



Highlights of 50 years of ministry



1971
Don Eddy appointed Community Minister at Plainfield/Epworth United Methodist churches.

1972
Epworth Community Program grows with primary focus on Youth Ministry.

1974
Plainfield/Epworth Community Ministry becomes Northeast Community Ministry. Food pantry and holiday food baskets added.

1973
Carolyn Vaughan joins staff as Program Coordinator.
Wilhelmina Wright begins Home & Family Life Program to teach parenting skills.

1975
Betsy Finger replaces Carol Vaughan as Program Coordinator.

1976
Program Coordinator resigns.

1981
Budget grows to \$5525.



1983
Rev. Ron Fassett becomes Director of United Methodist Metropolitan Ministry and joins NECM board.

1984
Northeast Community becomes North End Community Ministry.

1985
Faith UMC becomes a Member Church of NECM, the first on GR's West Side.



1971

1976

1981

1986

Highlights of 50 years of ministry



1986

Laura Castle replaces Nichea Guy as NECM Director. NECM office located off the sanctuary in a small room with no heat, phone or typewriter.

1987
NECM serves 35-40 families per month with food.

1988
Income surpasses \$20,000 for first time.

1991

Laura Castle works with Plainfield UMC to expand space for NECM and acquires a Sunday School room in the church basement. A volunteer puts in a wall and door to make two offices out of the room. The small food pantry was in a small basement closet for many years. NECM asked to become an Access (All County Churches Emergency Support Systems) Key Food Pantry.



1992
The Jane Woodbridge Memorial Fund established to honor former NECM volunteer.

1993
NECM's first quarterly newsletter published by Laura Castle.

1997

Celebratory event for NECM's 25th anniversary takes place. NECM joins with Grand Rapids NW to operate citywide food drive for NE side. (Eventually Grand Rapids SE and SW join, renamed County Wide Food Drive.)

1994

Sue Harrington serves as Interim Director during Laura Castle's maternity leave.

1995

New Skills for Living and Single Parenting classes launched by the Director.



1999

Paula Shelner hired as first additional staff person as the Volunteer Coordinator. Emergency fund established. George Mandigo joins the Board representing North Park Presbyterian Church.



2001

Pre-employment training program launched by the Director to prepare clients to apply for jobs in the Creston neighborhood and beyond. Special meeting held to tell NECM's story and invite new churches to join the NECM Board.

2000

NECM's lobby given facelift with new paint and chairs. Board of Directors facilitates restructuring meetings with Naomi García from the United Methodist West Michigan Conference Center.

Second Sunday School room acquired in the basement from Plainfield UMC for two more offices.

Laura Castle and Paula Shelner establish the "Celebrate Back to School" program providing new clothing, shoes, underwear, socks, school supplies, backpacks, and haircut vouchers for children.

Budget grows to more than \$100,000 for the first time and Laura Castle becomes full-time.

2002

First administrative assistant is hired, Linda Richardson. Clothing Bank is closed by Laura Castle and is turned into a "Client Choice Food Pantry," with major help from Diane Bouwknecht. NECM's kitchen is painted and new countertops and sinks are installed.

A memorial is established in honor of Jean Ranck, former volunteer and board member.

Laura Castle and Rev. Chuck Van Lente write grant for "Faith in Action" to Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to provide a program for senior citizens to remain independent in their homes. The \$30,000 grant was approved to develop the "Caring Connections" program.

New computer program from Access of West Michigan installed, connecting 11 area food pantries.

Laura Castle is encouraged by Rev. Neil Davis (former pastor of Plainfield UMC at the time) to take a look at the Supper House program in Muskegon Heights.

2003

NE Supper House program through NECM established by the Director and she puts together a committee to move the program forward and hire its first coordinator, Jessica Campbell. 50 people are served its first night. The program eventually provides meals both Tuesday and Thursday evenings and serves 260 people per week.

George Mandigo becomes the NECM Board President, following Linda Powrie (who served for 10 years).

NECM extends its reach to become a newly formed "Ecumenical Ministry" and Aberdeen Reformed, Faith Lutheran, North Park Presbyterian and St. Andrews Episcopal churches join NECM in partnership with the 4 original churches, Aldersgate, Faith, Northlawn, and Plainfield UMCs. Oakview Community, Berkley Hills, Second Congregational, St. Luke's Lutheran, Immanuel Lutheran and Third Reformed churches are other Partner Churches. Frontline Church joins for a few years, as well.

A Mobile Food Pantry is established at Leonard Terrace Apartments (part of the Grand Rapids Housing Commission serving Senior Citizens) by Laura Castle, with plans for the food pantry to serve up to 125 residents.

2005

An annual fundraiser dinner and live/silent auction established to help support NECM.

NECM becomes a Partnering Pantry with Spectrum Health "NOW." Nutritional options for wellness program provide diabetic-friendly foods to help clients manage diabetes.

Access of West Michigan eventually took over the program up until 2019.

2006

NECM partners with Calvin College social work students, Community Development class, and SIFE (Students in Free Enterprise), as well as Calvin College and Grand Rapids Community College nursing students, to provide blood pressure and blood sugar screenings for NECM clients.

2007

NECM Board works with Professor Dana Phillips, Carnegie Mellon University, and leader with "Faith In Action/Robert Wood Johnson" to facilitate growth and development of the ministry of NECM.



2012

Irene Gager hired as the first Program Coordinator of "NOW" program.

2008

NECM begins working with MSU Extension Services to help clients select healthy foods in food pantry.



2015

NECM partners with Macy's Department Store at Woodland Mall in Grand Rapids to promote their "Bag Hunger" program, where donations of food and financial support are garnered. "Scan Hunger" also gives opportunity for customers to round up their purchase to support NECM. Staff from Macy's comes to NECM to do volunteer work during the promotion.

2020

COVID-19 strikes and NECM is forced to temporarily close NE Supper House and the food pantry for clients. Pre-packed bags of food provided at the door. Holiday baskets distributed by NECM instead of coordinating with churches and individuals.

NOW Program with Access of West Michigan comes to an end and a Diabetic Food Pantry is created by Laura Castle with the help of Grand Valley State University intern Adam Engwis. First diabetic food pantry coordinator is hired.

2021

Client Choice Food Pantry reopens to regular distribution for clients. NE Supper House reopens in July.

Dairy products, including milk, eggs, cheese, butter and milk) added to the Client Choice Food Pantry.

NECM celebrates 50 years!!!

2019

NECM's wood floors totally refurbished and surfaced. New flooring installed in the hallway, kitchen and bathrooms. New sinks put in bathrooms. Lobby area and hallway spruced up with a fresh coat of paint.

1986

1991

1996

2001

2006

2011

2016

2021