

2025 State of the Church

Rev. Lesly Broadbent

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This is my fifth Church Conference at Polk Street Methodist Church. These have been amazing years of ministry for Amy and me. The way you have accepted us into this community has been incredible. You care for us just like you care for all who are new to Amarillo and Polk Street. We are honored to serve here in your midst, and we look forward to many more years of fruitful and exciting ministry together.

The past year has been filled with exciting new adventures, opportunities for ministry, and growth. By way of measurable metrics, our worship attendance was up by 4% in 2025 after increasing 2% in 2024. Our Sunday school attendance is also up just a bit for the second year in a row. This is healthy, steady, and sustainable growth. We are able to initiate new members into the life of the church, connecting them to small groups, Sunday school classes, and ministries. These are wonderful areas of growth, but they pale in comparison to the financial growth we have seen at Polk Street. Our Sunday offerings have increased by more than \$200,000 over 2024. Our total income has increased by almost \$375,000. This has helped us get closer to our goal of becoming financially sound after 20 years of running short each summer. For the first time in 20 years, we did not have to borrow from our restricted accounts in order to meet our monthly expenses. We came very close, but we made it through the year without having to borrow from ourselves.

We made some significant strides in our facility management and upgrades this year. We purchased the lot on 300 S. Taylor and demolished the house that had been the subject of illicit activity for many years. This brings us a step closer to completing another phase in our master plan of expanding our parking lot. We also installed new exterior doors by the chapel, replaced the caulking around the exterior sidewalks, installed sound proofing in Wesley Hall, retubed the boilers, and made numerous other upgrades to mechanical systems. We were able to purchase the lot without borrowing money because of a generous gift we had received over five years ago. We were able to make all these other improvements because the Endowment Committee increased the dividends we receive from our endowment investments. The step the Endowment Committee took last year to increase our dividends from 2.2% to 5% has allowed the Trustees to perform more maintenance and upkeep on our facilities. One major Trustees project that is not yet complete, or even started, is the insurance claim we have on our damaged roof. We have been in negotiations with our insurance company for the past three and a half years. We are close to an agreement, but negotiations are still ongoing. (This settlement has now been completed.) Once a settlement is reached work will begin to repair our roof and water damage in our sanctuary. We anticipate we will need to worship in the Great Hall while the repairs to the sanctuary take place. This will be a major renovation to our church that will disrupt our weekly ministries, but these repairs will carry us through the next 50 years. While these repairs are being made the Trustees will decide on what other improvements throughout the facility can be made in anticipation of the centennial anniversary of our church facility coming up in 2028.

All of this is amazing news, but the most important thing in our church right now is that we are beginning to see the results of our evangelistic endeavors. We are seeing new people come to faith in Jesus Christ. The Alpha course we offered last fall has made a lasting impact on multiple people who

have come to faith. We anticipate we will offer this amazing course at least every other year as we become more comfortable in making friends with the unchurched and non-Christian.

Finally, we are proud to be the flagship partner and supporter of the new Global Methodist Hispanic church. Along with numerous other Methodist churches in the area we were approached with this opportunity last spring. When we heard the vision and met the pastor we were sold on this important ministry. It is an opportunity for us to be involved in reaching a population we have little to no opportunity to reach through our current ministries. Pastor Johnny and his team are worshipping each Sunday afternoon at St. Paul Methodist Church. They are reaching mostly non-believers and unchurched Spanish speakers in Amarillo. We have met with the leadership of this new church and set out benchmarks for them to reach in order for our funding to continue. We anticipate these benchmarks to be met and exceeded in the coming year. I ask that you join me in praying for this new ministry we are supporting.

Moving forward, there are a number of initiatives we are looking forward to next year. First, although we made significant progress in becoming more financially stable, we want to make even more progress. For most non-profit organizations, at least three months of reserves are needed in order to be financially stable. That means we need over \$500,000 in reserves to begin the year. This year our cash reserves grew to \$330,000, significantly higher than in previous years, but still far below what we need. We hope we can increase our reserves to a healthy level by increasing our income while reducing our expenses. We have worked hard on both fronts. The budget proposed for 2026 includes a \$35,000 increase, however our property insurance is increasing by \$54,000. This means the rest of the budget is actually decreasing. Thanks to the hard work of the staff to cut costs across the board we will continue to see cost savings throughout the year next year. Increasing income means members of Polk Street will need to begin to give more to the church. It will be more than one or two large givers stepping up. It will take every member of the church to increase their giving for us to build up a healthy reserve.

Another important ministry next year will be our emphasis on prayer. As 2025 was the Year of the Bible, 2026 will be the Year of Prayer. We have seen amazing results from our yearlong emphasis on reading the Bible. I have heard reports from lifelong members who are reading the Bible daily for the first time in their lives. I even heard of one older adult who is reading the Bible with her daughter over the phone each day. The results have been astounding, and we anticipate similar results through our emphasis on prayer. We will once again offer a daily Bible reading plan, but we will also add a weekly prayer guide as well as multiple classes on prayer. We anticipate we will transition from a church who prays to a praying church.

Finally, we anticipate we will make it through the fifth year of a pastorate cycle. We are continuing to experience the ongoing challenges of the “crossroads” life stage, as described by author and church consultant Thom Rainer. The third and fourth years of a pastorate often include conflicts and challenges. In this stage the church begins to recognize the imperfections in the pastor’s ministry. Some congregants become disillusioned and dissatisfied. For others, their expectations, often unspoken, have been unmet by the Pastor. Likewise, the pastor also begins to see flaws in the church. A perpetual lack of volunteers, financial resources, or leaders begins to erode the pastor’s once optimistic outlook. The fifth year of a pastoral tenure is a crossroads moment. It is not by accident that the average pastoral tenure is four years across all churches in the United States. The fifth year is a difficult year. In Polk Street’s history we have only had four pastors remain at Polk Street longer than six

years. That's astounding for a church of our size and stature. Thom Rainer in his book *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, writes of this season "If the pastor and the church manage their relationship well, they can often look forward to some of the best years ahead." I anticipate we will see a more unified church once we make it through this crossroads season. It is important for us to manage conflict well during this season.

As I mentioned last year, it must not be lost on us what God is doing here. All across the country mid-size and large cities are littered with dying downtown, traditional worship churches just like Polk Street. But we are bucking that trend. Not only is there warmth, honest devotion, true faithfulness, and genuine authenticity here, we are seeing the Holy Spirit bubbling up all around the church. More people are praying. More people are reading the Word. More people are hearing God's voice. More people are stepping out in faith. The spiritual growth we are seeing at Polk Street right now is far greater than what I have seen in any other church I have pastored.

So, it is an honor and a joy to be the Lead Pastor of this great church, among you, such amazing people. I can hardly wait to see what God will do among us and through us in the coming year. May God bless us with His grace, His presence, and His power this year and in the years to come.