



TURNING INTERFAITH ENGAGEMENT INTO UNDERSTANDING AND ACTION

BY BLAKE WILLADSEN
MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

As you walk through the doors to Temple B'nai Jeshurun, immediately you are greeted by a table of literature on local charity resources, a table of food donation collections, and a bright red barrel adorning the classic DMARC Red Barrel stop sign – “Help STOP Hunger in our city”. The Jewish reformed synagogue is celebrating its 150-year anniversary this year and each month is choosing to select a different food item to collect donations of for the Food Pantry Network.

For Rabbi Neal Schuster this idea of helping those in need is simple and constant in their congregation. Like any good Rabbi, he has a passage from the Hebrew Bible in mind (Deuteronomy 14:4-11) that reflects that “... *do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kin. Rather, you must open your hand and lend whatever is sufficient to meet the need.*”

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BY MATT UNGER | DMARC CEO

We've heard a lot about diversity, equity and inclusion over the last few years. How do race, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity affect your place in the community?

For DMARC, DE&I has been a cornerstone of what makes our work possible, but through a lens that doesn't always lead the conversation – religion.

DMARC is built upon partnerships with over 200 interfaith partners from no less than 7 world religions. Despite all that these different faiths disagree about (and sometimes with very strong conviction), they have come together around the belief they all share to create a cooperative effort to support those who need help meeting their

basic human needs. It is because of these efforts that DMARC has been able to enjoy the history of difference-making in our community. With a history that includes the foundation of the Oakridge Neighborhood, partnering on creating Hospice of Central Iowa, and of course, our now 48th year of the DMARC food pantry network, it would be easy to just focus and report on those aspects of our work – but DMARC is more than that.

As the first non-faith leader to lead this organization, maintaining that strong connection and grounding to our faith partners and the unique situation that allows DMARC to be what we are, is crucial. Chief among the work that maintains that connection to our history and partnerships are two programs that speak to diversity of faith, learning about our neighbors, and a broader understanding of the history and rituals of different faith communities: Meet My Religious Neighbor and Interfaith Youth Leadership Camp.

You will read in more detail the great experience students have at Interfaith Youth Leadership Camp. The screening each July of the videos they produce at the camp is one of my favorite events to attend

In June, high school and incoming college students explored their own personal faith journey during the 2023 Interfaith Youth Leadership Camp. Students shared meals, participated in discussions, and joined celebrations at 10 site visits like The Iowa Sikh Association Gurudwara in West Des Moines.



and almost always leaves me in need of a Kleenex. It might surprise you to learn the very first event I attended as DMARC CEO was the screening. It impacted me so much that it has a permanent place on my calendar each July and has driven a curiosity to continue to learn more about the diversity of faiths being practiced in our community and around the world. After their week visiting with various faith communities, experiencing some of their ritual and hospitality for their neighbors, these videos tell of the campers' own faith journeys – always varied, and usually with a lot more introspection behind them than you might expect from someone just finishing up high school or making their way to college.

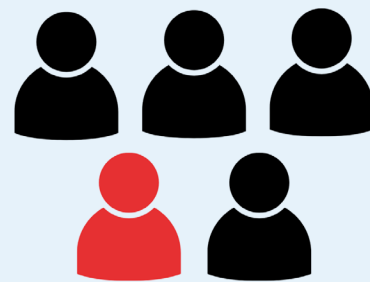
Meet My Religious Neighbor provides a similar opportunity, but in a single visit, single faith at a time format. These events open up faith communities to our broader community. They provide a safe space to ask questions about faiths and learn more about what they believe and how they came to those beliefs. These events are not about conversion or gathering evidence that one particular faith is greater than another, they are about genuine understanding and appreciation for those with a different perspective. Most days, we could use a little more of that.

