



## Celebrating Small Churches

**25 in Worship - 37,000 meals!** For too long, congregations have been measured by size rather than faithfulness. Some were told they were too small, too remote, too old, or too fragile to survive. Yet they are still here. They are serving their neighbors, sharing Christ's love, and helping their communities flourish.

As Barbara Barkley and I travel the church, we want to help tell these stories—stories from small congregations, congregations of color, immigrant congregations, First Nation congregations, LGBTQIA+ congregations, rural congregations, and other communities whose voices are not always heard but whose witness is helping shape the church's future.

Today, we share one of those stories. It's a long one, so we'll tell it in three parts. Together, these volunteers from a congregation averaging just 25 people in worship have served more than **37,000 meals** to their community.

### Edgewood Presbyterian Church "Saturday of Service (SOS)" – Part 1

Saturday of Service (SOS) began in the fall of 2020 as a pandemic ministry. Unable to gather in the usual ways, volunteers prepared meals at the church and distributed them to people waiting in vehicles outside. About 100 meals were served that first day—and we learned quickly that offering menu choices was not the best idea.

Encouraged by the response, we expanded to low-income housing and assisted living communities. Soon, volunteer drivers were delivering meals to seniors, people with disabilities, and others facing transportation challenges. Within six months, SOS was serving approximately 150 meals each month.

By the end of 2021, the holiday meal reached 419 people.

Not everyone was convinced the ministry would last. Questions were raised about cost, staffing, and sustainability. Yet those conversations helped clarify our purpose: SOS was not simply about food. It was an opportunity to live the Gospel by serving Christ through serving others. What began as a response to a crisis became a calling.

As the ministry grew, so did the challenges. Grants, donations, and community support helped provide needed equipment, including commercial refrigeration, a new stove, and a fire-suppression system. SOS also committed itself to environmental stewardship by using biodegradable containers and recycling whenever possible.

One Saturday stands out above all others. On November 18, 2023, SOS served 945 meals. Cars stretched down Brush Road, and many people waited nearly an hour. Yet no one complained. They were simply grateful. At the end of the day, I stepped outside and found myself in tears—grateful for what God had done through this ministry. The following Thanksgiving meal served 1,263 people, followed by 963 meals at Christmas.

For a congregation averaging about 25 worshipers each Sunday, this ministry would have been impossible alone. Volunteers came from neighboring churches, community organizations, WVSOM,

local civic groups, and sometimes simply from passing cars. Strangers became friends. Friends became partners in ministry.

SOS continues to grow, along with the need for volunteers and financial support. What began as a small pandemic project has become a community-wide ministry—and a powerful reminder that God can do extraordinary things through ordinary people willing to serve.

## ***The Challenges and Impact – Part 2***

Today, SOS delivers meals throughout the Greenbrier Valley to apartment communities, assisted living facilities, first responders, hospice staff, domestic violence shelter residents, recovery ministries, and individuals in their homes. What began as a small pandemic ministry has become a network of care reaching hundreds of people each month.

In 2022, we began giving a free children's book to every child who came through the drive-thru. For some families, books are a luxury. Watching a child receive a book is every bit as rewarding as serving a meal. That same year, we started keeping dog treats on hand for our four-legged visitors, who quickly became part of the SOS family.

Another cherished tradition is the Prayer Pot. Guests are invited to share prayer requests as they move through the line. At the end of each serving day, volunteers gather to pray for every person and concern placed in the pot. Meals nourish the body; prayer nourishes the spirit.

Milestones have become celebrations. When SOS served its 10,000th and later its 25,000th meal, volunteers paused their work to celebrate with balloons, confetti, and gratitude for what God had made possible.

One of the most rewarding outcomes has been watching other churches launch similar ministries. When service inspires service, the impact reaches far beyond a single congregation.

SOS has also expanded beyond Greenbrier County. Following the devastating floods in southern West Virginia in 2025, volunteers traveled to McDowell County with meals, bottled water, food supplies, and donated quilts for affected families. Serving neighbors in need does not stop at county lines.

The ministry has not been without challenges. Deliveries arrive late. Supplies run short. Volunteers occasionally miss a shift. Plans sometimes change at the last minute. Yet every obstacle has taught us flexibility, perseverance, and trust. We have learned to adapt, solve problems, and keep moving forward.

What continues to amaze us most is the generosity of people. Donations arrive unexpectedly. Needed equipment appears at just the right moment. Volunteers travel long distances simply to help prepare and serve meals. Time and again, people have stepped forward because they wanted to make a difference in someone else's life.

Today, SOS is a separate 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with its own board of directors. Yet its mission remains unchanged: addressing food insecurity and extending compassion to anyone who needs a meal, a prayer, or a reminder that they are not alone.

We have dreams for the future, but the lesson of the past five years is simple: no dream is too big when Christ is leading the way.

Jesus calls us to serve others with love and kindness, expecting nothing in return. Yet somehow, in serving others, we discover that we receive far more than we give.

### ***The People Served – Part 3***

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to share the story of Saturday of Service. But SOS is not really about meals. It's about people.

Meet Chris and Trey, two boys who walked more than a mile from Spruce Cove Apartments to get a meal. Later that afternoon, they returned with their sister and a backpack. They collected meals to take home, and this time we insisted on giving them a ride back.

Meet Larry, a delivery volunteer who was asked by a resident to place her meal in the refrigerator. When he opened the door, the only thing inside was a bottle of ketchup.

Meet Patricia from Alderson, who was thrilled to receive spaghetti with meat sauce. She told us she never makes it that way because she cannot afford the meat.

Meet Elissa, a drive-thru volunteer who greeted an elderly man in a nice car. He admitted he didn't really need the meal. What he needed was human interaction—a smiling face, a warm greeting, and someone to talk to.

Meet Mrs. Davis, who called after the Thanksgiving meal to thank us for the delicious "stuffin." She hoped we'd serve that "stuffin" again.

Meet Tonya, a delivery volunteer who stopped to offer a meal to a young man pushing his bicycle in Fairlea. He threw his hands in the air and shouted, "Praise God!"

Meet Katie, a young mother with two children who was grateful for a few meals because she was down to her last \$2.37.

Meet Mr. LaRue, a widower who came through the drive-thru because, since his wife had died, he had not enjoyed a home-cooked meal in a very long time.

Meet James and John, two delivery volunteers attempting to deliver meals to the Lewisburg Police Department. After getting no answer at the door and no response by phone, they headed back toward the church. Along the way, they spotted a Lewisburg police cruiser traveling in the opposite direction. Certain they had found their recipient, they pulled into the center lane, turned on their flashers, rolled down their windows, and enthusiastically waved at the officer.

They definitely got his attention. The officer pulled into the center lane—with his lights flashing—and approached the truck, wanting to know exactly what they thought they were doing. Their response was simple: "We're just trying to deliver your lunch." The misunderstanding ended with smiles, laughter, and a police escort back to the station so the officers on duty could receive their meals.

These are only a few of the thousands of people whose lives have intersected with SOS over the past five years. Some came looking for a meal. Some needed companionship. Some needed prayer. Some needed hope. And in every one of them, we encountered Christ.

***That may be the greatest lesson SOS has taught us. We started by serving meals. Along the way, we discovered that the real ministry has always been about seeing our neighbors, loving them well, and reminding them that they matter.***

More than 37,000 meals later, we remain grateful for the opportunity to serve.

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