

AIFC History (Beginnings):

EARLY DAYS

The original Food Closet was a mission of St. Luke's Episcopal Church and was led by Molly Hance. It was run for a while at the church and then transferred to the DeWitt on "C" Avenue. The Food Closet was in one of the long, old buildings in the DeWitt Center, on C Avenue behind the DeWitt Rehabilitation Center, about midpoint on Richardson. It was above ground level and had a rather steep ramp and stairs. In May of 1998, Molly's health was not good and the operation was more than their church wished to handle, so Father Clemons contacted pastors of several churches to see if they could begin to develop the Food Closet as an interfaith organization.

Four ministers—Rev. Ken Winter (Auburn Presbyterian), Rev. Jeff Mohr (Pioneer United Methodist), Rev. Curt Anderson (First Congregational), and Rev. Bruce Lundberg (Bethlehem Lutheran)—met with Father Clemons along with several lay people from the churches to consider the idea. A steering committee was formed and began to take on the tasks of creating the new organization.

Nanci Worcester Suemnicht (Bethlehem Lutheran), Bev Anderson (Auburn Presbyterian), Sue Hullen (Bethlehem Lutheran), and Barbara Whitney (First Congregational) developed and submitted the required documents to incorporate and to become a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws of the Auburn Interfaith Food Closet (AIFC) were approved in November 1998 by the Secretary of State. Nanci Suemnicht developed the AIFC logo.

During the interim time, a woman who had been an active volunteer at the original St. Luke's Food Closet was hired to run the AIFC, because none of the steering committee were experienced in this area. It was also at this time that the County required the Food Closet to move from the building on C Avenue to the little house at 2985 Richardson Drive. The new director, along with volunteers from the churches, took on the task of the move. The Food Closet was closed for a week to accomplish the move.

Also, during that time, new lay people from the churches came on board: George Hare and Jack London from St. Luke's Episcopal, Frank Sweeney from Pioneer Methodist, and Pete Andersen from Bethlehem Lutheran. In January of 1999, Barbara Whitney was elected the first President of the Board of Directors; Frank Sweeney became Vice-President; Pete Andersen Treasurer; and Bev Anderson, Secretary. The four officers then purchased the financial assets of the former Food Closet for the price of \$1.00, officially launching the new entity known as the Auburn Interfaith Food Closet (AIFC). In January 1999, an invitation was extended, and others began to come on board as sponsoring churches/congregations: Sunrise Church, Parkside Church, both St. Teresa of Avila and St. Joseph's Catholic Churches, Cornerstone Community Church, St. Paul Lutheran Church, and the Sierra Foothills Unitarian Universalists.

The new Operations Manager kept things running smoothly and, in April 1999, the Board of

Directors decided to give out food every 30 days instead of every 60 days. In August of that year, when the Director took a month-long vacation, Frank Sweeney, George Hare, Bev Anderson, and Barbara Whitney each supervised for a week. During this time the Board decided to no longer give clothing away—the clothing had carried over from the original Food Closet. The clothing had become a problem for several reasons, including cleanliness and space limitations. When the director returned from vacation and found that the clothing had been removed, she was upset and resigned at the September 1999 meeting. Having had experience running the Food Closet in her absence, the Board decided they could handle it without a paid director, and Frank Sweeney volunteered to become Operations Manager starting the following morning. The AIFC is what it is today to a large extent due to Frank's dedication and loyalty. Since then, the Food Closet has operated with 100% volunteers.

In 1999, the average number of families served per month was 206. The idea for a Sponsor-A-Family Program was presented to the Board by Bev Andersen and has become the single largest fundraiser for the AIFC.

MOVE TO NEW FACILITY

In the summer of 2013, Placer Environmental Health notified us that placing refrigeration and food in Wilson's Storage Units did not meet the requirements for a food facility and we would have to have all refrigeration equipment in our building by August 2013. All the food would also have to be moved into the building, but no final date set for that move. The building we were occupying had only 1400 square feet of space, and it was impossible to move all the refrigeration equipment inside the building, so we began the search for a new building. A 4680 square-foot space was located at 12972 Earhart Avenue, Suite 301 (behind Pacific Power). This building contained office and warehouse space that would allow all of our food service, food storage, and equipment to be in one location. The Food Closet opened its doors to the public in that location on March 10, 2014.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

In 2016, the average number of families served per month was 666, covering an average of 1,985 individuals each month. At the height of the recession in 2011, we served an average of 1,011 covering 3,211 individuals. Fortunately, the economy has somewhat recovered and our service levels are about equal to those of 2008. This may be our “base” number.

There are currently 20 sponsoring congregations and more than 200 volunteers.

PAST PRESIDENTS

1999	Barbara Whitney
2001	Sharon O’Donnell
2002	John Lenienger (Feb-May)/Carolyn Holmes (June-Jan)
2003	Carolyn Holmes (Feb-March)/Trish Wallen (April-Jan)
2004	Trish Wallen
2005	Sandy Bassett (current)

OPERATIONS MANAGERS

1998	Erma Tonner (paid position, to Sept. 1999)
1999	Frank Sweeney
2004	Fred Catherall
2007	Trish Jensen
2013	Carol Mulder (current)