

The Grove Echoes

January 2026



HICKORY GROVE UMC

Hickory Grove,

It's a new year, which means new rhythm! But not for a couple of months.... Beginning Sunday, March 1, our church will explore a new rhythm in our life together. On the first Sunday of each month, which is also Communion Sunday, we will gather for one combined worship service. This will replace our current practice of coming together only on fifth Sundays or special occasions.

I know that worship rhythms matter deeply. Many of us have grown attached to particular service times, styles, and routines. This change is not meant to diminish those connections, but to gently invite us into something more—an opportunity to experience our life in Christ together as a whole church more regularly.



As United Methodists, we believe the church is the body of Christ, unified by the grace of Christ. While Hickory Grove United Methodist Church may worship in different ways, we are not four separate churches. We are one congregation, called to love God and neighbor together. Gathering as one on a regular basis helps us remember that shared identity.

Our children and youth already live this out each week. They learn, pray, and grow in faith together across differences in age and experience. They remind us that faith is not meant to be lived in isolation, but in relationship. If our youngest disciples can be formed together, we trust that God can continue forming us as adults when we gather as one for worship.

There is also deep meaning in coming together on Communion Sunday. In the United Methodist tradition, Holy Communion is a means of grace—a place where Christ meets us, nourishes us, and renews us. At the Lord's Table, all are welcome. We come just as we are, and we are reminded that we belong to God and to one another.

In a world that often pulls people apart due to differences, choosing to worship together and to know one another is a powerful witness. When we gather across differences—of age, background, race, preference, or perspective—we embody the reconciling love of Jesus Christ. We practice being the church God calls us to be!

As we step into this new rhythm, I ask for your prayers, for your openness, and for your grace for one another. I trust that God is at work among us, drawing us closer—to Christ and to each other.

I look forward to worshiping together more often as one church, gathered at one table, sustained by God's abundant grace!

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

Greetings and Happy New Year, Hickory Grove Family,

I am grateful to God, who has made it possible for us to enter 2026. This new season brings both joy and anticipation; hope for new possibilities, alongside the uncertainty of the unknown. It is my prayer that God will be with us, guide us, and sustain us throughout this year.

As we celebrate the New Year and the month of January, Rhema and I would like to extend warm birthday and anniversary wishes to all who are celebrating. January holds special meaning in our home, as two of our children, Kaniis and Colnik, were born this month.

I also hold in prayer those among us who are experiencing grief during this season. May you find comfort, strength, and peace in the promises of God.

I would like to share that Rhema and I will be traveling out of the country for our annual vacation from January 20 to February 20, 2026. During this time, please contact Pastor Caitlin for any emergencies or pastoral care needs. We are also grateful to Alex Kwiagaye and Victor Teclar, who will be bringing the messages while I am away. Many thanks to the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) for approving this time of rest.

It is my prayer that God will guide each of us as we journey through 2026 together.

Blessings and peace,

Pastor Morris



Latino Ministry

As we begin January 2026, we step into a new year with gratitude for where God has brought us and hope for where God is leading us. A new year is an invitation to renew our faith, deepen our trust, and walk forward together. Scripture reminds us, “See, I am doing a new thing” (Isaiah 43:19). While challenges remain, God is at work among us, calling us to faithfulness in prayer, worship, and love for our neighbors.

We move into this year not knowing everything that lies ahead, but trusting the One who holds our future. May 2026 be a year of renewed faith, shared hope, and faithful living as we continue to serve God together.

Rev. Candido Albino



Preschool News

The Preschool Staff would like to wish each and every one a Happy New Year! We are especially grateful to be a part of the ministry here at Hickory Grove UMC. We enjoyed a wonderful Christmas break after a month filled with 1) learning, practicing, and performing our Christmas program – “Hooray for Baby Jesus 2) doing lots of art activities and making decorations and special gifts for our families 3) celebrating the real reason for Christmas, the birth of the Christ child, as we collected items for the We Care ministry at our Birthday Party for Jesus. (We were so happy to collect 189 items for We Care!) It was a really busy month!

As we settle into January, we look forward to returning to our regular monthly activities and our annual Pajama Day - yes, everyone gets to wear pajamas this day!

Our Bible Memory verse for January is “God is love” 1 John 4:8, and we will talk about how when Jesus was tempted in the desert he used scriptures to help him.

Wishing you many blessings in 2026!

Sharon Freeze
Preschool Director
preschool@hgumc.com

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ROOM IN THE INN

RTI is about to start again !! This will be Hickory Grove United Methodist Church's 25th year supporting our unsheltered neighbors. Congrats Hickory Grove – quite an accomplishment !!

We have opened our church to provide shelter and food for the homeless people during the winter months of December through March. The basic goal is to keep our neighbors and guests from the Roof Above organization from freezing on cold winter nights. A greater goal is to provide a more personal relationship to homeless people, at least for a night, and to foster a deeper understanding of the depth and complexity of the issue.

