

## Snapshot of Willow UMC

### Name of Church & Ministry:

Willow United Methodist Church and Willow Community Food Pantry

### Advance Special Number (Two ways to give):

Willow UMC and the Food Pantry are supported through the Advance. You can either submit gifts through your conference treasurer, or by going to [www.UMCMission.org](http://www.UMCMission.org), and reference the following numbers:

- Willow UMC -- #931511
- Willow Food Pantry -- #931520

When you partner with us in ministry, we will regularly keep you up to date through newsletters and e-mails about what is happening here, and any special projects as they arise.

### The mission field / community it serves:

Willow and Houston Areas of the Susitna Valley

### Brief history of the Church/Mission:

The Willow ministry was founded in the early 80s as part of the Parks Highway Parish, which also included congregations in Wasilla and Trapper Creek, a span of over 90 miles!

Willow UMC is near the center of the area that makes up Willow. We are the only mainline Protestant church for over 30 miles, and one of the largest churches in Willow. With about 40-50 in worship each Sunday, we

are a larger family-like church. Much of our focus is on responding to the poverty we see around us.

Our Mission Statement is: *To be a mission outpost of the United Methodist Church in Alaska, and as Christ's disciples responding to God's love by our witness, stewardship and outreach with and for all persons and creation.*

Because of the outreach efforts of the Willow Food Pantry, Willow UMC is seen as a trusted source of help for those in need, and a caring place for children, youth, families, and adults.

### **Challenges of ministry in this particular setting:**

Willow, Alaska, spans about 30 miles of the Parks Highway, north of Anchorage. Mostly spread out and rural, the approximately 1200 residents represent an economically diverse spread. With easy access to Anchorage, Willow is a favorite spot for many weekenders who want to get out of the city for the 'real Alaska' experience. Anything from simple small cabins to extensive second homes are spaced throughout the area. Intermixed with this is one of the most impoverished areas of the state. Many people live completely 'off the grid,' with no electricity, water, or fuel source other than wood.

Many houses are temporary-turned-permanent, and not necessarily designed for winter weather. Since temperatures here can dip well below zero and stay there, and the snowfall can exceed 9-10 feet per winter, this creates some real challenges for people in those conditions.

The primary employment includes dog sled trainers and flight-guides for hunting and fishing. Beyond this and such things as teachers and services, employment opportunities are primarily based in communities roughly 30-40 miles away.

Willow is somewhat central to much of the state's road system, and was once even considered as a site for the state capital. Because of its location and accessibility, many great recreational, historical, and scenic locations are readily available within a day's drive.

## Something that surprises most people about your setting:

Many people who are most vulnerable economically and emotionally in the community also tend to be some of the most resilient people as well. While accustomed to dealing with hardship, they also can be some of the most cheerful people.

## What are the ministries that persons can support financially:

The Food Pantry Outreach ministry is a direct way to serve the people of the community who need it most. Also, support of the congregation allows for ongoing pastoral pre

## Story of what God is up to:

Much of the outreach ministry of the church is accomplished through the Willow Food Pantry. The ministry was formed 20 years ago in response to the poverty needs in this area. The weekly food pantry serves between 200-300 people monthly. We have a firewood ministry, help with specific construction projects on homes as needed, and have a fuel voucher program. The Food Pantry also partners with the Willow Health Organization and the Willow Area Community Organization (WACO) in improving services and events available to the community.

## Praying for this setting:

As with many parts of Alaska, we are always in the process of transition. Please be praying for the congregation and Food Pantry as we transition to new pastoral leadership. Please be praying for those in our community who are most vulnerable financially, economically, and socially. We ask

God's continued strength for the congregation and community to serve those whose family systems and support networks are not always helpful. We also ask that God continues to allow us to have a clear understanding of our call as the Body of Christ in mission together.

**How should "outside" churches reach us to be in dialogue about supporting the ministry:**

The church phone is 907.495.6638, and our email is [WillowUM@mtaonline.net](mailto:WillowUM@mtaonline.net)

**Do you have a need for work teams...and if so what work could they be doing:**

Yearly work teams help with construction projects, Vacation Bible School, chopping and distributing wood, and a number of other jobs as needed. Groups come from all over the country for 1-2 weeks during the summer. Staying at the church or in member's homes, we experience first-hand what it is to be in ministry together.