



## Celebrating the Angel Soap Pantry of the First Presbyterian Church at Philipsburg

Presbyterians have focused on hunger issues for a long time, and this is as it should be. However, funding for food programs rarely has anything extra for personal hygiene, laundry, or cleaning products. Nor can these items be purchased with food stamps. Government funds are non-existent in this area.

In 2014 the Mission Committee at First Presbyterian learned of this deficiency and decided, with Session approval, to open the Angel Soap Pantry in the fall of 2015. God has provided through gifts from the congregation and the occasional donation from another church or organization in the community.

We believe in the old adage that “Cleanliness is next to Godliness” and recognize that the struggle to maintain one’s health and well-being with very limited resources can result in a loss of dignity and may lead to depression or even spiritual issues. Children and teens are often bullied because they lack the means to attend school, showered and wearing clean clothes. Poor health can result from the inability to be clean and live in a clean environment as readily as a lack of food.

Because we did not want to probe into the financial status of our potential clients, we asked the local food bank to screen their clients for eligibility. The staff of the Philipsburg Community Action food bank use vouchers which we provide to give our pantry staff the very limited information required. If the client brings a voucher signed by the CA staff, we serve them. The only additional thing we request is identification. On occasion, a first-time client enters the pantry not having visited the food bank. We still give them the requested items, telling them they will need to present a voucher the next time and each succeeding time. Some are in desperate circumstances, but regardless, all are grateful for what they receive, knowing that with these products, their struggle to pay the rent or put food on the table has been lightened just a bit.

The very poor, the elderly on very limited incomes, the homeless, jobless, transients, etc. have benefited from the soap pantry. God loves us all no matter our condition. We are also called to love them. They may feel better about themselves having the means to achieve cleanliness, both of their persons and their homes. Who knows when an angel might be helped unaware.