

## ***Volunteers needed to package 160,000 meals Feb. 21-23 in Imperial***



***By Sheri Hink-Wagner  
The Wauneta Breeze***

Mercy Meals of Southwest Nebraska is working with Orphan Grain Train and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) to host a large-scale meal packing event in Imperial on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, Feb. 21-23.

"The purpose is simply what Jesus said in Matthew, 'Feed the people,'" said Pastor Keith Wellman, Mercy Meals of Southwest Nebraska Board President.

Mercy Meals is currently recruiting volunteers to help package meals during the "Feed the Philippines" event.

"This is a very ambitious goal and we are looking forward to seeing the community rise to the challenge," Pastor Wellman said.

The Imperial packing effort will be held at Zion Lutheran Evangelical Church.

"Mercy Meals is an organization that is dedicated to providing life sustaining subsistence meals to hungry and starving people around the world," explains Michael Widhalm with Orphan Grain Train.

"If you are able to raise a fork to your mouth you can pack a meal," Pastor Wellman said.

Organizers said they will accommodate volunteers of all ages. Stools can be provided for those who have difficulty standing for a two-hour shift. Pastor Wellman added young and strong teenagers are also needed on every shift to help move the boxes of raw food product and packaged meals around.

The event will include a total of 10 two-hour shifts where groups or individual volunteers can package meals. A total of 540 volunteers are needed, roughly 50 volunteers each shift.

At the end of the weekend, volunteers will have packed 160,000 meals for starving children and families impacted by the typhoon that hit the Philippines on Nov. 8, 2013.

According to the LCMS website, "The storm displaced four million people, killed nearly 6,000 and destroyed everything in its path. Emergency food provisions and rebuilding homes and churches on the island of Leyte are part of the ongoing relief efforts by the LCMS and the Lutheran Church in the Philippines."

The meals—which consist of rice, soy, dehydrated vegetables, chicken flavored vitamin and mineral powder—are designed to be gentle on the digestive system of individuals who may be malnourished or starving.

These raw food products are packaged together in sealed plastic pouches. Recipients can eat the food after it has been boiled for 20 minutes.

Widhalm notes, the cooking process has the added benefit of making cooking water sanitary. He said this is a benefit because in many places where Mercy Meals are shipped there is no access to clean water for cooking or drinking.

"Feed the Philippines" has a goal of packaging one million meals total. In addition to the Imperial event, "Feed the Philippines" events will be completed in Sioux City, Iowa, Lincoln, Hastings, Norfolk and Wauneta. The target completion date for packaging all one million meals is April 30, 2014.

The events were made possible by a grant from LCMS to purchase the raw food supplies needed for the packing event. Transportation and distribution of the packaged meals is provided by Orphan Grain Train at no charge.

Mercy Meals has ordered the raw food products to package the meals at the Imperial packing event, which will be delivered to the Zion Lutheran Evangelical Church in Imperial on Feb. 21. The Orphan Grain Train truck will stay on site to get the meals started on their voyage to the Philippines.

**Sign up online or by phone**

Individuals and groups are invited to volunteer to package meals at the "Feed the Philippines" event. Volunteers can sign up at [mercymealsofsouthwestnebraska.org](http://mercymealsofsouthwestnebraska.org) or by calling Laurie Kerchal at 308-350-0975 or Rick Einspahr at 308-883-0759. The organization can be reached by mail at P.O. Box 474, Wauneta, Neb., 69045.