

Friendly Messenger

January 2026

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” (Isaiah 9:2)

Beloved Sardis,

DID YOU KNOW??!?! The tradition of the Christmas tree began in Germany during the late Middle Ages?? And Christians adopted the evergreen tree—long a symbol of life during winter—as a proclamation of hope in Christ. Because evergreens remain alive when all else appears dead, they became a natural symbol of God’s promise of new life.

This was not “pagan” as many have presumed. The pagans commonly worshipped oak trees and would never chop one down, and drag it inside the house and decorate it.

One early influence was the “Paradise Tree,” used in medieval German plays on December 24, the feast of Adam and Eve. These trees were decorated with apples, recalling humanity’s fall, and later with candles, proclaiming Christ as the Light of the World.

In many German and Lutheran traditions, the Christmas tree is closely connected with Advent, and marks that the season of waiting and preparation has begun. As Advent begins, the tree stands as a visible sign of hope taking root, with the light of Christ among us and yet to come.

The Chrismon tree, is just as German and Lutheran but much younger and from here in the United States, Danville, Virginia to be specific 1954. The ornaments are more centered in Christ than Adam and Eve. But historically Lutheran and connected with Advent through Christmas.

During Advent, the Christmas tree reminds us that even in darkness, God’s promise is already present, preparing us to rejoice in the coming of Christ.

I share this as celebration of Christmas and our Lutheran history less commonly known. Olivia really enjoyed learning this from “A Christmas Cornucopia.” by Mark Forsyth A historical survey of a selection of Christmas traditions. I pray this season of Christmas is one that is a blessing of growth and discovery!

God loves you and so do I
Pastor Oscar Shepherd

The **Fred T. Foard Senior Citizens** group meet on the first Wednesday of each month for lunch and a program. The seniors will meet in January on the 7th at Hebron of Vale. All are invited to join us for fun, food, and fellowship.



Happy New Year to my Sardis Family!

I want to take this time and wish everyone a Happy New Year! May the love of Christ fill your hearts and homes with unending joy and peace! I also want to thank the choir & congregation for your generous Christmas gift! This church has been beyond loving and so gracious to me, and I truly feel like family... So thank you very much! I love you all!

Let us remember this verse going into the new year:

Jeremiah 29:11 “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

P.S. We are always welcoming any new choir members that would like to come join us! No music experience needed. We meet Thursday evenings at 7pm. I look forward to seeing some new faces!

With Love,

Kenan Chronister
Director of Music/
Organist



Information for NL's and Bulletins

Committee meetings or events by the congregation should be communicated to Jane directly. This needs to be done in time for newsletters (Wednesday before the last Sunday in the month), or the bulletin (by Wednesday evening each week.)

Sardis Women of the ELCA

THANK YOU to all those who ordered poinsettias to honor loved ones at Christmas. Your donation also provided \$148 to the Christmas Project sponsored by the youth. They purchased Christmas gifts for five needy children from Union Elementary.

THANKS also to those who brought canned food during Advent. The cans are stacked under the tree, and \$75 from our treasury will also be spent to add to that donation. Every little bit helps those who need food during the cold months of winter, and our Blessing Box will benefit.

Your delicious cookies, cheese balls, fruit trays, and vegetable platters were greatly enjoyed by the many members and guests who attended the Children's Christmas Play. With such variety, no one left hungry! Thank you for your contribution.

2026 will soon be upon us. We are looking forward to continuing the "usual" projects, such as a sponsoring a food drive during Lent, feeding the FTF Football team, recognizing Bold Women's Sunday, honoring the men and women of our church, and celebrating the senior members.

Other NEW projects will be happening in 2026. We plan to serve refreshments for resident's birthdays at Trinity Ridge Nursing Center. Making birthday cake kits to distribute is another new project that we are looking forward to this year. Do you have any ideas where women can fulfill WELCA's mission - "to engage in ministry and action" and "promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world?"

The NC Women of the ELCA started a "Supporting Our Sisters" (SOS) program last year that provides funding for new projects that a group of women would like to pursue. Like the Thrivent Grant program, \$250 would be granted to groups who have a plan to fulfill WELCA's mission. Please share your ideas! We look forward to starting a new project this year.



Please consider joining us on the first Sunday of selected months for our planning and business meetings. **Join us at 5 pm in January, March, May, September, and November.** As a community of women, we are called to discipleship and look forward to meeting other's needs in 2026.

Nena Babb

In preparation for the 2026 Annual Report, please make sure the information we have in our church directory is correct. The directory can be found in the back of the 2025 Annual Report...advise Jane of any changes. If you need a copy pick up one in the Narthex in the stand, on the wall, next to Jane's Office.

Thank you

COUNCIL MINUTES

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Annual Congregational Meeting Minutes
Sardis Lutheran Church
November 2, 2025

The Annual Congregational meeting for Sardis Evangelical Lutheran Church was held on Sunday, November 2, 2025.

