

Epiphany Evangelical Lutheran Church

Church Congregational Council Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, April 14, 2026 – 7:00 PM

Attendees

Present: Mike Dunavant (President), Jane Huddle (Vice-President), Joseph Bolick, Missy Hill, Phillip Martin, Cindy McClintock, Leigh Pickels

Present (via video conference): Jennifer Edwards (Treasurer), Markus Groener (Secretary), Matt Greenshields, Gwen Newman

Guests: Rylan Samos, Jane Lanham (Video)

Absent: Carl Erickson, Sarah Lang

1. Call to Order

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

2. Devotions / Opening Prayer

Joseph Bolick led devotions, drawing from the season of Easter and the New Testament reading of Acts 2, in which Peter addresses the crowd and proclaims his witness to the risen Christ. Joseph invited the council to reflect on what it means to be a witness, asking whether members had ever been called upon to testify to something they had personally seen or experienced.

Council members shared personal stories of witnesses. Joseph connected these stories to the Greek word *martros* (the root of the English word *martyr*), reflecting that to be a witness is to share what one has seen and experienced of Christ in everyday life. He concluded with prayer, asking God to bless the council's work and to help its members serve as faithful witnesses in their life together.

3. Consent Agenda

A. Approval of Council Meeting Minutes of March 10, 2026

Council received the March 10, 2026, council meeting minutes for approval. No corrections were noted.

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

Written reports from pastors, staff, and ministry teams were received. Council celebrated the news that Pastor Sarah Lang had recently been awarded a grant, and members offered congratulations on this exciting recognition of her ministry.

C. Receipt of Treasurer's Report and Mortgage / Shine to 75 Update

Jennifer Edwards reviewed the financial reports for the month ending **March 31, 2026**. She noted that, beginning this month, a combined schedule has been introduced to track both the Mortgage Reserve and the new *Shine to 75* capital campaign, with the expectation that these will eventually be split into two separate reports as campaign activity grows.

- **Monthly:** Net income was favorable to the budget by **\$840**. Total income was favorable by **\$6,428**, reflecting stronger-than-budgeted contributions for the month, while total expenses were unfavorable by **\$5,588**, driven primarily by annual subscription renewals (Bizplay, Zoom, and Microsoft) and the unplanned replacement of a PTAC unit.
- **Year-to-Date (YTD):** Total income was favorable by **\$12,532**, with total contributions running **10% higher than in 2025**. Total expenses were unfavorable by **\$8,313**, primarily due to the annual subscription renewals, the PTAC replacement, and higher-than-planned utility costs from the cold start to 2026. Overall, net income remains favorable to the budget by **\$4,219**, even though year-to-date expenses still exceeded year-to-date income by **\$21,927**.
- **Mortgage Reserve:** Balance as of **March 31, 2026**, is **\$296,119**, covering approximately **24.42 months** of principal and interest payments at **\$12,124/month**, sustaining payments through **March 2028**. The March balance reflects both the regular monthly mortgage payment and the monthly reserve buildup.
- **Discussion highlights:** Phillip Martin asked for clarification on the new combined Mortgage Reserve/Shine-to-75 schedule, particularly the meaning of certain transaction codes (e.g., P/E) in the report. Jennifer explained that those codes designate deposit and expense entries, respectively, and that the format will likely evolve as the campaign matures into two separate reports. Council expressed appreciation for the transparency of the new combined schedule and recognized that some refinement of terminology will be helpful as members become accustomed to it.

D. Approval of Consent Agenda

- **Motion:** Missy Hill moved to approve the Consent Agenda for April.
- **Second:** Cindy McClintock seconded.
- **Vote:** Approved unanimously

4. Receipt of Communications

A. Open Requests for Communications Received

Council received and acknowledged the following thank-you communications:

- **EnCircle**, thanking Epiphany for its recent donation of **Easter baskets** for the youth in its foster care program. The communication, signed by Ashton Porter, expressed gratitude for the spirit of compassion reflected in Epiphany's community and for the joy this gift brought to the youth they served.
- **Crossover Healthcare Ministry**, thanking Epiphany for its recent gift received in February in support of the compassionate healthcare ministry. The letter, addressed to Pastor Phillip Martin, noted that Epiphany's support "means the world" to Crossover and will make a real difference for its patients and the broader community.

