

# FAITHFUL SERVANT AWARD

**“Well done, good and faithful servant”  
Matthew 25:21**

**JOHN S. WILKEY**



For the first time, we honor one tonight who is not a Seminary alumnus. Rather, the award this year goes to elder John Wilkey from the Sterling, Kansas, Reformed Presbyterian Church. John Wilkey is the behind-the-scenes and unsung hero of much of the ministry of the Seminary in the past two decades. He and his wife, Phyllis, as the lead donors in the Bicentennial campaign, set the pace and opened doors for other gifts that would follow their pledge. John’s life is marked by humility, faithfulness, and generosity.

In presenting this award to John Wilkey, the Seminary is indirectly recognizing faithful elders, humble servants, and all who give sacrificially of their time, talents, and resources to the work of Christ’s Kingdom. Such service to the Lord and His church is oftentimes done with no human recognition. In the final analysis, we serve not to be recognized by others (although such recognition is Biblical), but to hear our Lord say as we complete our earthly journey, *Well done, good and faithful servant ... Enter into the joy of your Master.*

John Wilkey was born and raised in Sterling, Kansas. John attended Sterling High School and graduated from Sterling College in 1967. He became a math teacher and coach in Newton, Kansas, for one year and then in Salina, Kansas, for 6 years. He met his wife, Phyllis, at Sterling College. She also taught school for a few years, including one year in Alaska. But she is probably best known today in Sterling as the lady who makes cookies and has the “Oreo” (dutch belted) cows.

One of the biggest decisions of his life, John says, was whether to stay in teaching or move to Sterling to farm and raise a family. The opportunity to farm and work with livestock, raise children in a community like Sterling, and attend the church to which they wanted to be committed was too much to turn down.

Although John began farming in the 1970s with only 40 acres to call his own, he and his son Tanner now farm over 5,500 acres (including both land he owns and land he rents), has another 4,000 acres in pastureland, and (depending on the year and the time of year), has 4,000 cattle.

John has served the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Sterling, Kansas, in many ways. He was a deacon for 12 years, and has served as an elder since the early 1980s. Over the years, John has at various times taught the high school and junior high classes, served as youth group leader, coordinated the activities of the young married couples, and served as congregational chairman. For years, he led an investigative Bible study for young men in the community, the majority of whom were not Christians. He even spoke at a Seminary chapel service when he visited the Seminary once, pressing upon young pastors the need to know their flock well so that they could meet the individual needs of the members of their future congregations.

As mentioned above, John Wilkey's life is marked by humility, faithfulness, and generosity. Although willing and sometimes eager to be on the cutting edge of technology that impacts his business, his life is marked by being content with what he has, not eager to spend money on himself if there are other unmet Kingdom needs around him. John and Phyllis still live in the house he grew up in sixty, or even seventy, years ago.

John's gift of generosity has profited the kingdom in many ways, very often behind the scenes. Whether it is the local church, the Seminary, Sterling College, or even extended family members in need, John and Phyllis have provided help when they can. They were the lead donors in our bicentennial campaign a decade ago, and because of their early pledge in the campaign, others gave because everyone was so encouraged because of the magnitude of their gift.

John has served on many boards, including the Sterling School Board, Sterling Co-op Board, Sterling College Board of Trustees, Rice County Community Foundation, and the local bank board. He has also been a strong supporter of 4-H in Rice County. He is owner or part-owner of Sunflower Cattle Company and the Clark County Feed Yard. John continues to buy cattle for the Wilkey Farm operations.

John was awarded the Master Farmer Award in 2010 for the state of Kansas and the Sterling High School Black Bear Award in 2012. Both of these awards were for his excellence in farming, combined with the way his life has made a difference in the Sterling community.

John and Phyllis are parents of two sons. Their oldest son, Justin, is employed at Flight Safety International as a mechanical engineer. He and his wife, Joy, live in Coweta, OK. They have three children: Jackson, Isaac, and Tess. Tanner is the second-born. He is self-employed on the farm, and works alongside his dad with the cattle and farm operations. Tanner is married to Courtney, and they have two children, Annie and Hank.

Nearly two years ago, John began to notice that his body was not responding quite right in certain situations. He began to tire easily and was unable to work the long days that he was used to working. He went to this doctor and that doctor looking for a diagnosis. At first, one doctor thought that he had had a stroke, prescribing exercises to try to get his dexterity back. Last year, John and Phyllis went to Mayo Clinic to see what was wrong. This esteemed clinic diagnosed him with Parkinsonism, and basically sent him home to do certain exercises to slow down the effects of the Parkinsonism.

Please pray for John and Phyllis. The path they are on will not be an easy one.

