

## Friendship Feast History

The idea for a meal program to feed hungry people in the community sprouted from a seed planted in a September 1989 sermon given by Rev. Kipp Wolfe, pastor at the Ponca City First Christian Church (FCC). A plan to start the meal program was developed in the following weeks and on January 2, 1990, the Mission Night program at FCC first opened its doors to provide a free meal and fellowship to any guest who entered. No screening was required, all who came were welcome. On opening night, eight people enjoyed a hot meal of homemade noodles and turkey. On January 4, nine guests were served vegetable beef soup. By February 5, the initial Tuesday and Thursday program expanded to a third night and by March 5, meals were served Monday through Thursday. The program's success and rapid expansion were due to an overwhelmingly positive response from church and civic organizations that provided generous donations of time, food, and money.

On March 8, 1990, the Mission Night program officially became the "Friendship Feast", a name submitted by Niki Jorgenson. Later that year, a children's program was begun to minister to the children who attended Friendship Feast (FF). Through this ministry, in which volunteers read stories and supervise games and play time, the children learn of the love of God and others for them.

A nine-month report given during October 1990 stated over 8,000 people had been served, including a high of 90, with an average attendance of 66 persons per night. In addition to FCC groups, ten other groups had volunteered to cook and serve. Nine groups brought their own food.

On November 25, 1990, FF first served a Thanksgiving Dinner. Afterwards, guests took home sack lunches filled from a food drive at Woodlands Elementary School. The Christmas dinner, held on December 20, included eating a turkey and dressing meal with all the trimmings, singing carols, reading the Christmas story, and opening presents delivered by Santa. Presents for Santa to distribute were placed under an "Angel Tree" by volunteers who took a guest's name from the tree and returned a present. These special holiday events have since become an annual tradition for FF guests and volunteers alike.

On March 14, 1991, the FF Steering Committee held the first "Volunteer Appreciation Dinner" to recognize and thank the many volunteers for their dedicated service to the ministry. Other notable dates for FF events include:

- May 1991, published the first FF Newsletter,
- June 1992, completed shelving for the FF pantry,
- November 1992, hired a Children's Table coordinator,
- February 1993, the FF Steering Committee changed to the FF Board,
- June 1994, hired the first FF coordinator,
- April 1995, began annual Spaghetti Dinner Fundraiser,
- March 2003, temporarily relocated meals to First Presbyterian Church,
- March 2004, moved meals back to First Christian Church.

The FF provides a setting in which guests can make new friends and develop a sense of community. The volunteers who cook, serve, greet, and give devotions also develop a sense of belonging and service through their efforts and commitment to FF. Throughout each year, groups from 14-17 church and civic organizations provide volunteers for FF. This ecumenical program truly provides an opportunity to live out Jesus' commandment to love one another.