The State of the Church

November 2026

Prayers, People, Potlucks, and Possibilities

Sun Lakes United Methodist Church | Charge Conference 2026

John Wesley famously said, "The world is my parish." I'm fairly certain he never had to navigate a church committee meeting, a malfunctioning microphone, or the delicate question of who gets to use the Fellowship Hall on Tuesday afternoon.

Nevertheless, Methodism marches on.

As we consider the state of Sun Lakes United Methodist Church, I offer a few observations, organized around some alliterative themes and accompanied by the occasional haiku. After all, if we can summarize nearly forty years of ministry in seventeen syllables, perhaps there's hope for shorter committee meetings.

1. Prayers, Praise, and Pews

Sunday bells ring out
Old friends gather, new friends come
Grace fills every pew

Worship remains the heartbeat of our congregation. We gather to sing, pray, hear Scripture, celebrate the sacraments, and occasionally discover that the pastor and the organist are not on quite the same page.

Our congregation continues to demonstrate that faithfulness has no expiration date. We may be a congregation of retirees, but retirement from employment is not retirement from discipleship.

And while our pews may not always be as full as we would like, our calling is not simply to fill seats. It is to form disciples, nurture faith, and share God's love.

2. People, Pastoral Care, and Persistent Compassion

Some days hearts are heavy
Friends bring comfort, hope, and grace
Love makes burdens light

At Sun Lakes, pastoral care is not merely a program. It is part of our DNA.

We have expanded our ministries of care, including grief support, wellness opportunities, prayer, counseling, and outreach to those who may feel isolated or forgotten.

In a community where the phrase "I've lost another friend" is heard far too often, these ministries matter profoundly.

We cannot eliminate grief, reverse aging, or guarantee that everyone's hearing aids will work during the sermon. But we can ensure that no one has to face life's challenges alone.

3. Programs, Partnerships, and Possibilities

New ideas take root
Calendars fill up again
God keeps calling us

If you've looked at our church calendar recently, you may have wondered whether anyone at Sun Lakes is actually retired.

Our campus is increasingly a place where community and congregation meet. Wellness programs, support groups, educational opportunities, and partnerships with community organizations are creating new connections.

We are discovering that ministry doesn't always begin with an invitation to Sunday worship. Sometimes it begins with a yoga mat, a grief support group, a conversation over coffee, or simply the assurance that someone cares.

The Holy Spirit, it turns out, is not restricted to Sunday mornings between 9 and 10.

4. Participation, Persistence, and People Who Volunteer

Helping hands abound
Someone always says, "I'll help"
Grace wears work clothes, too

Our volunteers are extraordinary.

They serve on committees, visit the homebound, prepare communion, maintain our facilities, welcome guests, organize missions, assist with worship, and do approximately 847 other things that rarely appear in a job description.

Some of them have served so faithfully for so long that I suspect they were appointed by John Wesley himself.

We are grateful for every one of them.

But we also recognize that even the most faithful volunteers need rest, encouragement, and the occasional opportunity to say, "No, thank you."

5. Problems, Potholes, and Providence

Plans go slightly wrong
Committees discuss the plans
Grace gets us through it

No honest State of the Church report would be complete without acknowledging our challenges.

We face changing patterns of participation, the realities of an aging congregation, staffing transitions, financial responsibilities, and the ongoing work of maintaining a campus that, like many of us, occasionally needs a little extra attention.

And yes, sometimes we disagree.

We are United Methodists, after all. We believe in grace, connection, and the importance of having a committee to discuss both.

But our challenges do not define us. How we respond to them does.

We continue to practice patience, extend grace, make thoughtful decisions, and trust that God is at work even when the path forward is not entirely clear.

6. Promise, Purpose, and the Next Forty Years

Forty years of faith
Still, the Spirit calls us forth
New dreams take their shape

In February, we will celebrate forty years of ministry at Sun Lakes United Methodist Church.

Forty years of worship, service, fellowship, mission, and faithful witness. Forty years of people who believed that God was doing something important in this community.

And now we have an opportunity to ask a new question: What will faithfulness look like in the years ahead?

Our anniversary celebration will invite clergy, community members, and our congregation to reflect upon Christian hope. Bishop Will Willimon will join us, and we will explore what it means to hold onto hope in an anxious world and in the second half of life.

Of course, we will also eat together. We are Methodists. Some traditions are simply too sacred to abandon.

The Final Assessment

So, what is the state of our church?

We are **praying and praising, caring and connecting, serving and supporting, adapting and anticipating.**

We are not perfect. Our calendars are crowded, our committees are committed, and our coffee is occasionally questionable.

But our faith is alive, our mission is meaningful, and our future is filled with possibility.

We are rooted in faith and growing in grace.

And if I may conclude with one final haiku:

God is not finished
Grace keeps surprising us all
Pass the coffee, please.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

The state of the church? We're not yet perfect, but we're going on to perfection. And according to the Book of Discipline, we may need a committee to get there.