

Epiphany Evangelical Lutheran Church

Church Congregational Council Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, November 11, 2025 – 7:00 PM

Attendees

Present: Mike Dunavant (President), Rob Boyle (Vice-President), Markus Groener (Secretary), Joseph Bollick, Jim Huddle, Phillip Martin, Cindy McClintock, David Schiller

Present (via video conference): Missy Hill, Sarah Lang, Gwen Newman

Guests (via video conference):

Absent: Jennifer Edwards (Treasurer), Leigh Pickels

1. Call to Order

Council President Mike Dunavant called the meeting to order at **7:02 PM**.

2. Devotions / Opening Prayer

Cindy McClintock led devotion, focusing on **Matthew 6:34** (“Do not worry about tomorrow...”), reflecting on anxiety, control, and trusting God in the midst of national and personal turmoil. Council members shared practical ways they handle worry—owning and naming stress, deep breathing, exercise, intentional prayer, avoiding catastrophizing, and reframing what is truly within one’s control. Cindy closed with prayer, asking God to help the council and congregation bring their cares to God and to guide them in serving those facing insecurity in the community.

3. Consent Agenda

A. Approval of Council Meeting Minutes from October 14, 2025, and October 28, 2025


B. Receipt of Reports from Pastors, Staff, and Ministry Teams

Written reports were received from staff and ministry teams. Pastor Phillip noted he had not submitted a written pastor’s report this month due to timing but briefly highlighted that he will distribute updated online worship attendance data (year-to-date) by email, showing a relatively stable pattern over the year.

C. Receipt of Treasurer’s Report and BOL Update

Jennifer Edwards was absent; **Jim Huddle** presented highlights from the October 2025 financials and Jennifer’s email summary:

- **Monthly:** Net income for October was **unfavorable to budget by approximately \$41,242**, driven primarily by significantly lower-than-planned contributions for the month.
- **YTD:** Net income was **unfavorable by about \$2,328**; offerings lagged plan despite being ahead of last year on a year-to-date basis.
 - i. Total income is favorable to the budget by \$638. Offerings are about \$4,152 below plan but remain roughly 10% ahead of last year, offset by higher interest income.
 - ii. Total expenses are unfavorable by about \$2,966, primarily due to a catch-up billing for technology support as payments transitioned from credit card to check, partially offset by small savings in other areas.

- iii. As a result, YTD expenses currently exceed YTD income by approximately \$74,019, and net income is unfavorable to the budget by about \$2,328.
- **Mortgage Reserve:**
 - i. As of October 31, 2025, the mortgage reserve (BOL) stood at \$306,280, providing about 25.3 months of principal and interest coverage at roughly \$12,124 per month, sustaining payments through November 2027.
 - ii. Jim noted that if Council accepts an additional \$25,000 from the Endowment Fund at year-end and continues the planned annual reserve build (e.g., \$51,000 in 2026 plus a \$25,000 endowment contribution), the reserve could increase in the near term. However, given annual mortgage payments of about \$145,000, the reserve would likely decline by roughly \$70,000 per year, which implies that without new funding from the “Epiphany Shines to 75” campaign, the reserve will be depleted shortly after refinancing.
 - iii. Jim emphasized that the BOL reserve remains adequate to get the congregation past the upcoming refinance date. Still, long-term **sustainability depends on successfully raising capital and/or adjusting distributions and reserve funding strategies**. He will continue working with the Finance Committee on a **five-year projection** incorporating endowment distributions, BOL usage, and Epiphany Shines contributions for future council review.
- **Motion:** Rob Boyle moved to approve the consent agenda.
- **Second:** Cindy McClintock seconded.
- **Vote:**  Approved unanimously

4. Receipt of Communications

A. Open Requests for Communications Received

None received this month.

B. Sympathy and Support Cards

Cards were prepared and circulated for signatures for:

- **Get Well**
 - Charles Boyer
 - Wayne Root
- Council briefly discussed how prayer list names are supported with cards and noted:
 - Some individuals ask to remain on the prayer list long-term, and cards are not sent every time. Currently, the Council does not routinely send cards for births or other joyful milestones, though the congregation recognizes births with a rose in worship.

