



Photo: The 1961 annual meeting of the Des Moines Area Council of Churches at Veterans Auditorium.

BY LUKE ELZINGA,
COMMUNICATIONS & ADVOCACY MANAGER

This article is the first installment of a two-part series on the history of DMARC.

In February 1952, the Des Moines Ministerial Association convened an organizational meeting at St. John's Lutheran Church to discuss the formation of a Council of Churches for the Des Moines area. Over 700 clergy and lay leaders gathered for this historic meeting.

On May 12, 1952, the Des Moines Area Council of Churches was officially chartered with 15 member congregations and the YMCA. DMARC has changed in significant ways over the past 70 years, but its mission of meeting basic human needs remains.

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SEVENTY YEARS AND STILL GROWING STRONG

BY DENISE BUBECK, DMARC PRESIDENT

Like many of you, my journey with DMARC began at a local food pantry, where we filled up bags of groceries and put bread on the shelves. It is at these pantries we see the hardworking staff and volunteers who are committed to a mission. A mission that—for 70 years—brings our community together, united to meet the needs of every single person with dignity and respect.

The reality of the ongoing need for DMARC continues to grow as we assisted over 40,000 people last year, with one in three of those individuals being children. DMARC continues with a firm belief that no child should go to bed hungry. We want to provide individuals young and old a place where they are served with empathy and care for their well-being.

This year we are witnessing the lifting of the COVID emergency proclamation, resulting in reduced SNAP benefits for many individuals. In addition, rising inflation is placing increased pressure on families with cash flow that does not enable their food security. Combining these significant circumstances, Matt Unger, DMARC CEO, states this is a “perfect storm” for many individuals.

Therefore, I believe our dedicated donors, staff, and volunteers will be a “calm” to this “storm.”

The opening of our new building at 100 Army Post Road on the south side of Des Moines could not have come at a better time.

Our new building is uniquely positioned right next to the home of historic Fort Des Moines, which

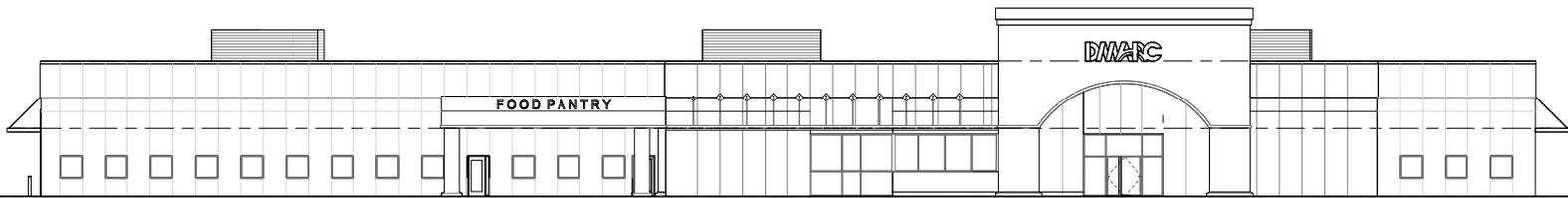


historically symbolizes a stronghold of protection and security for our city. While many people in our community face mounting food insecurity, we can provide a fortress of security to our neighbors. We stand on the shoulders of those before us, who 70 years ago came together as communities of faith to meet the fundamental human needs of Greater Des Moines. **Our founders were guided by their faith, as they committed to bringing people together to meet the basic needs of their neighbors.** DMARC will continue to operate under this situation of urgent need through the generous support of many donors, volunteers, and DMARC staff, standing united and continuing to meet the needs of our community.

Please join with me in anticipation as we look to this coming year, continuing the care and compassion of DMARC's founders, meeting the basic human needs of Greater Des Moines.

Denise Bubeck, *DMARC President Elect*

In being aware of others' hunger, we contribute to a more empathic world. —Hamza Yusuf



MOVING IN AT 100 ARMY POST ROAD

BY LESLIE L. GARMAN, CFRE
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT & OUTREACH

It's official—DMARC is now moved in and open at our new headquarters located at 100 Army Post Road, Des Moines, IA 50315.

