



ICM Food & Clothing Bank

INTERFAITH COOPERATIVE MINISTRIES

A BRIEF HISTORY



ICM Food and Clothing Bank has a colorful history, and this document was written by people very involved in the organization. The key uniqueness about ICM is having been founded and staffed by hundreds of volunteers.

Maricopa County is fortunate to have an example of a “grass roots”, “faith based”, ecumenical organization which has worked for twenty years to fill gaps in the social safety net. INTERFAITH COOPERATIVE MINISTRIES is the result of (a) perceived need, (b) determination to make positive efforts, (c) the ecumenical cooperation of a broad spectrum of the religious community, (d) the contribution of some areas of private enterprise, and (e) the dedication, skills, and abilities of many people over the years.

A brief history of ICM can be divided into six phases, representing the somewhat disparate background of the organization.

PHASE I - John Van Hengel will always be justly famous in the service community of Phoenix. John was a member of the St. Vincent DePaul Society of St. Mary’s Catholic Church in downtown Phoenix. He and his companions received referrals from anyone who knew of a family or individual in need and they then made an investigation and often out of their own pockets, provided emergency assistance. John was the driving force behind “St. Mary’s Food and Clothing Bank” in the mid and late 1960’s. The food bank activities grew very quickly and have become St. Mary’s Food Bank so well known today. The clothing operation was incorporated with its own board of directors, and became known as the Community Clothing Bank. The clothing was donated and the labor was donated. The clothing bank then operated out of the Carnegie Library basement on West Washington Street.

Early in 1970, the Clothing Bank was having difficulties and the Board sought assistance from the Ministry of Urban Phoenix. This was an ecumenical organization financed primarily by the Presbytery of Grand Canyon and by participating churches. At this time Rev. Paul Moser, became the administrator of the Clothing Bank.

PHASE II - In the early 1970’s another ecumenical group came together to form the North Phoenix Corporate Ministries. Their purpose was to address social needs and concerns. This organization included several Protestant churches of various denominations, a Catholic Parish, and two Jewish Synagogues. The North Phoenix Corporate Ministries was large enough to hire its own executive and it embraced several functions in the community, including the operation of the clothing bank.

In October of 1975, the First Presbyterian Church, located at 402 West Monroe, beset with a steady flow of requests for emergency assistance because of its inner city location, hired a part-time social worker to screen requests. Joan Fenton was hired and continued at that location until January 1981, at which time the program was moved and combined with an existing program at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral located at First Avenue and Roosevelt.

PHASE III - North Phoenix Corporate Ministries continued to grow as a force for ecumenical social action. It was a very logical step for them to combine the Clothing Bank, which they were operating, with the emergency relief then centered at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral. Largely through the efforts of Dr. Culver Nelson of the Church of the Beatitudes, United Church of Christ, the Salt River Project was encouraged in 1982 to donate half of a storefront building at 315 North Third Avenue. Here the Clothing Bank and emergency relief services were combined under the name INTERFAITH COOPERATIVE MINISTRIES – ICM.

PHASE IV - By 1993, the building at 315 North 3rd Avenue was too small to accommodate the large number of people seeking assistance. At the same time the limited space allowed no expansion of services. A Board Opportunities Committee was appointed to study additional needs. Two programs were targeted: 1. Larger facility and 2. Child enrichment services for parents.

The Board of ICM began to seek a larger building. A warehouse was found at 743 West Buchanan Street (later changed by the city to 501 S. 9th Avenue). With the help of Salt River Project, and the supporting congregations and a major capital fund drive, this building was purchased. Donated architectural planning, construction skills, heating and cooling equipment and many hours of volunteer labor made the building ready for use. A shift of firefighters from Station 1 provided the manpower and the use of a donated moving van and driver made the moving day a success. On January 14, 1994 ICM opened their doors at the spacious new building.

Interfaith Cooperative Ministries is a viable, significant force meeting the needs of people who fall through the cracks of the social service net. The agency operates with four full-time employees and over a hundred volunteers a week. Today, ICM is the largest distributor of St. Mary’s Food Bank Emergency Food Boxes in Maricopa County. Over a thousand families receive food boxes from ICM each month. With the help of many congregations and volunteers, the agency gives to the needy almost 9 tons of clothes a month. The agency serves over seven thousand people a month. In 2000, ICM helped families with over a hundred thousand dollars in emergency financial assistance.

Although still operating on a shoestring, it is attempting to meet needs served by no other agency. It stands as an example of interfaith cooperation and could be emulated by other locations and other areas of service.

PHASE V - In 2006, a large remodeling project was begun and funded with more than \$100,000 by the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust and the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust. Roger Benson arranged for architectural and engineering plans, and once again Don Hughes (board member and employee of SRP) carried out the labor on the project. The project switched the clothing and food pantry areas because of safety concerns, and also provided more offices and updated the bathrooms. At the end of 2006, the ICM Board and staff decided it was time to stop service to the street homeless since other nearby agencies were much better equipped to do so. We continue to serve homeless with referrals for clothing from one of the local agencies that concentrates on their service – CASS, the Lodestar Day Resource Center and Andre House. Our primary focus since that time has been on the working poor, physically and mentally disabled, and the elderly poor.

ICM is now open six days a week, to accommodate working individuals. The transformation of paper to computerization of client data took place in 2009 – a huge change for the better in storing tens of thousands of client files. Volunteers were trained, and a successful transition occurred.

ICM has also opened a free monthly medical clinic for the uninsured in collaboration with Cathedral Health Services. An average of 80 individuals are screened for all kinds of medical problems during the once a month Saturday clinics. We’ve also added a case management component to help clients with employment, housing and other needs. The case manager also handles phone requests. Our client numbers exceed 140 families per day, six days a week. As always, we continue the mission of providing for basic needs, including food boxes, clothing, toiletries and household goods.

With an effort on fundraising, the staff has grown to four full-time and seven part-time, including a security guard and child caregiver, and staff for the Saturday food program. The numbers of volunteers have also grown to more than 120 regular weekly volunteers and many additional groups from corporations, schools and congregations in Phoenix. The Board of Directors now numbers 21, with a new emphasis on recruiting members who are actively working and can bring resources from theirs and other corporations to ICM for better service to more needy individuals. There is also an emphasis on diversifying the board, volunteer ranks and staff.

PHASE VI - In 2012, ICM’s name was officially changed to ICM Food & Clothing Bank to better describe the organization. AT the same time, St. Mary’s Food Bank Alliance asked ICM to become a leading partner with them in the fight against hunger. ICM took on the St. Mary’s client database to better control the distribution of food all over the Valley.

In 2014, thanks to the generous support of the Phoenix Thunderbirds Charities, Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust and Intel, the warehouse was completely remodeled and updated, including larger coolers and a semi-automated conveyor for ease of packing food boxes.

In 2016, more than 135,000 total individuals were served at ICM, a record to that point. More than 130 regular volunteers and hundreds of others in corporate employee groups now provide services six days a week. There are 5 full-time staff and 8 part-time to keep up with the pace.