



## History of Hearts and Hands

In the late 1990s, Reverend Mary Ann Pula, the associate pastor at First United Methodist Church of Akron, saw older members of her congregation were having a hard time getting to church. She found they were also having problems getting to medical appointments, to the grocery store and even out with friends. Pula was authorized through the support of Pastor Wayne West to develop and implement a model for recruiting and training congregants to assist members and friends of the church who desired to have home visitation, prayer, and communion regularly.

Mary Ann's position developed into a significant ministry at Akron UMC for seven years. Pula realized that this model was needed for the wider community. She came up with a plan that used local churches to recruit volunteers and care receivers. Along with driving care receivers to appointments, Pula included light household chores and routine home maintenance, as well as friendly phone calls and visits, to the list of needed services that volunteers could accomplish. The program would assist older and physically challenged people to live with dignity and independence, improving the quality of their lives while making it possible for them to remain in their home of choice.

With the support of her pastor, Pula set out to find support and funding for her idea. In 2002, Rev. West received a letter about grant funds for developing community programs to assist older residents. Pula applied and received the grant and began to transition from her ministerial role to coordinate and implement the program in the larger community of Akron/Newstead. The seed was planted; what would eventually become Hearts and Hands - Faith in Action took root and began to grow.

Hearts and Hands - Faith in Action is founded with a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, linked with the broader program Faith in Action, a national association of faith-based service groups. Rev. Mary Ann Pula becomes the organization's first executive director. Through the support of Supervisor Gerald Summe, the Town of Newstead becomes a community partner and provides the organization with office space at 50 John Street, the former Denio Public Library.

The agency's services officially begin on February 23, 2003, for the Akron-Newstead community and the Tonawanda Indian Reservation. Ten churches supported the effort and planned their Sunday services to celebrate volunteerism, and to encourage attendance at an open house at Hearts and Hands - Faith in Action's office. Since that time, the program continues to spread through rural and suburban Western New York communities and has become a sustaining and life-enhancing service for many of our elderly neighbors.