Joe Biggerstaff brought the meeting to order. The proposed 2026 budget as well as the list of nominees for Church Council, the Nominating committee and Scholarship committee were distributed.

No additional nominees were brought forward for the Nominating committee. Jon Gladden moved that the nominations be closed and the motion was seconded by Al King.

No additional nominees were brought forward for the Church Council. Dwayne Whitener moved that the nominations be closed and the motion was seconded by Al King.

No additional nominees were brought forward for the Scholarship Committee. Jon Gladden moved that the nominations be closed and the motion was seconded by Dwayne Whitener.

Al King announced that he was “retiring” from the Endowment committee and nominated Mike Midgett as his replacement. This will be added to the ballot at the meeting in two weeks.

Dwayne Whitener gave an overview of the 2026 budget proposal stating that some decisions had been very difficult. He explained two commitments that Sardis has always strived to attain: Paying the pastor per the Synod’s salary recommendations and maintaining a 10% annual benevolence apportionment to the Synod. Dwayne stated that in order to meet the latest pastoral salary recommendations, Sardis benevolence amount would need to be reduced with a goal to reach the recommended pastoral salary within 2 to 3 years. Some specifics from the 2026 budget Dwayne mentioned were:

An overall 13% increase in the Pastor’s salary including insurance and pension costs.

A 3% to 4% increase for all church staff members.

The Worship and Evangelism Ministries amounts reflect the spending from the past two years.

Expenses for Garbage collection, Sexton and Water bill will be paid with funds from the Property fund.

Funds from the Parsonage fund (\$16,500 in 2026) are currently being used to offset some of the budget. This fund will only last another 6 to 7 years.

The cost of flowers will increase in 2026 from \$50 to \$70 per week due to a new florist providing the flowers.

The 2026 budget represents an increase of \$27 per week.

With no other questions or discussions, the meeting was suspended to be continued on Sunday, November 16th, 2025.

The Annual Congregational meeting for Sardis Evangelical Lutheran Church was continued on Sunday, November 16, 2025.

Joe brought the meeting to order and asked if there were any questions, feedback or comments regarding the proposed 2026 annual budget or nominees.

Two corrections were brought forward from the initial meeting:

No nomination is needed to replace Al King’s position on the Endowment committee. Mike Midgett will join the committee.

Only (2) votes are allowed when voting for the Scholarship committee.

With no other discussion, ballots were distributed to the congregation. The meeting was suspended until the end of the service.

Joe brought the meeting to order and announced the results:

The 2026 budget was approved as written.

Church Council: Kristin Teague, Jennifer Whitener, Robin Stuart and Amy Jones were elected.

Nominating committee: Terry Bledsoe, Jane Moretz, Dwayne Whitener, Nena Babb, Sherrie Midgett and Dawn Covington were elected.

Scholarship committee: Marilyn Teague and Susan Jones were elected.

With nothing further to discuss, Joe asked for a motion to adjourn. Dwayne Whitener made a motion to adjourn the meeting with a second from Al King.

Respectfully submitted,
Mike Midgett, Church Council Secretary

Sardis Lutheran Church
Council Meeting
November 9, 2025

In Attendance: Gene B., Darrell J., Jon G., Zack S., Terry B., Ken P., Jane M., Joe B., Tim W., Pastor

Joe opened the meeting after Worship Service

The minutes were discussed, Terry motioned to accept as written, Gene seconded and the motion carried.

Jane gave a brief financial report. Benevolence is caught up within 2 months and will be completely caught up by the end of November. Terry motioned to accept the Financial Report, Ken seconded and the motion carried.

The Pastor gave a verbal report noting: It continues to be a delight to visit and take communion to our shut ins. He told us that Rick L. would love visitors.

- Boy Scout project is on schedule
- FTF Seniors is a joy to connect with them
- He is preaching a friend's funeral this evening in Taylorsville at St. John's.
- He is serving as Spiritual Director for TEC this month.
- The Blessings Box is a blessing to many and we have so much to be thankful for. We need to check into getting food from Second Harvest Food Bank.

NEW BUSINESS · Ground maintenance around the Columbarium needs attention. Need someone with proper equipment to shape up trees.

- There is a local family using our Fellowship Hall for a large family Thanksgiving. They have already paid \$250.00 and agreed to the rules of using the kitchen and eating area.
- Judging of the Beard Contest will be December 7th during Worship Service.

The meeting closed with the Lord's Prayer

Next Council Meeting will be December 14th at 7PM. Elected 2026 members will be present.

