

The Grove Echoes

April 2026



HICKORY GROVE UMC

Dear Hickory Grove,

We arrive at Easter this year having walked through a season of uncertainty. Throughout this season of Lent, some of you have been setting aside time to reflect upon on what it means to trust God when the path ahead is unclear—when we don't have easy answers, when the future feels unsettled, when life doesn't unfold the way we expected. In his book, *Embracing the Uncertain*, Margrey deVega reminds us that faith is not about having everything figured out. It is about trusting our God who goes with us, even into the unknown.



The resurrection of Jesus is not the happy ending to a difficult story. It is God's response to uncertainty, fear, and even death itself. The women come to the tomb unsure of what they will find. The disciples are hiding behind locked doors, uncertain of what comes next. No one arrives at Easter morning confident or in control. But God is already at work!

In his book, DeVega describes resurrection not as a return to what was, but as the beginning of something entirely new—something unexpected, even unimaginable. The risen Christ is not always immediately recognized. Mary mistakes him for a gardener. The disciples on the road to Emmaus do not know him at first. Resurrection, it turns out, often looks unfamiliar. And that is good news for us, because it means that God is not limited to restoring the past. God is in the business of creating new life in ways we may not yet recognize! In a world that feels uncertain—whether in our personal lives, our communities, or the wider world—Easter reminds us that uncertainty is not the end of the story. It is often the very place where resurrection begins.

We may not always know what God is doing. We may not always recognize resurrection when it first appears. But the good news of Easter tells us this: the tomb is empty. Christ is risen. And new life is already unfolding. So this Easter, we do not celebrate because everything is clear. We celebrate because even in the midst of uncertainty, God is faithful. Even in the shadow of death, life is stronger. Even when we cannot yet see the way forward, Christ goes ahead of us.

As we pivot from Lent into the season of Eastertide, I pray that you will have the courage to trust the God of Resurrection and that you will have eyes to glimpse new life in unexpected places. May the hope of Easter carry you forward—into whatever comes next.

Christ IS risen!

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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From the very beginning of creation, God has woven rhythms of work and rest into the fabric of our lives. In Genesis, God rests on the seventh day and calls it holy—not necessarily because God was tired, but to model for us a pattern of life that includes both faithful work and intentional renewal. Sabbath is not simply a pause; it is a sacred gift that restores, re-centers, and reconnects us to God’s presence.

It is a deep joy and honor to serve God through Christ’s Church—and especially to serve as your pastor! Our United Methodist Book of Discipline (§351.3) provides for clergy to take a period of renewal leave for spiritual and formational growth after at least six years of full-time ministry. I am grateful to share that, with the approval of Bishop Ken Carter, District Superintendent Dan Pezet, and our Administrative Council, I will be taking a renewal leave from May 27 through July 19. This means my last day in the office will be May 26, and I will return on July 20. This is not a vacation, but an intentional time set apart for rest, prayer, study, and renewal—so that I may return with deeper spiritual grounding, renewed vision, and greater capacity for ministry among you.

Some FAQs:

Why are you 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 our family life, as my husband Matthew will complete his PhD in May. After many years of full-time ministry and study, this is a meaningful and timely opportunity for renewal.

Are you coming back?

Yes! Healthy pastors help cultivate healthy churches. Renewal leave creates space to listen for God, grow spiritually, and return with fresh energy for the work we share. Even Jesus stepped away to pray, and I look forward to returning—especially as we head into VBS in August and all that lies ahead in our life together.

(Continued...)



FAQ's continued

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

The conference will provide a supply pastor who will preach at both the Traditional and Contemporary services from June 14 through July 19. 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. The supply pastor, 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.

What will you be doing?

I plan to spend time at a retreat center, engage in prayer and writing, travel, be with family and friends, and do plenty of reading.

Will you be checking email or answering texts/calls?

To fully honor the purpose of this renewal leave, I 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. I will follow up on messages after I return the week of July 20.

How can we support you while you're away?

Your prayers are deeply appreciated—for renewal and rest. I also encourage you 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.

The name of the supply pastor will be shared in late April or early May. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me or to Mary English-Tri (SPRC) at maryalison.english@gmail.com

African Ministry

Greetings Hickory Grove Family, I bring you warm greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I pray that your Lenten journey has been meaningful and spiritually enriching.

As we enter the month of April, we give thanks to God for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who lived and died so that we might have new life. Easter reminds us of the bright hope we have in Him—that we, too, can rise above the darkness we sometimes experience in our lives. Through Christ, there is always hope for a better future.

To those celebrating special occasions such as birthdays and anniversaries, Rhema and I extend our heartfelt joy to you. May God bless you with peace, happiness, and many more years to come.

To those who have experienced the loss of loved ones, we offer our deepest condolences. May God comfort and strengthen you during this time.

I would also like to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude to all who supported the Roof Above ministry. Your willingness to provide shelter, food, and care for our friends during the winter months was truly remarkable. Thank you for your compassion, generosity, and faithful service.

Blessings and peace,

Pastor Colston Morris



Latino Ministry

April reminds us that God is always at work bringing new life. As the earth begins to bloom, we are invited to renew our hearts in faith, hope, and love. Even in quiet or challenging moments, God is present, guiding us toward new beginnings. May this season draw us closer to God and to one another, filling us with peace and renewed hope. Sharing some pictures from March from HGUMC Latino.

Grace and peace,

Rev. Candido Albino



Preschool News

Spring is here and we are super excited! Our preschoolers will be celebrating Easter with an Easter Party Event with our parents on April 1 and will then be on Spring Break April 3-10. Our Three Year Olds and Pre-K classes will walk the campus looking for crosses which remind us that Jesus loves us. We just finished taking our spring individual pictures and anxiously await their return.

Last month we really enjoyed playing soccer during FitKids and learning about worms and how they benefit our plants and earth during our ScienceKids class.

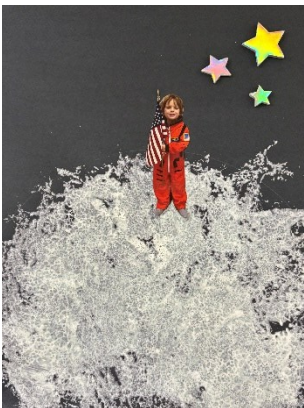
During the month of April we will enjoy the Butterfly Farm again! The children (and staff) will get to hold and feed the butterflies and learn interesting things about them. This is an amazing visit and we are so grateful for Mrs. Loretta Brady and her butterflies.

Our Bible Memory Verse for April is “Sing for Joy to the Lord” – Psalm 98:4 and we will learn about Jesus’ resurrection.

I strongly encourage you to venture down the preschool hallways on Sundays to see all of the amazing artwork that our children create each week.

Hallelujah! He is Alive!

Sharon Freeze
Preschool Director





Memorials and Honorariums

(received in the office by March 30th).

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

Memorials:

Lana Freeman

Preschool: Floyd and Kathy Sistrunk

WeCare: Jean Long

Snack Pack: Betty Nunn, Tom and Susan Fox

General: Cokesbury/Epworth Sunday School Class

Floyd Sistrunk

Room in the Inn: Betty Nunn

General: Cokesbury/Epworth Sunday School Class



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!

Midday Mercies service at HGUMC!

In partnership with Cokesbury, The Vine, Commonwealth, and Memorial UMC



Community Easter Egg Hunt hosted at HGUMC!

