

Epiphany Evangelical Lutheran Church

Church Congregational Council Meeting Minutes — Special Meeting

Thursday, June 18, 2026 – 6:00 PM (via Zoom Video Conference)

Attendees

Present (via video conference): Mike Dunavant (President), Jane Huddle (Vice-President), Markus Groener (Secretary), Jennifer Edwards (Treasurer), Joseph Bolick, Carl Erickson, Matt Greenshields, Sarah Lang, Phillip Martin, Cindy McClintock, Gwen Newman, Leigh Pickels

Absent: Missy Hill

1. Call to Order and Purpose of the Special Meeting

Council President Mike Dunavant called the special meeting to order at approximately 6:00 PM, thanking members for joining on short notice. The meeting was convened by video conference for the single purpose previewed at the June 9, 2026, regular council meeting: to receive Pastor Phillip Martin's recommendation on the open Finance Manager position and, because the employment offer formally comes from council, to consider extending an offer to the proposed candidate, Elizabeth Hurst. A quorum was present. No devotions were held, given the brief, single-purpose nature of the meeting. President Dunavant turned the meeting over to Pastor Phillip to present the candidate.

2. Presentation of the Candidate

Pastor Phillip Martin reminded council that he had circulated a written background summary and Elizabeth Hurst's resume by email earlier in the day, and noted for the record that he was working without his candidate files, which had been left at the office. He summarized the candidate as follows.

Elizabeth Hurst is a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) who currently serves as bookkeeper for Bonaire Presbyterian Church (on Huguenot Road, roughly Epiphany's size at approximately 271 active members) and its preschool, working about six hours per week. She would retain that role and add Epiphany's position; Bonaire's leadership is supportive of the arrangement. She also holds a separate part-time position (approximately 20–30 hours per week) that she intends to step away from, as it has proven to be too much. Pastor Phillip noted that Hurst, on her own initiative, had researched the church's Realm software and watched training videos before her interview, reflecting an interest in learning new systems.

Debbie Sexton, the outgoing Finance Manager who is retiring after ten years, had reviewed the candidate resumes and considered Hurst overqualified for the role. Hurst was interviewed by Pastor Phillip together with Jennifer Edwards and finance team members

Fran and Jim; the interview went well. Council members observed that Hurst presents a different personality than Debbie — quieter and more reserved.

Pastor Phillip reported that he had reached one of Hurst's references, the volunteer treasurer at Bonaire Presbyterian (Jennifer Edwards's counterpart there), who spoke highly of her, describing her as adaptable and willing to learn each church's preferred accounting practices. The reference also noted that Hurst has come through a difficult couple of years following the death of her husband and is ready to take on more, and that while Bonaire is fully supportive of her adding the Epiphany role, they value her and would not want to lose her.

3. Council Discussion

Council discussed the recommendation at length. Jennifer Edwards reiterated the reservations she had shared in her pre-meeting email, noting that they stemmed primarily from the fact that only one candidate had been interviewed, in a single interview of about an hour, leaving no basis for comparison. She observed that Hurst is a different, more reserved personality than Debbie Sexton, raised the question of longevity given a similar career stage, and expressed some uncertainty about interpersonal fit — how Hurst would interact with the congregation, council, committees, and external partners. At the same time, Jennifer affirmed Hurst's strong credentials as a CPA with the technical and fund-accounting background the role requires, including her completion of coursework in fund accounting and her experience producing church and preschool financials.

Pastor Phillip and other members noted that Hurst had embraced the supportive nature of the role: while she indicated she would prepare the budget and prefer that Jennifer present it, she offered to "put together a Google deck that will make you shine." The reference had also noted that Hurst takes an active interest in the life of the congregation she serves.

Gwen Newman, Jane Huddle, and Carl Erickson discussed whether to attach a probationary period to the offer, with monthly check-ins over an initial three-month period, to ensure a good fit. Pastor Phillip expressed reluctance to use formal "probationary" language, explaining that as supervisor he would need clearly defined benchmarks he was not prepared to set, and that he prefers to frame any such period as mutual monthly check-ins — a practice he already follows with new hires. Jennifer cautioned that a formal probationary designation was unnecessary, since both parties are effectively evaluating the fit regardless. Markus Groener noted additional safeguards already in place: Debbie Sexton, who has documented her procedures, will assist with onboarding and could raise concerns if needed, and Virginia is an at-will (right-to-work) state, so the church retains the ability to part ways if the arrangement does not work out. Leigh Pickels made the same point regarding at-will employment. Council reached consensus that regular monthly check-ins are sound management practice but need not be written into the motion as a formal probationary condition.

Cindy McClintock asked that any offer be contingent on a background check. Pastor Phillip confirmed that the offer would be extended pending a clear background check.

4. Motion to Extend an Offer of Employment

Following discussion, council acted to authorize the offer of employment to Elizabeth Hurst for the Finance Manager position, contingent on a clear background check.

- **Motion:** Markus Groener moved to extend an offer to Elizabeth Hurst to hire her as Finance Manager, contingent on a clear background check.
- **Second:** Carl Erickson seconded (Jane Huddle concurred).
- **Vote:**  Approved unanimously

5. Compensation Authorization

Pastor Phillip then presented the proposed compensation. Drawing on the range council had previously developed of \$28 to \$30 per hour, he illustrated the bounds: at the low end (\$28/hour for roughly 12 hours per week) the annual salary would be approximately \$17,472, and at the high end (\$30/hour for 15 hours per week) approximately \$23,400. He asked council to authorize him to negotiate and extend a salary offer not to exceed \$23,000 per year, noting that the ceiling, rather than the floor, was the operative limit.

Jennifer Edwards observed that the figure sits in the bookkeeper range and may be low for a CPA performing finance-manager-level work, citing market references closer to \$30–\$40 per hour for comparable nonprofit and church roles. Members acknowledged that churches generally pay below market, that Debbie Sexton is currently paid less than \$23,000, and that the position is part-time at roughly 12–15 hours per week. Several members noted that Hurst's CPA credential — maintained through 40 hours of annual continuing education per the Virginia Society of CPAs — along with her degrees in accounting and finance, supported trending toward the higher end of the range. Markus Groener suggested a negotiation approach of offering somewhat below the ceiling while holding room to move upward, with Pastor Phillip retaining the option to return to council if Hurst's expectations materially exceeded the authorized ceiling. Council agreed to authorize up to \$23,000.

- **Motion:** Cindy McClintock moved to authorize Pastor Phillip Martin to negotiate and extend a salary offer not to exceed \$23,000 per year (within the established range of approximately \$17,472 to \$23,400).
- **Second:** Carl Erickson seconded.
- **Vote:**  Approved unanimously

6. Action Items

- Pastor Phillip Martin will extend an offer of employment to Elizabeth Hurst for the Finance Manager position, at a negotiated salary not to exceed \$23,000 per year, contingent on a clear background check.
- A background check will be conducted before the offer is finalized.

- Debbie Sexton will assist with onboarding and transition, drawing on the procedures she has already documented.
- Pastor Phillip will conduct regular monthly check-ins with the new hire during the initial months as ordinary management practice (not a formal probationary condition).

7. Adjournment

With no further business, Council President Mike Dunavant thanked Pastor Phillip and all who participated in the search and adjourned the meeting at approximately 7:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Markus K. Groener

Church Council Secretary