

## 2019 Mission Endowment Fund Recipient – St. John Lutheran Church – Wilson, TX Supporting the South Plains Food Bank Mobile Pantry



*In 2019, the Mission Endowment Fund granted \$80,000 to 29 ministries.  
This is one of the ministries.*

Are you thinking your congregation is too small to make an impact in your community and give public witness to your Christian faith? It can happen! And this is the story as told by SAWL Tonda Freitag about how St. John Lutheran Church in Wilson became involved with the South Plains Mobile Food Bank.

St. John has received a grant from the Mission Endowment Fund for the last three years to support this ministry. SAWL Tonda Freitag shares this information: As a small congregation with only about 30 active members and an average worship attendance of 18, it is a blessing to provide such a service in our community that has no other feeding program available. We typically have about 6-10 volunteers, ages 6 to 81, each month which allows us to screen and load the cars swiftly and efficiently right on the parking lot of our church.



A couple of years ago, we also became a distribution site for a federally funded program that provides a 40 lb. box of food and a 2 lb. block of cheese to senior citizens each month. That means some of our households receive even more food if they qualify for the senior program.

It is an amazing story how we at St. John became involved. The partnership between St. John and South Plains Food Bank began in June of 2013. I live in the community of Tahoka about 10 miles from Wilson and had noticed a food bank truck at one of the Tahoka churches and a LOOOONNNGGG line of cars on their property. As our congregation was seeking a community outreach program, I contacted the Mobile Pantry Coordinator at the Food Bank to see what might be happening in Tahoka and learned that the program serves approximately 20 counties surrounding Lubbock. They send a refrigerated truck filled with food boxes to select locations once a month where pre-screened clients receive a box of dry goods and a box of frozen foods. There are often additional items distributed, depending on what the South Plains Food Bank has available, including fresh produce or canned drinks or various other goodies. A volunteer checks in each client by walking down the line of vehicles, using a list of those who have been approved for the program. To receive the food, clients then move forward to the truck where volunteers load the food in their vehicles. The clients don't even have to get out of their cars. The process is designed to serve 100 clients in less than 30 minutes!!! It's an amazing process.



I also learned they were looking for a site in Wilson. That night, I presented the idea to a church council meeting, and it was overwhelmingly approved! So our involvement began. Each year, with the help of SPFB staff, we screen the clients who must be below a certain income level based on the number of people in the household. If they fall below those preset limits, then we can distribute food. We can also screen clients on an emergency basis, like if they're having high medical bills, and just need to get back on their feet. We currently serve approximately 30 households that include about 100 people.



Due to bulk purchasing and donations to the food bank, each household unit costs us \$7 for most folks, or \$3.50 for senior citizens. It would be impossible to go to a store and buy the same amount of food for that price. Additionally, for a small additional fee we can distribute Christmas boxes through the South Plains Food Bank, including an extra box of canned goods, a box of "goodies" that includes holiday treats, and either a turkey or ham.

The gratitude expressed by the clients makes this ministry of giving food to those who are hungry even more rewarding. Receiving a Mission Endowment Fund grant has made this ministry something that we can continue in our small congregation. One year we served over 50 households instead of our average 30. I can't even begin to describe the joy that I see each month as we go through this process . . . the joy of the volunteers as well as the clients. Many have identified St. John as a congregation that has the gift of hospitality and this ministry helps us express that gift in a unique way.

**Thank you, Tonda Freitag, for sharing your story.**