We support this ministry with a variety of different roles while our guests are with us. These roles include drivers, innkeepers (spend the night with our friends), cooks, set up the Gym, provide snacks and clean up the Gym the next morning. If you see a role that appeals to you and would like to help us, please contact Randy Bunnell @ 704-905-6177. We really can use more volunteers !!

The dates we will be hosting our guests this season are December 18th, January 15th, February 19th and March 19th.Please let us know if you can help and please continue to pray for this ministry and our guests.

FINANCIAL NEED @ HGUMC

Hi Friends,

We are coming to the close of our fiscal year and unfortunately find ourselves not meeting our budget. I'm praying December is a better month and we can catch up. Thankfully, we are not too far behind with either the General Fund or the Building Fund. The General Fund is approximately \$20,000 behind budget and the Building Fund is approximately \$10,000 behind budget. Therefore, if you are looking to make a donation to balance out your tax season, need to make a donation to honor your annual pledge or just love our Lord and Hickory Grove United Methodist Church, please consider making an end of year donation to the Building Fund or the General Fund. If you can give a little extra to help, it would be greatly appreciated. Please note these donations to the fund you wish to support. God bless you and thank you for all you do for Hickory Grove United Methodist Church,

Randy Bunnell
Finance Chair

Memorials and Honorariums

(received in the office by December 28th).

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

Memorials:

Patty Marks

Snack Pack: Jamie and Diane Horton, Mary Wyant, Patty and Jerry Smith, Jean and Donald Long, The Fox Family

WeCare: Jamie and Diane Horton, Channing and Jeff Kirkpatrick, Patty and Jerry Smith, Ron and Jatana Royster

Staff Love: Joyce Dulin

General Fund: Patricia Poland

Honorariums:

Jeff and Channing Kirkpatrick

Snack Pack: Robbie Bost, Betty Nunn

Peter and Nancy Scercy

Budget: Robbie Bost

Kathleen Robinson

WeCare: Robbie Bost

Robbie Bost

Snack pack: Channing and Jeff Kirkpatrick

Funeral Stewards

General: Patricia Poland/ Patty Marks Family

James and Virginia Parker

Snack pack: Betty Nunn

Randy Bunnell

General: Steve Hagler



Memorials and Honorariums (Continued)

Honorariums:

Susan Fox

Budget: Mary and Jarret Wyant

Patty Smith

Budget: Mary and Jarret Wyant

Jatana Royster

Budget: Mary and Jarret Wyant

Mrs. Kim Long

Budget: Mary and Jarret Wyant

Memorials:

Linda Logan

Snack Pack: Glenn and Susan Bailey



WeCare 2025

Thank you to all who supported WeCare this year whether it was with your time, food donations or monetary donations. Your generous donations allowed us to provide food throughout the year and provide Christmas to 136 families. The Christmas families consisted of 272 children/youth 18 or younger, 222 people 19 – 64 years of age and 36 people 65 or older for a total of 530 people.

We helped a total of 712 families in 2025 which is an increase of 137 families from last year. The total number of people making up these families is 2,496 people which is an increase of 411 people. There were 1,115 children/youth 18 or younger, 1,153 people 19 – 64 years of age and 228 people 65 or older.

Our Christmas boxes consist of a new pair of pants, a new shirt, a gently used coat for everyone in the family when sizes are provided. The children get a new toy/gift (Angel gifts), a used toy, a used book, a hat, scarf, or gloves and a stuffed animal if age appropriate.

The new clothes we purchased cost a total of \$1,272.47.

Any angel gifts, not filled from the Angel Tree and by another generous donor, cost \$279.54.

In addition to the new clothes and angel gifts filled, your monetary donations purchased 22,268.5 pounds of food from Second Harvest Food Bank at the cost of \$4,311.15. This food was in addition to your generous food donations.

Lastly, we provided a \$25 Food Lion gift card to each family that signed up for Christmas at a cost of \$3,097.25.

Total operating cost for WeCare this year was \$9,053.89.

Your generous support, helped us bless many families in a year of uncertainty.

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Scarves

WeCare extends a special thanks to Margaret Norwood and Phyllis Knudsen for making 62 scarves. These scarves were put in the boxes of families that signed up for Christmas help.



Mathews HELP Center

Mathews HELP Center graciously shares with WeCare coats, linens, towels, clothes and other goods to help meet our neighbor's needs. We are very thankful for their support in helping those less fortunate.

Hickory Grove UMC Preschool

Last but not least, we want to thank our preschool for their help in collecting hats, gloves and socks for the Christmas families we are helping.

Our preschool also held a food drive to help restock our pantry and collected a wagon full of food.



Cokesbury Epworth Christmas Party



Christmas Cantata