We are so excited with the opportunities this new space provides—far greater storage capacity in our warehouse, indoor parking for our mobile food pantries, more office space for our staff and volunteers, community and training rooms, a new volunteer center, and an on-site food pantry that will open in a few months.

The move could not have come at a better time. Rising costs for food and transportation are stretching the budgets of people in our community, and pandemic-era supports from the government that have been helping people put food on the table are coming to an end.

DMARC has seen an increase in visitors to our Food Pantry Network in the first three months of 2022, including a 10.7% increase in March. April is on pace to see an even greater increase.



Thanks to our new headquarters, we have significantly more space to store food (especially food that needs to stay refrigerated or frozen), which will lead to enhanced efficiencies and cost savings by allowing us to order greater quantities of food in bulk and accept larger food rescue donations.

But we are not done yet. Although we are now in our new facility (thanks to a very generous community!), we yet have a gap of \$1.5 million in order to meet our goal for the "Food Today, Change Tomorrow" campaign.

It's the home stretch! Won't you make a gift today and help us finish our capital campaign strong? Pledges can be made from one to five years. No matter the size of your gift, your contribution will make a difference right here in our community. Questions? Please contact Leslie Garman at lgarman@dmarcunited.org.



Make your contribution today:
dmarcunited.org/capital-campaign

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The first Executive Secretary for the Council, **Rev. John D. Clinton**, was hired on March 1, 1953. Office space was rented from the Iowa Council of Churches in downtown Des Moines.



Rev. John Clinton guiding a "Tour of Faiths" at St. George Greek Orthodox Church in 1960.

In May of 1953, the Des Moines Area Council of Churches started offering its "Tour of Faiths," a religious education program offering tours of multiple protestant churches, Temple B'nai Jeshurun, and St. George Greek Orthodox Church.



Rev. John Donovan

In 1963, **Rev. John Donovan** took over as the new leader of the Council. With Rev. Donovan's leadership, the Council became more active in civil rights work in the community. In 1963, the Council submitted a resolution to the Des Moines City Council calling for the adoption of a Fair Housing Ordinance to combat discrimination. The following year, in May of 1964, the Council went on record in support of the Federal Civil Rights Bill and encouraged church members to write their congressional representatives.

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In February 1966, the Council introduced the creation of a Committee on Ecumenical Relationships to be composed of three Protestant ministers, three Catholic priests, and three Jewish rabbis. The purpose of the committee was to foster dialogue between the faith leaders. This began the journey toward becoming an interfaith organization.

Near the end of 1966, the Council began exploring the creation of 300 apartments for low and medium income families. The \$3 million project in the Oakridge Urban Renewal Area was approved at the annual meeting in February 1967 under the name "Housing for Modest Income People." This would become a pivotal project in the Council's history. Oakridge Neighborhood welcomed its first residents in 1969.

At a delegate assembly on May 9, 1972, delegates voted to change the name of the organization to the "Des Moines Area Religious Council," in order to be inclusive of faiths outside Protestant Christianity. This action was another step toward DMARC becoming an interfaith organization.

Rev. Harold Varce became the Executive Director of DMARC on June 15, 1973. Varce had previously served on the Administrative Cabinet and was a strong advocate for making the organization open to other faiths. Under his leadership, DMARC began in earnest to build stronger relationships with Catholic and Jewish faith communities.

The second half of the 1970's was a period of significant growth for DMARC. The FISH program was implemented to provide rides to people without access to transportation. DMARC supported school integration efforts and began planning the first "January Thaw" interfaith education event. DMARC and the United Way formed Hospice of Central Iowa. The "Compassion in Action" program was formed to provide emergency rent and utility assistance. DMARC moved its office to the "Kirkside" house owned by Central Presbyterian Church.



The food pantry warehouse located in the basement of Central Presbyterian Church.

Most significantly, in May 1976, DMARC formed the "Emergency Food Pantry" program. The basement of Kirkside served as a make-shift "warehouse" for food that was collected from congregations and distributed to six neighborhood food pantries. In 1977, Kirkside was sold, and DMARC moved its office and warehouse to Central Presbyterian.

In 1979, DMARC welcomed its first Jewish member congregation, Tifereth Israel Synagogue, finally becoming an interfaith organization.

