

I confess I am not ready for Christmas. I've purchased just a few gifts with more to do at some point. I might resort to using Amazon to expedite the process. We haven't baked a single Christmas cookie in the parsonage yet. The schools suggest the kids wear Christmas pajamas this week for Spirit week. Will last year's pajamas be too short? I bet so. We haven't seen Christmas lights intentionally unless seeing them at night on the way back from a school event or sports counts. However, it seems December has quickly become the busiest month of the year. Throw in some unexpected events and wait; we are halfway through the month!

I asked a parent at a school event the other night if she was ready for Christmas? "Absolutely, not," she replied. Praise God! This led to a mutual conversation of the stresses and joys we associate with this time of year. There is a deadline that happens to be the day we celebrate the birth of the Savior. I smiled and agreed with the plight.

Although, I like to think while I may not be ready for Christmas yet, I am ready for Christ. This can be two very different states of being. Having the peace of Christ in your heart, the joy, the hope of resurrection is worthy of celebrating. This beautiful assurance of faith is a gift that leads to awe, praise, and adoration. How easy it is to see God at work in so many places. Evidence of God's goodness is everywhere! I am reminded to be grateful for the gifts I have, including another year ending soon serving here at Walnut Grove UMC as your pastor too.

A few years ago the song, "I can only imagine" frequented the Christian radio stations. I was concerned. What if I was doing something I shouldn't be doing? What if it was more likely a dirty stable than some glorious, perfect moment of epiphany? I think when we recognize the goodness of God everywhere and the assurance of faith in our lives- we see it in all places.

God's goodness is not perfected because we try to make things perfect over the holidays. Getting ready for Christmas and ready for Christ don't necessarily follow the same pattern. Faith, in scripture, is often seen in the midst of the messiness of life (praise God for that fact). To get ready for Christ means we would pick the messiness of the stable over the perfection of decked out halls.

So, if by chance, you are like me this year and didn't finish your Christmas preparations back at Halloween, hear this reassurance. If you would honestly answer that you are not ready for Christmas, extend yourself some grace. Remember it is better to be ready for Christ's coming instead. Having Jesus Christ live in your heart is far more rewarding than making everything perfect for your loved ones. Carry the assurance of the love of Christ with you wherever you go. Faith is the gift that keeps on giving!

~Pastor Laura

NEW AND IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Trip to the Billy Graham Library and "The Real Christmas Story"

Saturday, December 16, 2023

The bus will arrive at the church at 8:30 a.m. and will leave at 9:00 a.m. We should arrive at the Library around 12:00 and will have lunch on our own at the Library. We will arrive at NarroWay for the play around 6:15 p.m. Dinner is served at 7:00 p.m. We should arrive back at Walnut Grove between 11:00 and 11:30 p.m. You may want to consider bringing a snack that doesn't require refrigeration, if needed.

Music Ministry Update

Worship Choir Musical Presentation "The Celebration of Christmas"

This Sunday's musical worship experience will take you on a journey through the Christmas story as you hear familiar worship songs and Christmas carols. As we participate in worship today, let's celebrate together as we worship the newborn King!

Children's Christmas Program – December 24th

Next Sunday the Hallelujah Kids will present the Christmas musical play, "Sleepover at the Stable" during the 10:30am worship service. You will get a "bird's-eye" view of the nativity story as experienced by the animals in the stable the night Jesus was born. You don't want to miss it!

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service – December 24th

We will have our annual Christmas Eve service with candle lighting and communion. There will be one service at 7:00pm. Baby Jesus (from the manger scene), who has been passed from home to home within our congregation during the last four weeks, will be returned to the manger during the service. We will receive an offering for Project AGAPE and Professors in Methodism. For more information important ministries check out this link below:

<https://districts.nccumc.org/2023/11/united-in-love-united-in-giving/>

5th Sunday **CAROL FEST on Sunday, December 31st**

On Sunday, December 31st, during the 10:30am worship service we will be singing many of your favorite Christmas carols. Please join us for this special time of worship.

Office Closed

Please note that the church office will be closed the week of Dec. 25th – Dec. 29th. There will not be a Nutshell on Dec. 29th. In case of emergency, you may contact Rev. Laura Dunlap at 919-255-4160 or ldunlap@nccumc.org.