5. Old Business

A. Endowment Fund Distribution proposed changes

- Mike reported on follow-up conversations with **Bill Seidel** and reflected on the **Annual Meeting discussion** around Endowment distributions:
 - Mike expressed appreciation for Bill’s willingness to speak at the Annual Meeting and recognized that his remarks helped **educate the congregation about the Endowment Fund’s size and purpose**. However, Mike also sensed that Bill remains frustrated by the recurring pressure from some members to increase annual distributions.
- Council members discussed:
 - The need to dial down tension and avoid a “taking sides” dynamic within the congregation.
 - The importance of **better communication** from the Endowment Committee about the fund’s purpose, history, inflows/outflows, and current balances, especially for newer members who

- see “a million dollars” and do not understand why it is not being used to solve the mortgage entirely.
- The perception among some members that Endowment funds are “just sitting there,” versus the original intent that the Endowment serve as a **long-term resource and stabilizer**, not a primary operating or mortgage-elimination tool.
 - A need for a **common message** shared by the Council, the Finance Committee, and the Endowment Committee when communicating with the congregation to prevent confusion and mistrust.
 - Pastor Phillip believes a bit more communication from the Endowment Fund to the congregation could be beneficial for educating and informing, as well as answering questions.
 - **Quarterly Reporting Request:**
 - Jim reiterated his strong concern that the Endowment has functioned as a “black box” for many years. He stressed that a body responsible for approximately **\$1 million** should **routinely, not occasionally, report balances, earnings, and distributions** to the Council.
 - Jim recommended that Council issue an **official written request** that the Endowment Committee provide **quarterly statements from Davenport** (or an equivalent reporting format) in alignment with their bylaws.
 - Council concurred by consensus to have a formal request sent from Council to the Endowment Committee requesting **quarterly Davenport statements** and a regular summary of activity.
 - **Next Steps – Joint Discussion:**
 - Mike proposed convening a meeting after the **New Year**, including **Council, the Finance Committee, and the Endowment Committee** to:
 - Clarify the Endowment’s purpose and the intent of donors.
 - Review current distribution guidelines and the proposed bylaw changes.
 - Develop a **shared communication strategy** for the congregation, particularly in light of the Epiphany Shines campaign and future mortgage discussions.
 - No motion was made regarding changes to distribution rules at this meeting; the focus was on **relationship repair, transparency, and communication planning**.

B. Epiphany Shines to 75 - Update and Next Steps

- Missy did a fantastic job presenting during the annual meeting
- Missy Hill reported on the **Epiphany Shines to 75** capital campaign following the Annual Meeting presentation:
 - Missy will provide **Pastor Phillip (and/or Hanne)** with:
 - A **PDF version** of the presentation.
 - Contact information for where congregants can send campaign-related questions.
 - The PDF will be distributed via email and/or Realm so members can review the material at their own pace and share it with others who could not attend.
 - Feedback from the Annual Meeting was broadly **positive**; some members even expressed concern that the campaign’s goals might be **too low**, a sign of strong support.
 - Staff and council members discussed **future Annual Meeting logistics**, including holding the business meeting between services during the **Sunday school hour** to increase participation by families and younger members. Options mentioned included:
 - Keeping two worship services but scheduling the meeting between them.
 - Providing alternative programming or supervised activities for children (e.g., in Price Hall) while parents attend the meeting.
 - Council also noted the risk that a prolonged **endowment debate** could overshadow or confuse the Epiphany Shines effort (e.g., members mistakenly directing gifts to the Endowment instead

of the campaign). The group affirmed that **clear, coordinated messaging** about both the Endowment and the campaign is essential.

- No motions were made; this was an informational and planning discussion.

C. Computer Lease Research Update

- Gwen Newman and Markus Groener provided an update on the review of **computer leasing vs. purchasing** and related network equipment proposals:
 - The vendor sent an email stating that it is less expensive to purchase computers on an as-needed basis, rather than leasing them.
 - Markus shared that vendor communications to date have included **numerous, sometimes confusing numbers and upgrade recommendations** (e.g., computer refresh cycles, network equipment replacement, and Wi-Fi access point upgrades).
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 - He expressed concern that some of the language reflects **sales pressure** rather than clear security or performance requirements (e.g., upgrading Wi-Fi from version 5 to 6 while version 7 already exists, and emphasizing hardware replacement rather than firmware upgrades).
 - Markus plans to:
 - Consolidate all costs and timelines into a **structured spreadsheet**, separating computer hardware from network infrastructure.
 - Meet with the vendor to walk through each line item, clarifying **what is necessary, what is optional, and what has a measurable benefit** for Epiphany.
 - Gwen noted that **Debbie** already has sufficient information to **reserve budget funds** for recommended items in 2026, which provides flexibility while analysis continues.
 - Council thanked Gwen and Markus for their work and asked them to **report back with a more precise cost/benefit comparison** before any decision is made on leasing versus purchasing.
- No motion was made.

D. AC Replacement Update

- Mike reported that the air conditioning replacement work for the sanctuary is scheduled to begin on Friday, November 14, 2025.
 - The project includes pouring a new concrete pad and related mechanical work.
 - Work is expected to be staged to minimize disruption to worship. Still, Mike will follow up with Rob and the contractor to confirm whether any systems need to be taken offline and to ensure that Sunday services remain adequately heated, especially if temperatures drop.
- No motion was made.

