

Epiphany Evangelical Lutheran Church
Church Congregational Council Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, July 14, 2026 – 7:00 PM

Attendees

Present: Jane Huddle (Vice-President), Jennifer Edwards (Treasurer), Markus Groener (Secretary), Carl Erickson, Matt Greenshields, Phillip Martin, Leigh Pickels

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

Absent: Mike Dunavant (President), Cindy McClintock

1. Call to Order

In the absence of Council President Mike Dunavant, who is attending a graduate study class this month, Council Vice-President Jane Huddle presided and called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM.

2. Devotions / Opening Prayer

Markus Groener led devotions, drawing on the book “Mr. God, This Is Anna” by Fynn. He reflected on the child Anna’s simple yet profound understanding that God is at once beyond everything and intimately close — “you can’t see him because he’s so big, but he’s so small he can get inside you.” Markus tied this to the Lutheran understanding of grace: we do not climb our way up to God; rather, God comes to us in Christ, in word and sacrament, not because we are strong but because we are in need. As a council carrying real responsibilities, we are therefore freed from fear and from the burden of believing that everything depends on us — the church already belongs to Christ — and freed instead to serve, to listen, and to notice the ordinary places where God is already at work. He posed two questions: how does trusting that God comes to us in Christ shape the way we lead as a council, and what does it mean in practice to trust that Christ is already at work and that the church ultimately belongs to him?

Members shared personal reflections. Jane Huddle acknowledged how difficult it is to “let go and let God” when one naturally wants to act and plan. Missy Hill offered the Epiphany Shines to 75 campaign as a living example — launched amid uncertainty, it has been blessed well beyond the council’s original expectations. Matt Greenshields spoke of the Holy Spirit having called the council together and gifted each member for the work, returning to the theme of trust. Carl Erickson reflected on being led to faith and to council service. Pastor Phillip Martin connected the theme to Sunday’s parable of the sower: we can scatter and tend the seed, but only God makes it grow. Markus closed with an opening prayer grounding the council’s leaders in God’s grace, freeing them from fear, and asking God to guide their conversations and shape their decisions.

3. Consent Agenda

A. Approval of Council Meeting Minutes of June 9, 2026, and Special Meeting of June 18, 2026

Council received the June 9, 2026, council meeting minutes and June 18, 2026, council special meeting minutes for approval. Markus noted that one name correction had already been made following discussion with Jane; no other corrections were noted.

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

Written reports from pastors, staff, and ministry teams were received. Carl Erickson asked that thanks be conveyed to Pastor Sarah Lang for the engaging way she had presented her ministry update, turning a routine checklist into a meaningful narrative. Council briefly discussed the value of incorporating such narrative commentary directly into written reports.

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

Jennifer Edwards reviewed the financial reports for the month ending June 30, 2026.

- **Monthly:** Net income was **unfavorable** to the budget by \$4,359. Total income was **favorable** by \$2,570, due to higher-than-expected contributions for the month. Total expenses were **unfavorable** by \$6,929, primarily due to higher-than-expected utility (air conditioning) costs during an unusually hot summer.
- **Year-to-Date (YTD):** Total income was **favorable** by \$31,715, with total contributions running approximately 7% higher than in 2025. Total expenses were **unfavorable** by \$6,796, primarily due to higher-than-planned utility payments (from both a very cold winter and a very hot summer) and a higher water/sewer bill stemming from an earlier water leak. Net income was **favorable** to the budget by \$24,919, even though year-to-date expenses still exceeded year-to-date income by \$40,337.
- **Mortgage Reserve:** Balance as of June 30, 2026, is \$271,382, covering approximately 22.38 months of principal and interest payments at \$12,124/month, sustaining payments through approximately April 2028. The June balance reflects the regular monthly mortgage payment and the monthly reserve buildup. The outstanding mortgage balance stood at approximately \$1,721,925.
- **Shine to 75 Update:** As of June month-end, the Shine to 75 Capital Campaign account held \$225,090. Drawing on figures from the contribution side of Realm, Jane Huddle reported total pledges of approximately \$1,004,589 and total campaign receipts to date of approximately \$336,402 (including the \$103,640 endowment distribution from the Epiphany Endowment Fund Board and excluding the council's original \$5,000 seed contribution toward campaign expenses).
- **Discussion highlights:** Jennifer Edwards and Jane Huddle reported on an action item carried over from the prior meeting to reconcile the "contribution" side of Realm (pledges and contributions, used for the weekly campaign updates) with the general-ledger (financial) side (actual cash received). The two do not currently agree month to month, and Jane was unable to fully reconcile them. Likely contributing factors include a timing lag — contributions from the Realm contribution side were not automatically posted to the general ledger until that setting was enabled around March or April — and the fact that pledges appear on the contribution side but not in the cash-based general ledger. Jennifer and Jane will meet with Finance Manager Elizabeth Hurst over the coming weeks to reconcile the

reports. Carl Erickson also raised questions about offsetting credit and debit entries. Gwen Newman observed that the matter appeared to reflect unexplained timing and reporting differences rather than an actual problem and was better worked out before council rather than during the meeting; council agreed.

