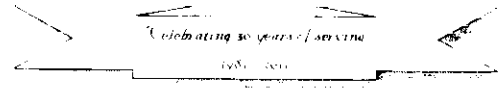


**Friends of
South End Community Outreach Ministries (SECOM)
Newsletter
April 25, 2011**



Dear Friends

As you know we are celebrating 30 years of serving in 2011. So this week I'm taking off and letting SECOM's unofficial first director tell you about the conception of SECOM and its early years.

Here are the words of Richard A. Youells:

"The pastors from Olivet, Oakdale, Burton Heights and South United Methodist Churches met weekly when I was appointed to Olivet UMC in July of 1979. They called themselves SECM (no 'O' yet), South End Community Ministries. SECM combined some ministries such as the youth, special worship services and metro concerns for the near south end of Grand Rapids. One of the first concerns shared with me was that of starting an outreach ministry in our area. It had been agreed by the pastors before I came that Olivet should be asked first to house the ministry. I therefore took the concept to our Administrative Board. After much discussion we voted. The vote was 20 to 6 in favor of housing what would become SOUTH END COMMUNITY OUTREACH MINISTRIES.

We believed there was a need for outreach ministries because the neighborhoods in the entire near south end of Grand Rapids had been changing to people with more needs than those who were moving out. For at least a decade there was radical red lining by banks and block busting by realtors. Houses were selling at lower cost to landlords who were dividing many of them into apartments to lower income people. We saw youth needing activities and families having temporary need of food and clothing. We believed we could contribute our part toward meeting their needs, at least on a short term basis.

Now that we had identified the need and had a place, we needed financing, an outreach worker to develop more ministries and a Board of Directors. The date SECOM began as SECOM was approximately in the fall of 1981. We appealed to the mission boards of the Grand Rapids District and the West Michigan Conference of The United Methodist Church for financing. They supported SECOM generously. Support also came from area UM Churches. We also built a Board of Directors made up of lay people and pastors from supporting churches. Later we expanded the Board to include members from churches of other denominations, such as Hope Reformed Church and gradually SECOM was supported by still other churches and agencies, such as GRACE.

We hired a full time worker, Roman Vera, a Mexican American who spoke fluent Spanish. He and I worked closely together. Though I never called myself the "director", I fulfilled that need.

Two ministries already in Olivet would become a part of SECOM. **Saturday Recreation** led by Bunny Swank, and what was then a very small food pantry. Saturday recreation involved elementary children in play of various kinds each week. The **food bank** as it would come to be called, continued to grow and was moved to a larger closet and then to a Sunday School room and then into three Sunday School rooms where it stayed. Food was given to last three days per person or family. Roman and I then developed two more ministries, **weekday recreation** and a **clothing bank**. In addition to Roman Vera, we hired a part time **recreation director** for the activities in the gymnasium. Most every evening had youth and adults playing basketball and volleyball.

Food was obtained from local churches and the then called Gleaners which our United Methodist Metro Ministry Director had started. Reverend Don Eddy also started ACCESS (All County Churches Emergency Support).

System, as outreach ministries developed in most Grand Rapids communities. With ACCESS we systematized those receiving assistance on computers metro wide.

The **clothing bank** grew and grew in another part of the lower level of the church building. Volunteers came from many churches across the city to work in the food bank and clothing bank with clothing largely coming from members of area UM churches. The food and clothing banks were open on Tuesday and was given without cost to the recipients.

During the time the folks were waiting in the lower hall in the church, pastors from supporting churches came and sat with them and heard their cares and sought to give comfort and support. I also gave a ministry of presence and counsel, not only then, but all week long.

Spanish speaking people appeared to be especially receptive to our offerings. Roman Vera's Spanish was very helpful. Credit can be given to SECOM for the beginning of Iglesia Metodista Unida La Nueva Esperanza, our United Methodist Hispanic Church, which until recently had its home in the Old Burton Heights UMC. Just this winter now it has moved back to the Olivet Building where both La Nueva and SECOM began. La Nueva began by Roman Vera holding worship services in Spanish on Sunday evenings at Olivet Church, gathering the people with whom he came into contact through SECOM, and then in time La Nueva, with a help of the UM District, received its own building. SECOM also helped many Vietnamese, as Olivet housed the Vietnamese UMC. To a lesser extent SECOM also helped members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Zion, also housed at Olivet.

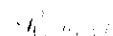
In about 1984 Roman Vera moved on and we hired Juanita Pagan, and we called her the SECOM Director, though I still spent major time "directing". She also spoke fluent Spanish. Her homeland was Puerto Rico. She related well to the growing Puerto Rican immigrants, and many became volunteers. She and I worked together and was still there after I left in 1989.

For a year, about 1988, SECOM hired a professional social worker who did research on possibly developing a ministry that would give assistance to young teenage girls who were pregnant. Funds came from the national United Methodist Women. Much later a similar effort took form in SECOM.

The building was used to its maximum capacity and beyond. It was the very epitome of racial and cultural diversity during that time. Meanwhile, the diminishing congregation gave itself and its building in mission the way a church can do as it did its best to be faithful to Christ's teaching as in Matthew 25:31-36. We saw Jesus in those who were hungry, were thirsty, were strangers and who needed clothing, were sick and even in prison. My ministry at Olivet took me into many places for support and to ministry to people in which we came into contact through the church, community and SECOM. It was a very "wholely" time in ministry and mission.

Thank you Rev. Youells

Best Regards,



Robert Heys
Development Director

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