

A Need and a Vision Leads to a Longtime Ministry FCC Claremore Feeds & Nourishes Through Food & Love

At First Christian Church in Claremore, Oklahoma, (FCC Claremore), they truly nourish and literally feed their community each week. As soon as one steps inside the church's Family Life Center on Monday evenings for "Friendship Feast" there are welcoming hugs, handshakes and smiles. Compassion and sheer joy can be found on all the faces of the guests and volunteers.

Friendship Feast is the brainchild of Russ Riffle, FCC Claremore elder and head chef at a

individuals in need, this ministry is seeking additional funding. An empty coffee container is available for those who can and wish to give a love offering for the meal, but the weekly collections provide less than half of what is necessary to continue the ministry.

The saying, "It takes a village," rings true in Claremore as FCC Claremore and nearby Redeemer Lutheran Church coordinate to prepare and serve a meal each week.



Pastor Charles Ragland and Outreach Ministry team leader Lynne Dosch prepare to serve a meal.

nearby Claremore hospital. Because the church is located in a low-income area of the city where nearly 93 percent of the students at a nearby elementary school are on a free or reduced-cost lunch program, Russ and other church members saw a need for their community. As the economic recession deepened, more and more neighbors came to the church asking for help, and Friendship Feast was launched.

Chef Russ loves to cook and serve others. He, Katy Galusha-White and the Outreach Ministry team approached the congregation more than six years ago with a vision to feed everyone who enters the Family Life Center a free hot meal each Monday evening. They wanted the program to be self-financed and not a church budgeted item. Their only request was use of the kitchen, the Family Life Center and support and assistance from the congregation.

Initially, a trial fund-raising meal was held for congregation members to raise seed money for that meal and future meals. The first public meal was served January 3, 2011, where about 30 people were served. Now, Friendship Feast averages 80-125 guests.

For nearly seven years this community outreach ministry has been self-sustaining every Monday evening, come rain, shine or holiday; however, due to the greater number of

Redeemer provides one meal monthly while FCC Claremore provides the remaining meals. Church volunteers work in teams to assist with food preparation, serving, setup and washing dishes.

Additionally, a local grocery store often donates day-old bread for guests to take home and local farmers occasionally donate extra eggs and vegetables. During

the holiday season, a local manufacturing plant has been known to donate hams for the special holiday meals around Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Local service organizations such as the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, youth services agencies and high school and college student councils have earned service hours by assisting with meals and clean-up.

"Nourish...Feeding God's Children with Love."

—Friendship Feast Vision Statement

And, offenders required to do community service have occasionally become short-term Friendship Feast servants.

There are also two groups that meet at the church on Mondays following each meal and they assist with breaking down tables and chairs.

The meal is served to all who are hungry in the community and beyond.

Depending on the particular Monday, a small team of church volunteers can serve upwards of 100 or more people. Guests include: young families on limited incomes, elderly on fixed incomes,



transition housing residents, domestic abuse shelter residents, single parents with young children and occasionally local college students.

One might expect this meal to be a quiet and somber event; however, it is quite the opposite. It's a joyous gathering of community and neighbors who share and receive blessings from everyone present.

Food is served buffet style on dishes. From the beginning, the church has used its best dishes as a way of showing honor to all diners while conserving resources.

Guests sit around tables adorned with festive centerpieces and eat with real silverware. Hot coffee, tea and ice water are served by a lovely retired woman who devotes each Monday evening to serving.

Church volunteers gather in the kitchen for prayer before serving the meal. They feed and nurture through kindness and action.

The feast offers refuge for the tired and hungry as well as fellowship for those seeking something outside of traditional church. Prayer request forms are available on each table for guests to fill out and return to the pastor for sharing on Sunday morning.

Recently ODF awarded grant funds to assist with Friendship Feast.

In response to receiving the grant funds, FCC Claremore Pastor Charles Ragland wrote, "Please convey to the Foundation the deep gratitude of our church family for the generous grant which will help us continue this significant ministry to our Claremore area neighbors in need."

For more information about Friendship Feast or to make a donation to this ministry, email FCC Claremore Outreach Ministry team leader Lynne Dosch at ldosch50@yahoo.com.

The Foundation newsletter is published quarterly. Please contact Julie Bowers (jabowers@okdfd.org) to opt out or advise of any errors, changes, or to update your email and contact information.

ODF Awards More Than \$50,000 Through Its New Grant Program

ODF is pleased to announce that \$50,648.90 in grant fund monies were delivered to Disciples churches or non-profit organizations to support various missions and ministries within Oklahoma and beyond. Please visit the Foundation website at <http://okdfdn.org/grants-program/> to find complete list of funds awarded, recipients and ministries.

The Grant Committee, composed of volunteer ODF board members and former board members, was faced with the responsibility of allocating the funds among grant requests totaling more than \$370,000. Of the 44 requests for funds, 14 requests were awarded full or partial funding.

The grant process had some hiccups and the ODF staff is diligently working to create a more streamlined and transparent grant application process for next year with plans on an earlier determination of grant fund allocation by the end of March 2018. Details will be available on our website following board approval in late October. Previous applicants will be notified of the new procedure via email early next year.

In this newsletter and future newsletters as well as on our website, we will be sharing stories from the recipients of grant funds as well as the very deserving ministries and missions of those who did not receive funding. Our goal is to share the needs of the community so that others may feel called to help.

"Not Your Parents' Offering Plate" ODF to Host Noted Author and Speaker Dr. Clif Christopher

Pastors, church lay leaders and moderators, mark your calendars for March 6, 2018.



Dr. Clif Christopher

Dr. Clif Christopher, noted author of "Not Your Parents' Offering Plate" and founder of Horizons Stewardship in Arkansas will be the featured speaker at an ODF sponsored stewardship seminar at First Christian Church, Moore, Oklahoma, on March 6, 2018.

You don't want to miss an opportunity to hear this longtime pastor, certified church growth consultant and nationwide speaker share stories and insight about his experiences within the church relating to generosity and stewardship. Please view this link <http://www.horizons.net/team/jclifchristopher/> for more information on Dr. Christopher.

Ways You Can Help Following the Hurricane Harvey Disaster

As we continue to pray for those suffering in the path of Hurricane Harvey, the Regional Church has posted important and practical information on its website on what you can do to help in the wake of this disaster: Pray, stay, donate, make kits and give blood. View Regional Minister Pam Holt's message at <https://okdisciples.org/harvey-8-30-17/>. Or, you may donate directly to Week of Compassion.



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Mail this form and check to the Foundation at the address listed above. Or, gifts may be made via PayPal or credit card online at our website.

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- ☐ I am interested in receiving information on making a bequest to the Foundation.

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☐ Yes, I have included ODF in my estate planning.