D. Approval of Consent Agenda

- **Motion:** Carl Erickson moved to approve the June Consent Agenda.
- **Second:** Leigh Pickels seconded.
- **Vote:**  Approved unanimously

4. Receipt of Communications

A. Open Requests for Communications Received

- **Debbie Sexton** — a thank-you card to council for the generous gift on her retirement, expressing gratitude for her ten years as Finance Manager and for the people she worked with; she will continue to work with the Nursery School.
- **Deacon Holly Shipley, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (Chapel Hill, NC)** — a thank-you for allowing the congregation's youth group to stay at Star Lodge on June 19; the note recognized the warm welcome given by Hanne and Rob, mentioned a donation to Epiphany's youth group, and offered to return the favor.

B. Sympathy and Support Cards

Cards were distributed by Pastor Phillip Martin this month, catching up from June, when Hanne Hamlin — who normally curates the cards — was on vacation.

Get Well / Serious Illness

- Tom Bosserman
- Cindy Butler
- Cheryl Poenisch
- Margaret Risher

Sympathy

- Naomi Painter at the death of her sister, Isabelle
- Sallie Bartholomew at the death of her father, William
- Teresa Rollins at the death of her father, George
- David Gorsline, Jr. at the death of his father, David, Sr.

5. Old Business

A. Epiphany Shines to 75 – Update

Missy Hill provided the campaign update. Having traveled for much of the past month, she noted the commons “thermometer” had not been updated as often as the bulletin reflected and said she would be back and current beginning that Sunday. Congregational communication had been light, with only a couple of questions — including from members asking whether payments toward capital improvements had begun and when giving directed to the mortgage would take effect. Mindful of the ongoing reconciliation between Realm and the general ledger, Missy raised the question of whether the weekly updates should temporarily move to an every-other-week cadence to ensure the figures shared remain accurate and welcomed council feedback. Gwen Newman thanked Missy for the updates, and Missy credited Jane Huddle for supplying the numbers and Linda and Hanne for their support.

Jane Huddle reported the latest figures from the contribution side of Realm: total pledges of approximately \$1,004,589 and total receipts to date of approximately \$336,402 (including the endowment distribution and excluding the council’s \$5,000 seed contribution). Jane noted that campaign expenses have now slightly exceeded the council’s original \$5,000 seed (by less than \$1,000); council agreed to let incoming campaign funds cover ongoing expenses rather than take further action.

Pastor Phillip Martin raised the need to plan for the congregation’s 75th-anniversary celebration, anticipated in February 2027 with the bishop attending and likely including a congregational meal (estimated around \$3,000). The funding source — whether the operating budget or campaign funds — was not part of the original campaign plan and will need to be determined; Missy Hill and the team will bring forward a proposal. No decision was required.

B. Elizabeth Hurst began as Finance Manager on June 25, 2026

Pastor Phillip Martin thanked council for its prompt decision at the June 18 special meeting. Elizabeth Hurst accepted the offer without negotiation and chose to overlap with Debbie Sexton — whose last day is July 15 — to cross-train, spending several extended sessions learning the role. Her prior church background has been an asset in getting up to speed quickly.

C. Job Openings Update — Office Administrator

Pastor Phillip Martin summarized the process used to develop the Office Administrator job description to replace Hanne Hamlin, who is retiring from the role. The personnel team (Jane Lanham, David Hess, Fran Caruso, and Paul Spidell) surveyed comparably sized ELCA congregations in several states (South Carolina, North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Colorado) and found Epiphany’s staffing structure to be standard for churches its size; surveyed Hanne about her role; and surveyed the staff who work most closely with the position. Pastor Phillip used an AI tool to consolidate the questionnaire responses and produce a draft job description, which the personnel team, Hanne, and the executive team then reviewed and refined. Council affirmed

keeping the title “Office Administrator” rather than “Church Administrator,” which would imply a higher-level role with direct reports and a higher salary.