Submitted by
Jane Moretz for Mike Midgett Council Secretary

January 2026

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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
				1 OFFICE CLOSED <i>Happy</i> NEW YEAR 2026	2 Pastor's Sab- bath	3
Inclement Weather decisions will be announced on our Phone Tree by Saturday evening or early Sunday morning. Please make sure your phone information is up to date with the Secretary. In the event of a Tornado during service please exit Sanctuary and proceed to the hallways, (1) back of Sanctuary to the left and (1) is the Fellowship Hall to the right of the Narthex. Remain in hallways, not in rooms.						
4 Bring Food for Blessings Box 9:30 Sunday School 10:30 Worship Service/Holy Communion and FB Live 5:00 WELCA	5 7:00 Prayer Group via ZOOM	6	7	8 7:00 Chancel Choir Rehearsal	9 Pastor's Sab- bath	10
11 Bring Food for Blessings Box 9:30 Sunday School 10:30 Worship Service/Holy Communion and FB Live 6:00 All Committees Meet 7:00 Church Council	12	13	14	15 7:00 Chancel Choir Rehearsal	16 Pastor's Sab- bath	17
18 Bring Food for Blessings Box 9:30 Sunday School 10:30 Worship Service/Holy Communion and FB Live	19 7:00 Prayer Group via ZOOM	20	21	22 7:00 Chancel Choir Rehearsal	23 Pastor's Sab- bath	24
25 Bring Food for Blessings Box 9:30 Sunday School 10:30 Worship Service/Holy Communion and FB Live 6:30 LMM	26	27	28	29 7:00 Chancel Choir Rehearsal	30 Pastor's Sab- bath	31

BIRTHDAYS

1/3 Mildred Fulbright
1/4 Catherine Houser
Thomas Gregory Smyre
1/8 Graysen Whitener
1/14 Dianne Nail
1/18 Bryon Hollar
1/23 Bailey Stuart
1/24 Ralph Stallings
1/28 Kipton Jennings
1/29 Sharon Sigmon

COUNCIL CONTACT

ASSISTING MINISTER

Tim Whitener

USHERS

Darrell J., Dianne N. Roger T., Randy S.

**COMMUNION PREPARATION /
CLEAN – UP**

Donna B.

Sherrie M.

Offering Counter: Dwayne W.

Anniversary:

Ralph & Sheila Ramsey 1-11

Bill Whitener

Conover Nursing & Rehab

920 4th St SW, Conover, NC 28613

Room number 112

Phone: (828)695-8282

<i>VOLUNTEER January</i>	4th	11th	18th	25th
ALTAR FLOWERS	Catherine H.	Kathy W.	Ben and April F.	Carolyn H.
ACOLYTE/ CRUCI-	Ray/Graysen	Paisley/Shuford	Gabriel/Bruce	Graysen/Ian
COMM. ASSISTANT	Rick J.	Dawn C.	Kristin T.	Kathy W.
GREETERS	Kristin/Kathy	Darrell/Roger	Dianne/Wanda	Felicia/Bruce
LAY READER	Marshall W.	Jennifer W.	Hayden J.	Jon G.
CHILDREN'S CHURCH	Kristin T.	No Children's Church	Susan J.	No Children's Church
TECHNOLOGY	Terry, Ben, Joe	Terry, Ben, Joe	Terry, Ben, Joe	Terry, Ben, Joe
SECURITY	Ralph S.	Zachary S.	Bruce S.	Darrell J.
SUNDAY SCHOOL LEADER	EL Sherie/Mike MH Kristin	EL April MH Rick	EL Donna MH Dawn	EL Hayden MH Nena
BANOAK BACK-PACK	8th Mike & Sherrie	15 Dwayne & Barbara	22nd Gene & Donna	29th Joe & Phyllis
FRONT YARD SIGN	Nena B.	Gabriel/Ian	Robin/Cynthia	Tim W.
MEAL DEL.	3rd No Meal	10th Sylvia K.	17th No Meal	24th April F.
BLESSINGS BOX	Disciples of Christ	Church Council	LMM	Jon's Class

OUR MISSION

Sardis Evangelical Lutheran Church serves together as disciples of Christ, teaches the word to invite people into a life of knowing Jesus, encourages each other in faith and personal mission through reaching out to the needs of the community and individuals.

REMEMBER: you can find this NL, the weekly calendar and Sunday Sermons on the website: <https://sardislutheran.com/> mark it as a favorite and check it out often.

SARDIS LUTHERAN CHURCH
6103 W NC 10 HWY
HICKORY NC 28602



SARDIS LEADERS CONTACTS

Pastor: Rev. Matthew Oscar Shepherd (C) 828-228-3078 pastor@sardislutheran.com

Pastor Office Hours Wednesday, 11am – 3pm Remember, you can always call the Pastor anytime from 8am to 7am in case of emergency.

Organist/Director of Music: Kenan Chronister (C) 828-582-3489 kenanthemusician@gmail.com

Council Chair: Gene Biggerstaff (C) 828-381-0039 genebiggerstaff@gmail.com

Secretary/Treasurer: Jane Moretz, (C) 828-302-8458 secretary@sardislutheran.com