A few years later, in 1981, DMARC established the Life After Death of Spouse (LADOS) program, which meets on a monthly basis to this day at Grace United Methodist Church.

Another area of need in the community that was identified during this time was assistance in paying for child care expenses. A task force was formed in April 1983, which led to the establishment of the Child Care Assistance program the following year.

The first half of the 1980's saw rapid increases in use at food pantries due to adverse economic conditions and changes to social welfare programs. It became apparent that the Emergency Food Pantry needed to be in a better position to respond to this growing need.

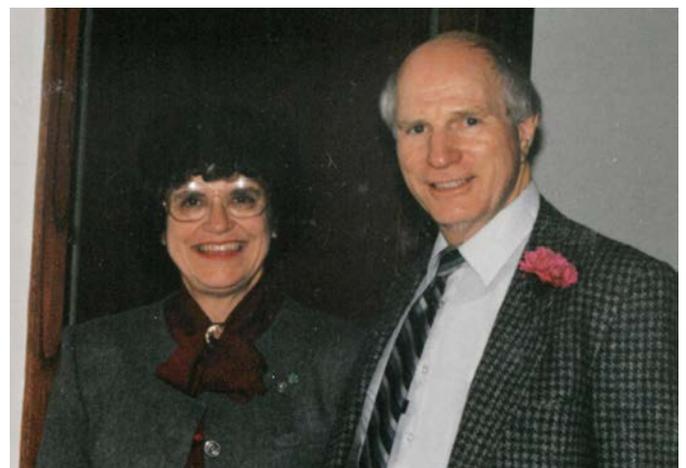
At that same time, DMARC was looking for a new home for its office and warehouse. An opportunity presented itself at 3816 36th Street, the former location of Zion Lutheran Church. There was office space for rent, and room to build a warehouse.

Thanks the leadership of Earl "Duke" Holst and Wil Dubes, local Kiwanis groups raised \$30,000 to build a food pantry warehouse for DMARC. The 1,500 square foot building was completed in the summer of 1986. DMARC also hired its first food pantry director, Charles Schachterle.



The food pantry warehouse on 36th Street in 1986.

At an Administrative Cabinet meeting in November 1988, DMARC established its own charitable foundation to provide greater financial stability for the organization. At that same meeting, Rev. Harold Varce announced his resignation as DMARC Executive Director, effective December 31, 1989. It was an end of a momentous era in DMARC's history, but there was still much more work to be done. *(to be continued...)*



Rev. Harold Varce (R) and Virginia Varce (L) at his retirement party in 1989.

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Working Together to Meet
Basic Human Needs.

STAFF:

MATT UNGER,

Chief Executive Officer

LESLIE L. GARMAN, CFRE,

Director of Development & Outreach

REBECCA WHITLOW,

Food Pantry Network Director

DANIEL BECK

MONICA CURL

JEFFREY CZERWIEC

JOE DOLACK

LUKE ELZINGA

ANDREW FIRESTINE

CHRIS HAUGEN

NISHA KISHOR

PAMPHILE KIWAYIELE

JOHN MCPHEE

PATRICK MINOR

MICHAEL SIROIS

REV. SARAH TRONE GARRIOTT

CINDY WEST

KEN WITMER

BOARD OF DIRECTORS, FY22:

CHRIST NAUMANN,

President

DENISE BUBECK,

President Elect

IHSAN YASEEN,

Secretary

RANDY JENSEN,

Treasurer

MATT DURHAM,

Past President

LUAI AMRO

TOM CHAPMAN

THOMAS CROSS

LISA LOGAN

RACHEL COLLIER MURDOCK

REV. RACHEL MITHELMAN

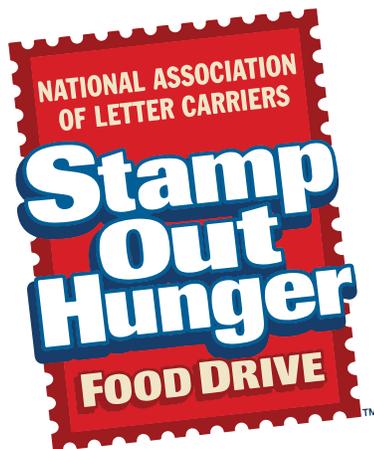
STUART OXER

REV. RYAN RUSSELL

MATTHEW STRAWN

EMILY WEBB

RON BEANE *(Advisory)*



STAMP OUT HUNGER®

On Saturday, May 14, the National Association of Letter Carriers will hold their annual Stamp Out Hunger® food drive, and DMARC will once again be the recipient of this drive. Be sure to leave out your food donation to be picked up!

