Presbyterian Church in Bunnlevel- Please pray for the church as they prepare for their VBS program in June, "Illumination Station." Also keep in prayer their support of Matt Vanderworp and his work with the Reformed University Fellowship at NC State and Silas and Zoe, missionaries in Central Asia.

Forest Park Presbyterian Church in Statesville- Please keep in prayer Forest Park's Community Prayer Box, the Good News Club (which works with the Boys and Girls Club of Statesville), and the church's work with their partner church in the Synod of the Nile in Egypt.

Franklin Presbyterian Church in Salisbury- Pray for success for Franklin's Community-Wide Yard Sale on Saturday, May 9, their help with meals and wheels, a Blessing Box in their community, and their Tuesday Bible Study (currently going thru the book of James).





SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
<p><u>Sundays</u> 9AM Sunday School 10 AM Worship</p>					1	2
<p>3 5 Cents a Meal CAM 2:30 PM SOC Meeting</p>	<p>4 11 AM Golden Girls 5:30 PM Women's Small Group 7 PM Men's Bible</p>	<p>5 10 AM Bible Study</p>	6	7	<p>8</p> 	9
<p>10 2:30 PM W&S Meeting</p>	<p>11 7 PM Men's Bible Study</p>	<p>12 10 AM Bible Study</p>	13	14	15	16
<p>17 11 AM Confirmation Class Meeting 2:30 PM Session Meets</p>	<p>18 6:30 PM Book Chicks 7 PM Men's Bible Study</p>	<p>19 10 AM Bible Study</p>	<p>20 12 PM Happy Years</p>	<p>21 3 PM Bingo</p>	22	<p>23</p> 
<p>24 11 AM Ensemble 11:45AM W&C Meeting 2:00 PM M&C Meeting</p>	<p>25 7 PM Men's Bible Study</p>	<p>26 10 AM Bible Study</p>	27	28	29	<p>30 11 AM Church Picnic</p>
<p>31 8:45 AM 5th Sunday Flourish Sunday</p>						

Union Community Church

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**YOU'RE
INVITED**

YOU ARE INVITED TO A
GRADUATION
party



In Honor Of
Jordan & Maddie Jones
Class of 2026
Sunday, May 17th 2026
Drop in from 2-4 PM
Union Community Church, Gastonia,
NC 28056

**Reverend James Holeman
Pastor**

**Tammy Biddix
Administrative Assistant**

**Jennifer Nelson
Communications Director**

**Jieeun Ha
Accompanist**

**Church Hours
3:00 PM—6 PM
Tuesday and Thursday**

Save the Date

May 3
May 20
May 30
May 31

5 Cents a Meal-CAM
Happy Year's Lunch
Church Picnic
5th Sunday Flourish Sunday