B. Sympathy and Support Cards

None were distributed this month, as Hanne Hamlin is on vacation. Members briefly checked in informally regarding ongoing meal needs and pastoral care follow-ups, and Pastor Phillip noted that the regular sympathy and support card process will resume upon Hanne's return.

5. Old Business

A. Epiphany Shines to 75 – Update and Next Steps

i. Special Reception for “Silent Phase” of Campaign – March 24

The lead-gift, or “silent phase,” reception was held on March 24, 2026. Approximately 40 of the roughly 75 invited households attended despite the Tuesday-evening timing. Council members felt the event was well executed and warmly received, with praise for Pastor Phillip’s and Rob Boyle’s presentation. Lead pledges have continued to come in steadily from those who attended, as well as from several households who were invited but unable to attend.

ii. Council Commitments – April 14

Council was reminded that the goal is for 100% of council members to have submitted a pledge to Epiphany Shines to 75 prior to the congregational launch on April 19. Several council members confirmed that they had already submitted their pledges, while others committed to doing so in the days leading to the event. Pledge cards were made available, and members were reminded that pledges submitted via Realm do not require a duplicate paper card.

iii. Congregational Breakfast – April 19

The congregational breakfast and formal launch of the campaign is scheduled for Sunday, April 19, 2026. Pastor Phillip will be reusing key portions of the silent-phase presentation, and Rob Boyle will share an updated pledge total at that event. Members discussed plans to collect short member testimonials at the breakfast — brief responses to a prompt such as “being a part of Epiphany has meant to me...” — for inclusion in future bulletins alongside the campaign communications.

iv. Current Pledge Totals

As of the morning of the meeting, **over \$275,000** had been pledged to *Epiphany Shines to 75* from approximately 16–17 households participating in the silent phase. This figure does *not* include the \$100,000 endowment distribution authorized by the congregation, since that transfer will be reported separately. Council expressed an aspirational goal of reaching **\$300,000 in pledges before the April 19 announcement**, and Pastor Phillip indicated that he would send a follow-up email to silent-phase invitees who have not yet pledged. Rob Boyle agreed to provide John Stapleton with an updated pledge total by Saturday so it can be incorporated into Sunday’s presentation.

On the giving side (gifts already received), the running total stands at **\$23,982**. A campaign “thermometer” will be displayed in the building to track giving (not pledging) over the multi-year campaign period. Council also discussed common questions about Realm: pledges should be entered into as a single total amount (not as a recurring schedule), with payment scheduling handled separately on the giving side. Members were reminded to use the *Epiphany Shines to 75* designations when giving and to confirm with Greg Trone if a contribution appears to have been miscoded.

B. Letter to Endowment – Update

Mike Dunavant provided an update on the letter previously approved by the council requesting the 10% distribution from the Epiphany Endowment Fund Board, totaling \$100,000, in support of the capital campaign. Following the March congregational vote, broad market volatility prompted council leadership to delay sending the letter. With market conditions stabilizing, Mike connected with Bill Seidel of the Endowment Board, who requested a formal letter. The letter was prepared, delivered to Hanne’s box at the church, and a digital copy was emailed to Bill on April 14.

Mike will follow up by phone to confirm receipt and to track the timing of the disbursement, which is expected to take approximately 10 days once Davenport & Company processes the transfer. Council expressed appreciation for Mike's careful timing relative to market conditions and noted that the funds, once received, will enable the church to begin acting on capital project priorities.

6. New Business

A. Rylan Samos – Eagle Scout Project

Rylan Samos, an Eagle Scout candidate from **Troop 795** (chartered at Glen Allen Baptist Church), presented his proposed Eagle Scout project to the council. Rylan plans to design and build a **“Blessing Box”** — a weather-protected, wooden donation box, larger than a typical “Little Free Library,” from which members of the community experiencing food insecurity can take non-perishable food items. The box will be installed in front of the Star Lodge.

Rylan reported that the project has already been approved by both his Eagle Scout Board of Review and the church's Community Service Board, and that he intends to fully fund construction himself (estimated at approximately \$200) so that no church funding is being requested. Council members asked thoughtful questions about box size, weatherproofing, and protection from animals, methods for collecting and rotating donations (including the possibility of designating a sorting bin in the Commons area and engaging the youth group), and how the box will be identified externally. Rylan plans to complete construction by the end of May, ahead of his June 27 age-out deadline.