E. New Signature on Accounts


- Jim Huddle noted that the bank still needs documentation to finalize his addition as a signatory on the church accounts.
- Markus confirmed that the prior minutes reflect the Council's approval of Jim as a signatory.
- Next steps:
 - Jennifer will contact Town Bank to clarify exactly what documentation is required (e.g., a copy of the official council minutes, a letter on church letterhead referencing those minutes, and Jim's identification).
 - Once requirements are confirmed, Jim will schedule an appointment with the bank to complete the process.
- No motion was made.

F. Kneeling pads for the communion rail

- There was **no new update** from the Worship Committee on kneeling pad implementation this month. The committee continues to explore suitable materials and designs to complement the sanctuary.


6. New Business

A. Christmas/Easter Offering Allocation

- Council considered allocations for **special Christmas and Easter offerings**, consistent with the long-standing practice of designating these offerings for outreach and partner ministries. Pastor Phillip provided a summary of past allocations and presented several candidate organizations, including those with existing ties to Epiphany and those addressing current urgent needs (e.g., food insecurity, immigrant support, veteran housing, and prison ministry).
- After discussion, the Council reached consensus on designating **Christmas 2025 and Easter 2025** special offerings by **percentage** as follows:
 - **GraceInside** (Virginia prison chaplaincy ministry) – 20%
 - **Tuckahoe Volunteer Rescue Squad** – 10%
 - **Waymakers Foundation** (Latino/immigrant food security and culturally appropriate food support) – 15%
 - **CrossOver Ministry** – 20%
 - **Camp Caroline Furnace** – 20%
 - **Liberation Veteran Services** (veteran housing/support) – 15%
- Key points from discussion:
 - Council affirmed continued support for **GraceInside**, especially given current efforts to expand chaplain coverage in Virginia prisons and the extremely limited compensation and benefits for prison chaplains.
 - **Tuckahoe Rescue Squad** has historical ties to Epiphany's property and remains an ongoing local partner.
 - **Caroline Furnace** has been a consistent beneficiary because of its direct impact on Epiphany's youth and faith formation.
 - Members expressed concern about **food insecurity** and the growing strain on local food banks; Waymakers' focus on culturally appropriate food for immigrant families resonated with council members, particularly given recent immigration-related pressures.
 - **CrossOver** continues to face funding challenges while serving uninsured and underinsured neighbors; Epiphany is considered a founding supporter.
 - **Liberation Veteran Services** is expanding housing capacity for veterans, and Epiphany already participates by providing meals. Support here aligns with existing volunteer engagement.
- **Motion:** Jim Huddle moved to approve the **2025 Christmas and Easter offering allocations** as listed above.
- **Second:** Cindy McClintock seconded.
- **Vote:**  Approved unanimously

B. Vacation for Pastor Phillip

- Mike presented a recommendation from the **Executive Committee and Mutual Ministry** to **add one additional week of vacation** (a fifth week) to **Pastor Phillip Martin's** annual benefits in recognition of his **15+ years of service** at Epiphany.
- Discussion highlights:

- Historically, Epiphany has granted additional vacation to long-tenured staff (e.g., when Hannah reached 15 years of service). While not codified as a formal policy, this has been a consistent practice of **recognition and care for long-serving staff**.
- Council members affirmed the importance of adequate time away for clergy for rest, renewal, and long-term sustainability, especially in light of previous sabbatical discussions.
- Gwen suggested that an eventual **employee handbook** should capture guidelines for vacation increases and other benefits to ensure clarity and uniformity for current and future staff.
- **Motion:** Missy Hill moved that **Pastor Phillip Martin** receive **one additional week of annual vacation (for a total of five weeks)**, in recognition of his years of service at Epiphany.
- **Second:** Gwen Newman seconded.
- **Vote:**  Approved unanimously

- Pastor Phillip expressed his gratitude for the council's support and emphasized his appreciation for the congregation and staff.

7. Anything for Hanne?

- Mike will send the offering distribution information to Hanne
- Markus Groener will provide Hanne and Turner with the approved council minutes from the October meeting for posting to Epiphany's website.

8. Next Meetings

- The next council meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, December 9th, 2025, at 7:00 pm.**
- **Council Officers** will be elected at the December meeting.
- Newly elected council members (**Matt Greenshields, Carl Erickson, and Jane Huddle**) will be invited to attend the December and January meetings with a **voice but no vote**, except that they will participate in the **election of officers**, since the officers they elect will serve during their term beginning in February.
- **Pastor Phillip Martin** will lead devotions and the prayers.

9. Closing Prayer

Cindy McClintock offered the closing prayer, thanking God for guiding the evening's discussions and decisions, asking that Council keep the church's mission at the center of all actions, and praying for God's continued provision for Epiphany's ministries, staff, and members in the month ahead.

10. Adjournment

Mike Dunavant adjourned the meeting at **8:18 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Markus K. Groener
Church Council Secretary