As we enter the next 70 years of interfaith engagement, I challenge each of you to take a deeper dive into a faith you don't know well over the next three months. Learn about the things that are shared with your own faith or philosophy and those that are different. Then, take a minute and remember those things that we share in common provide much more strength than those things on which we differ. And when we combine our efforts around those beliefs we share, solving some of the complexities faced by those neighbors who are struggling a bit becomes possible. That strength of effort is going to be needed as much as ever as we continue to see record numbers of folks coming to the network. **United, we can meet the need.**

Matthew A. Ny

THE BUSIEST 12 MONTHS OF ALL TIME

From July 2022 to June 2023, the DMARC Food Pantry Network assisted a record **59,844** unique individuals making **251,705** visits for monthly assistance.



1 in 5

**residents of Des Moines
utilized the DMARC Food
Pantry Network.**



1 in 3

**had never utilized the
DMARC Food Pantry
Network before.**

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“We want the world just to work and for it to be fixed – that’s not how the world works. It’s more like tending a garden than solving an equation,” Said Schuster. “Meet the needs of now, but don’t have the hubris or the foolishness to think that you’re solving it once and for all. Be prepared to do it on an ongoing basis.”

This is a thread that runs through so many of DMARC’s faith community partners here in Des Moines and one that has made DMARC such a special place for decades. The ongoing relationship between DMARC and the broader Des Moines faith community showcases that when we work together, we are stronger than the sum of our parts.

AN INTERFAITH TRADITION

DMARC has changed in significant ways over the past 70 years, but its mission of meeting basic human needs remains.

While the DMARC name didn’t become official until 1972, conversations among interfaith leaders helped facilitate the creation of the Homes of Oakridge Housing Project (now Oakridge Neighborhood Services), on-going Tour of Faiths events, and dialogues around segregation and housing.

In May 1976, DMARC formed the "Emergency Food Pantry" program in the basement of the "Kirkside" house owned by Central Presbyterian Church. Through the decades our faith community partners have helped the network adapt to meet the present need, whether it was gas crisis of the 1980's, to the flood of 1993, to the Great Recession, and most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We firmly believe that if you can bring people together you can do so much good,” said Sarah Trone Garriott, Coordinator of Interfaith Engagement at DMARC. “Interfaith is such an important part of what we do because we know that there is just so much opportunity to help our neighbors. Everybody understands that food is something that brings people together – across cultures, across religions.”

COLLABORATION IS IN OUR DNA

DMARC could never do the work of feeding so many people without the support of nearly 200 faith communities of many, diverse faith communities. Often times this work starts with building understanding, trust, and relationships between those practicing different faith traditions than your own. The biggest examples of this work are the ongoing “Meet My Religious Neighbor” series and the Iowa Interfaith Youth Leadership Camp.

“Meet My Religious Neighbor” events are hosted at different sites throughout the year and participants spend an evening learning and celebrating a specific cultural and religious tradition.

“Our interfaith work is about building relationships. It’s about learning to get to know our neighbors,” said Trone Garriott. “Oftentimes folks will drive down the street and not realize they are passing a mosque, a Buddhist temple, a religious community. We create opportunities for folks to go visit those communities and meet their neighbors.”



Perhaps one of the best examples of this work in action is the Iowa Interfaith Youth Leadership Camp. This partnership with the Comparison Project at Drake University celebrated it's seventh year this summer. With over 100 current alums, the camp has grown into a transformative experience for high school and incoming Drake University students year after year.



“ There’s so much opportunity in the community to do great things for our neighbors and we can do more when we work together. ”
 - Sarah Trone Garriott, Coordinator of Interfaith Engagement at DMARC.

Over the course of five days, the cohort of 20 students get out of their comfort zone while visiting religious communities across the metro for worship services, meals and conversations and build relationships with their peers – many of whom came from a different city, background, or faith tradition than their own. Students create short digital storytelling video projects that share insight and examples from their

own personal faith journey and are a chance to tell their own story of understanding on the big screen.

“It’s a great opportunity to reflect on ‘what do I believe? What are my values? What is important to me?’ And how can I be inspired by how my neighbors live out their own traditions and faith values,” said Trone Garriott.

MAKING THE WORK “EASY”

Telling the story of food insecurity through what is going on in your own backyard has set DMARC apart for faith partners like St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church.