Lay Leadership

If you are serving in a new capacity on a committee or as chair of committee, make every effort to join a session that best fits your commitment for 2024. If you have questions, please reach out to Pastor Laura. Workshops are provided by the NC Conference and will be on zoom on

January 7, 2024 @ 2:00 pm – 5:30 pm

Join us for one of six virtual workshops designed to equip you to serve in your local church. Whether you are starting a new leadership role, or have been serving in church leadership for years, we hope this model of leadership training will prepare you for your much-needed ministry. Laity and clergy in partnership with one another is the key to a church's success in making disciples. Check out the link to register:

<https://nccumc.org/leadership/event/leadership-training/>

Tithes and Offerings

We have four ways to give to our ministries. If you would like your offering to be allocated towards a specific ministry, please indicate it in the memo of your check or you will be prompted on the website.

1. Give during our weekly Worship Services.
2. Mail in a check to 7215 Walnut Grove Church Road, Hurdle Mills, NC 27541.
3. Use our church [website](#). Click GIVE in the upper right corner.
4. Use our online giving app "Vanco Mobile".

JOYS & CONCERNS

Prayer List

- Judy Parker who is recovering from a pinched nerve
- Betty Sue Hyder (cancer treatments), Margaret Williams' sister and Sharyn Gates' aunt
- Beth Roberts, who was recently in a bad car accident. She is the daughter of Billie Roberts
- Pat Sykes
- Debbie Haywood (cancer treatments), friend of Ann and Bruce Richardson.
- Dana Kimrey. He is the brother of Lorraine Hines.

Quilt

Kaye S. Jones from Burlington is having surgery. She is a member of the Walnut Grove Crafters.

(The prayer quilt will be at the front of the sanctuary on Sunday. You're invited to tie a knot and say a prayer over the quilt before and after the service.)

Upcoming Birthdays

Friday 12/15 – Mary Blalock

Saturday 12/16 – Joyce Brown, Grant Berry, Angie Comer

Sunday 12/17 – Tammy Guy, Ellie Wimberly

Monday 12/18 – Heather Cole

Tuesday 12/19 – Caitlin Compton

Wednesday 12/20 – Stephanie Smith, Jackson Mariette, Abigail Blankenship

Thursday 12/21 – Dezarae Coleman

Friday 12/22 – Betty McCulloch, David Young

If your birthday is incorrect or missing, please contact Kim at the church office at 919-732-5722 or by email at office@walnutgroveumc.org so we can update our records.

STAYING CONNECTED

[WG YouTube](#)

[WG Facebook](#)

[Website!](#)

[Sign UpHere! For Online Sign-Up](#)

Serving in Worship

December 17th

Acolytes: Anna Robinson/Isabella Conway

Greeters: Cheryl L & Barry Parker

Ushers: Cheryl & Scott Humphrey

Nursery: Judy Butler/Cheryl S. Parker

Scripture: Ashley Parker

Trustee Open/Close: Jimmy Berry

December 24th – 10:30am Service

Acolytes: Corbin Smith/Max Kemnitz

Greeters: Brenda & Jimmy Berry

Ushers: Grace Dunlap/Patty Maseth

Nursery: Ashley Parker/Mary Beth Elliott

Scripture: Margaret Anne Dow

Trustee Open/Close: Leigh & Roger McFalls

December 24th – 7:00pm Service

Acolytes: Kennedy Dunlap/Michael Roberts

Greeters: Ashley Parker/ Cheryl Humphrey

Ushers: Mary Emma Roberts/Grace Dunlap

Nursery: Debby Donnelly/Pam Kimrey

Scripture: Grace Dunlap

Trustee Open/Close: Leigh & Roger McFalls

Communion Servers: Faith Parker/Mary Emma Roberts

NOTE: If you're unable to serve in your role listed above, please find someone to serve in your place and notify the church secretary of the change. This will allow us to have an updated listing to publish each week.

Upcoming Happenings

Friday, December 15	Youth Winter Retreat Registration Due
Saturday, December 16	9:30am – Worship Choir dress rehearsal Trip to Billy Graham Library and “The Real Christmas Story”
Sunday, December 17	9:30am Sunday School 10:30am Worship Service – Adult Christmas Program 3:00 – 8:00pm Youth Caroling and Christmas Party 4:30pm Hallelujah Kids character practice 5:30pm Hallelujah Kids play practice
Wednesday, December 20	6:30pm Worship Band 7:00pm Worship Choir
Saturday, December 23	9:30am Hallelujah Kids dress rehearsal
Sunday, December 24	9:30am Sunday School 10:30am Worship Service – Children’s Christmas Program 7:00pm – Christmas Eve Candlelight Service
Monday, December 25	
Friday-Sat., Dec 29-30	Walnut Grove Crafters
Sunday, December 31	9:30am Sunday School Opening Joint Sunday School (Adults) 10:30am CAROL FEST Service 5:00 – 8:30pm New Year’s Eve at the Grove

See You Sunday!!