Rylan agreed to submit a short article (with an optional photo or rendering) to Pastor Phillip by **April 27** so the project can be promoted in the May newsletter. He and Pastor Phillip will also coordinate a *blessing of the box* between services once construction is complete.

- **Motion:** Missy Hill moved to approve Rylan Samos' Eagle Scout **“Blessing Box”** project for installation in front of the Star Lodge.
- **Second:** Leigh Pickels seconded
- **Vote:** Approved unanimously

B. Personnel Team Update

Jane Lanham attended on behalf of the Personnel Committee (current members: Jane Lanham, David Hess, Paul Speidell, and Fran Caruso, the newest member) to update the council on two open staff positions and the work underway to fill them.

Office Administrator (Hanne Hamlin): Hanne will retire effective **August 31, 2026**, after many years of dedicated service. The Personnel Committee has been preparing for this transition for several months. Members have interviewed senior pastors at similarly sized congregations across Virginia and North Carolina to learn how peer churches structure the role; Hanne herself has provided a thoughtful self-assessment identifying what works, what does not, and what she most enjoys; and Pastor Phillip will next gather input from called and non-called staff (including Pastor Joseph, Pastor Sarah, the finance administrator, and the volunteer coordinator) on how the role intersects with their own. The committee's timeline aims to **post the position by June 1**, interview in late June and July, and have a successor on board by mid-August so that Hanne can provide hands-on training before her departure. Council also affirmed the need to plan an appropriate retirement celebration for Hanne, likely to take place between Sunday services in August.

Finance Manager (Debbie Sexton): Debbie will conclude her work on the church side as of **May 31, 2026**, though she will continue in her role with the nursery school and has indicated her willingness to provide spot support (e.g., payroll preparation or transitional questions) if needed during the

search. The Finance Committee and Pastor Phillip are currently reviewing the position's job description to clarify reporting lines (the role reports to the senior pastor) and to evaluate whether the position may need additional hours given growing demands. Some discussion was had on whether to outsource bookkeeping to an accounting firm; Pastor Phillip noted that a contractor would lose the responsiveness, on-site presence, and budget-season familiarity that Debbie has provided. The current part-time position is approximately 12–15 hours per week at roughly \$25/hour.

Discussion: Council members offered several thoughts. **Markus Groener** emphasized the importance of conducting *background checks* prior to final interviews — particularly for the finance role, given access to sensitive information — and noted that established accounting firms often carry insurance, adding an additional layer of trust. **Gwen Newman** raised the option of contracting bookkeeping services to an accounting firm and asked about the difference between bookkeeping and broader financial advisory work. Markus and Jane also raised the realistic limits of a part-time role: a new hire is unlikely to bring the same after-hours availability that Debbie has provided unless those expectations are explicitly written into the position. **Jane Huddle** and **Missy Hill** offered to assist with screening, interviewing, and other parts of the search to ease the load on Pastor Phillip during what will be a particularly busy summer.

Member vs. Non-Member Question: The committee shared its current leaning, based on conversations with peer churches, toward posting the church administrator position as “**non-member preferred,**” given the confidentiality, boundary-setting, and pastoral-care demands of the role. Council discussed the implications of this language at length, including the importance of transparency for any internal applicants and the value of avoiding the awkwardness that can result when members and non-members compete for the same role. There was general support for the “non-member preferred” framing as a fair and transparent approach, while still leaving the door open should an exceptional internal candidate emerge.

This update was provided *for the council's information only*; no formal action was required at this meeting.

7. Anything for Hanne?

- **Markus Groener** will provide **Hanne** and **Turner** with the approved minutes from the **March 10, 2026**, council meeting for posting on Epiphany's website.
- **Pastor Phillip** will check with **Hanne**, upon her return from vacation, regarding her preferred timing and frequency for receiving short member testimonial cards collected at the campaign breakfast for inclusion in future bulletins.

8. Next Meetings

- The next council meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, May 12, 2026, at 7:00 PM.**
- **Carl Erickson** will lead devotions and the opening prayer.

9. Closing Prayer

Joseph Bolick offered the closing prayer, giving thanks for the gift of the day, the work of the council, and the witness of the congregation in the world.

10. Adjournment

Council President Mike Dunavant adjourned the meeting at **8:33 PM**.

Respectfully submitted,

Markus K. Groener

Church Council Secretary