Randy Jensen is a member of the St. Francis Pastoral Council and has served on the DMARC board of directors. When trying to ramp up fundraising within his parish community Randy looked at the strength in numbers that was possible with a larger congregation and decided ‘we can be doing more than just collecting jars of peanut butter’.

So far this year the parish community has now raised over \$22,278 of support for the DMARC Food Pantry Network and Travis encourages other Faith Partners to consider how they can learn from their success.

“The story of the need is so easy to convey to the parishioners because you are already feeding it to us,” said Travis. “ The DMARC voice is loud, clear and present.”



EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Working Together to Meet Basic Human Needs for the greater Des Moines community.

STAFF:

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RON BEANE *(Advisory)*

"SONGS OF GRATITUDE" BENEFIT CONCERT



Musicians from the diverse faith communities of the Des Moines Metro will share their favorite songs of gratitude. As we close the year out by giving thanks there are many neighbors who are struggling to feed their families.

ALL ARE WELCOME! SUNDAY, NOV. 5 FROM 6:30 TO 7:30 PM

VOLUNTEER AT MEALS FROM THE MARKET



The Meals from the Market program collects donations from vendors at the Des Moines Downtown Farmers' Market. In 2022 alone, DMARC provided over 1,116,615 pounds of fresh produce to families in the DSM metro with the help of partnerships like this.

DMARC is currently seeking 12 -15 volunteers to collect donations during each Downtown Farmers' Market. If you are interested, please contact, Amanda Parkins aparkins@dmarcunited.org or (515) 277-6969 x 220.

SAVE THE DATE

**SPRING
GREENS**

THURSDAY, APRIL 11, 2024
CAPITAL SQUARE, DOWNTOWN DES MOINES

Interested in supporting this years event? Contact Leslie Garman, CFRE, Director of Development & Outreach, at 515-277-6969 or LGarman@dmarcunited.org.

DIY: WHEN CREATIVITY & PHILANTHROPY MEET

17-year-old Ethan H. Stanley doesn't like to be bored in the summers. After volunteering with his High School Swim team at the DMARC warehouse, he came up with an idea for how he could support a cause he cared about. Thanks to Ethan's direction, On Aug. 15 at Legacy Golf Club over 70 golfers teed-off to support DMARC in the inaugural "Putts for the Pantry" golf benefit.

"I grew up playing golf, I compete on Dowling's Golf Team, and I love the game of golf," said Stanley, the event director. "I wanted to use my passion for golf as a way to help others."

The event exceeded their original fundraising goal raising over \$13,000 through a mix of sponsorship, golfers, silent auction items and hole prizes. What's Ethan's advice for other people looking to help others?

"I think it's most important to find something that your passionate about like a sport, an activity, or even just a hobby, and take the hard step in recognizing how that thing could be used to help other people or causes."

Feel inspired? Visit dmarcunited.org/donate for other ideas to give back.



Ethan poses with his dad at a recent outing. Stanley was amazed at how impactful events like this can be while volunteering at Iowa Catholic Radio's golf outing.

Photos courtesy of the Stanley family



DMARC Board Member Emily Webb uses her birthday to find a new creative way to support DMARC every year - one year even running a marathon in -20F. This year her and her husband Nick had a surprise to share. As they announced that their first child was on the way, they also wanted to support other families.

They were able to encourage others to raise over \$3,500 for DMARC to purchase **diapers and wipes** as well as collecting 1514 diapers through their surprise announcement and baby shower.



Exile Brewing Company wanted to challenge themselves over the holiday season with a **food and supply drive**. Can we fill the Exile Truck? They encouraged visitors to bring in food items in November and December and were able to collect 5,463 donated items.



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

(515) 277.6969
dmarcunited.org

Des Moines Area Religious Council
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THE VOICE

ARE YOU A HAWKS FAN? WITH CYCLONE NATION?

ON SEPT. 9, LET'S TACKLE HUNGER TOGETHER.

Make this year's rivalry count for more than glory on the gridiron. Take your office, congregation or house divided and host a food and fund drive with a competitive twist before the big game.

Watch party : Kinship Brewing Sept. 9 @ Kickoff