You can also make a donation online at dmarcunited.org/stamp-out-hunger.

VOLUNTEER AT MEALS FROM THE MARKET



Each Saturday morning during the summer, the Meals from the Market program collects donations from vendors at the Des Moines Downtown Farmers' Market.

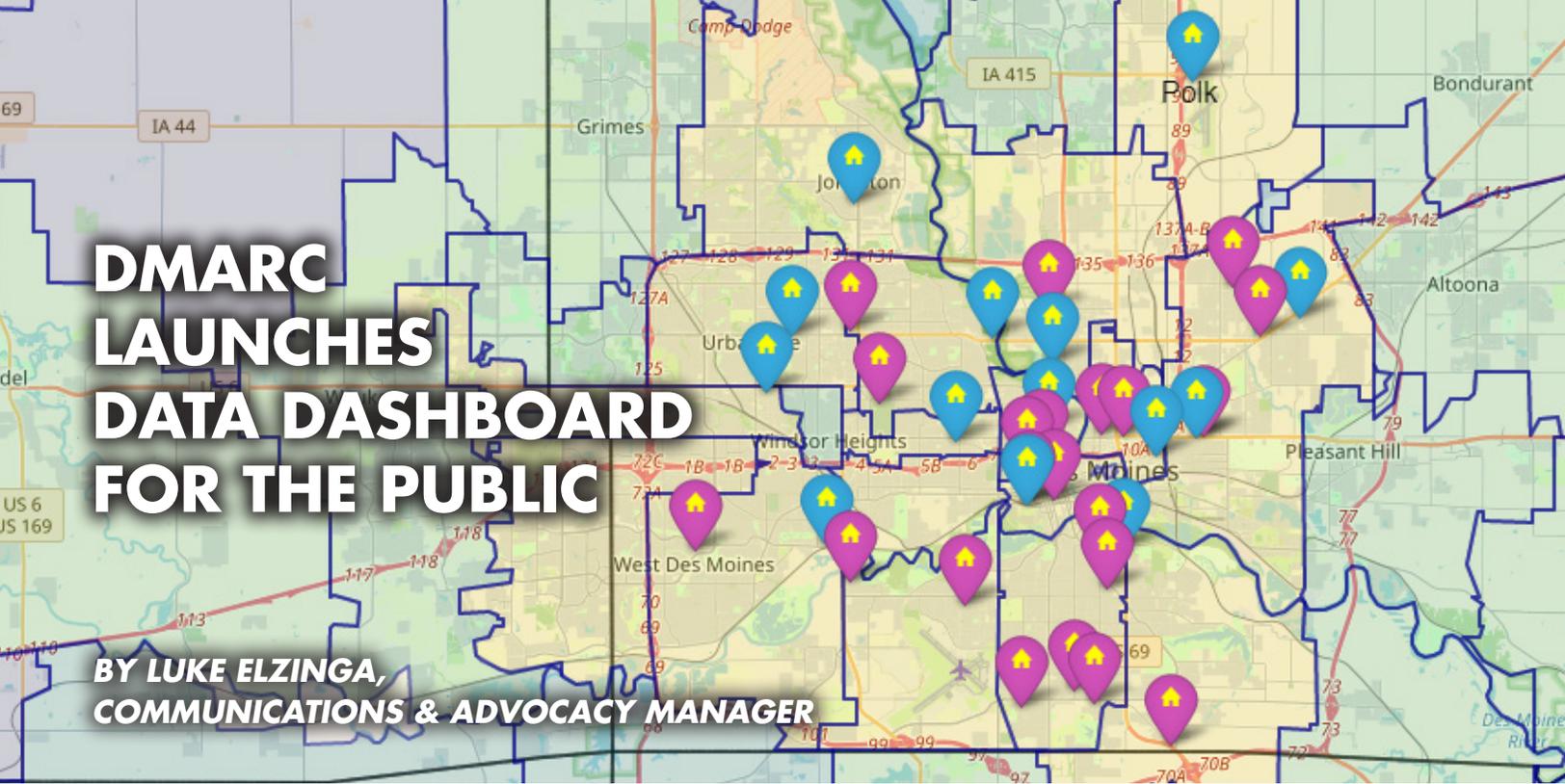
DMARC is currently seeking 10-15 volunteers to collect donations during each Downtown Farmers' Market. If you are interested, please contact Nisha Kishor, nkishor@dmarcunited.org or (515) 277-6969 x 220.