- **Job Description:** Markus Groener observed that no job description perfectly captures a role, and that the description should leave room for the position to evolve and for the right hire to help shape it. Council reviewed several clarifications: remove the word “orientation” from “hospitality and customer service orientation” under core competencies; amend the work schedule to 33–40 hours (Virginia treats 30–40 hours as full-time, and office hours total roughly 33), with occasional additional hours as needed; and reword “lunch time to be negotiated” to “timing of lunch to be negotiated.”
- **Salary Range:** The range was developed from two sources — salary data provided by out-of-area comparison congregations, and market-specific research (compiled by Markus Groener on the executive team using an AI data-mining tool) covering current local postings for the office administrator and related positions. The two sources were closely aligned. The range is approximately \$42,000–\$50,000; with benefits, the total cost to the congregation would be roughly \$65,000–\$67,000. The salary range will not be published in the posting.
- **Motion:** Markus Groener moved to approve the Office Administrator job description with the amendments discussed.
- **Second:** Jane Huddle seconded.
- **Vote:**  Approved unanimously
- **Time Frame and Interview Process:** The position will be posted on Indeed this week, and Pastor Phillip hopes to have someone on board before October 31. He will conduct initial phone screenings, with interviews expected in August. The interview panel will consist of Pastor Phillip, one personnel team member, and one council member, with the same panel hearing all candidates. Jane Huddle expressed willingness to serve, having substituted in the role previously; Pastor Phillip invited any interested council member to volunteer by email, noting that scheduling flexibility is the key requirement. Jennifer Edwards was excused given her earlier work on the Finance Manager hire. Hanne’s last day in the role is August 31; she will remain a member of the congregation and has offered to help the new hire transition.

D. Recognizing Hanne’s Service

Council discussed how best to recognize Hanne Hamlin’s service. Pastor Phillip Martin asked that a council member head a small team, joined by three or four members of the congregation, to plan a recognition event — likely a reception between services before her final day — together with a “love offering” solicited from the congregation. Jane Huddle offered to lead the effort, with others offering to assist. A formal resolution recognizing Hanne’s service is expected to be presented at the August council meeting, and the council fund can help cover event costs.

6. New Business

A. Adding Elizabeth Hurst's name as signatory to the bank accounts at Towne Bank and Vanguard

- **Motion:** Jane Huddle moved to add Elizabeth Hurst as a signatory on Epiphany's accounts at Towne Bank and Vanguard.
- **Second:** Leigh Pickels seconded.
- **Vote:** ☒ Approved unanimously

B. Removing Debbie Sexton's name as a signatory from all Epiphany-held bank accounts

- **Motion:** Carl Erickson moved to remove Debbie Sexton as a signatory from all Epiphany-held bank accounts.
- **Second:** Jane Huddle seconded.
- **Vote:** ☒ Approved unanimously

C. First large payment to the mortgage principal from Epiphany Shines donations

With approximately \$336,402 received and the first \$200,000 already designated for capital improvements (of which roughly \$50,000–\$60,000 has been spent, including the roof project, with a monitor for Price Hall still pending), council discussed authorizing the Finance Committee to begin applying campaign funds above \$200,000 to the mortgage principal. Missy Hill and others noted that the mortgage interest rate (3.875%) exceeds available investment returns (Vanguard at approximately 3.6%), making principal reduction the more advantageous use of funds. Council agreed that the Finance Committee should develop a paydown plan and report each payment and its impact back to council through the Treasurer's monthly report; advance approval of individual payments will not be required.

- **Motion:** Leigh Pickels moved so that council approves the Finance Committee paying down the mortgage principal immediately as funds above \$200,000 are received.
- **Second:** Carl Erickson seconded.
- **Vote:** ☒ Approved unanimously

D. Letter from Dave Schiller concerning disaster relief outreach

Dave Schiller contacted Mike Dunavant and asked that council consider having Epiphany reach out to a Lutheran church in the Kentucky flood zone to support recovery, prompted by a CNN interview with Kentucky's governor about the importance of faith groups in disaster response. The executive committee had discussed the idea, and council agreed the matter fits within Community Service/ministry outreach. Rather than adopting a specific congregation, council favored directing support through Lutheran Disaster Response, including a giving link in the next Constant Contact communication (as was done for Hurricane Helene). Pastor Phillip Martin will include the link. No motion was required.

7. Anything for Hanne?

- The approved June 9, 2026, council meeting minutes and June 18, 2026, council special meeting minutes will be forwarded to Hanne Hamlin (and Turner) for posting on Epiphany's website. Markus Groener will provide the approved minutes.

8. Next Meetings

- The next council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, August 11, 2026, at 7:00 PM.
- Leigh Pickels will lead devotions and the opening prayer.

9. Closing Prayer

Markus Groener offered the closing prayer, giving thanks for the time together and the work shared, asking God to accompany the council into their homes, work, and community, to keep them grounded in grace, and to send them out renewed in faith and attentive to the small and ordinary ways God is at work in the world.

10. Adjournment

Council Vice-President Jane Huddle adjourned the meeting at approximately 8:38 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Markus K. Groener

Church Council Secretary