IOWA CUBS SUNDAY HOME GAMES

At every Iowa Cubs Sunday home game this summer, DMARC will be accepting three food items as a donation in exchange for one general admission ticket. Fans can also pay \$5 to upgrade to a Grand Stand seat.

DMARC is looking for volunteers to assist with this effort. If you are interested, please visit dmarcunited.org/volunteer.



A map of the Des Moines, Iowa area, showing various neighborhoods and ZIP codes. Numerous colored pins (blue, purple, and pink) are placed across the map, representing data points for food pantry usage. The pins are concentrated in the central urban areas, particularly around Des Moines and West Des Moines. The map includes labels for major roads like IA 44, IA 415, and IA 80, and neighborhoods like Polk, Bondurant, Altoona, Pleasant Hill, Windsor Heights, and West Des Moines.

DMARC LAUNCHES DATA DASHBOARD FOR THE PUBLIC

BY LUKE ELZINGA,
COMMUNICATIONS & ADVOCACY MANAGER

DMARC recently launched a publicly-accessible version of its data visualization dashboard. DMARC has been utilizing an internal data visualization dashboard since 2017, but the dashboard has been housed on a limited number of DMARC computers due to privacy concerns. The new public-facing dashboard aims to provide similar data in a way that protects the privacy and identity of people who use food pantries.

“DMARC’s data visualization dashboard paints a stark picture that is hard to deny—that hunger and food insecurity know no bounds in our community,” said DMARC Chief Executive Officer **Matt Unger**. “It has been our goal to make this tool available to the public for some time now, and we are excited to finally launch it.”

The new data visualization dashboard provides general information on the number of people assisted by the DMARC Food Pantry Network going back to January 2014. It also provides more detailed demographic data for the past 12 months and can be examined through a number of different geographic layers, including ZIP codes, census tracts, House and Senate districts, and city boundaries.

“It is critical that we better understand the circumstances visitors to our Food Pantry Network are facing if we truly want to address the root causes of food insecurity,” said Unger. “The data we are collecting aims to do just that—and it’s even more useful when a greater number of people can access and understand the data.”

DMARC has used its internal data visualization dashboard in educational and advocacy efforts with elected officials and other community and nonprofit leaders. The dashboard has also been instrumental in finding areas of high-need and low-access that could be served by a DMARC mobile food pantry. Both the internal and public data visualization dashboards were built and are maintained by DMARC volunteer and former board member **Tom Fischer**.

“Before the project, I didn’t really understand the extent of the problem of hunger,” said Fischer. “People from all over use the Food Pantry Network, including the wealthier suburbs and from neighborhoods where you would have never thought there was poverty. It has truly been a game-changer in how we talk about our work.”



UNITED TO MEET THE NEED

Des Moines Area Religious Council
100 Army Post Road
Des Moines, Iowa 50315

(515) 277.6969
dmarcunited.org

 **Des Moines Area Religious Council**

 **@DMARCunited**

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COME SEE OUR NEW HEADQUARTERS!

Thursday, May 26, 2022

Grand Opening, 4-6pm

Annual Meeting, 6-7pm

100 Army Post Road, Des Moines, IA 50315

Join DMARC for the Grand Opening of our new headquarters at 100 Army Post Road on Thursday, May 26, from 4:00-6:00pm. Then, stay for our Annual Meeting, starting at 6:00pm, where you'll learn more about what we've been working on this past year, and our plans for the future.

Please RSVP for the events at dmarcunited.org/capital-campaign.

THE VOICE



UNITED TO MEET THE NEED