



*helping today. building hope for tomorrow*

**Friends of  
South End Community Outreach Ministries (SECOM)  
Newsletter**

August 30, 2010

Dear Friends,

After a few months of looking like there was some improvement in the employment picture, the news has gotten worse recently. The government reported that non-farm employment fell in July by 131,000 while the unemployment rate remained at 9.5% nationally.



How does employment fall while the unemployment rate stays the same? People give up looking for work and are no longer counted. The estimate is that in July, 181,000 workers left the labor force and are no longer considered unemployed. Add that to the 131,000 who left the payroll ranks last month and those who haven't been counted for many months and the situation looks particularly grim.

Here's an op-ed in the New York Times on the employment situation: [bit.ly/aQ9ibE](http://bit.ly/aQ9ibE). Don't read this if you are squeamish. It states in graphic detail how much unemployment and under employment we are experiencing.

While business has become more cautious about hiring, it is the federal government, either directly or indirectly, that has contributed to recent job losses. With the census complete the census takers have been laid off and the ending of government stimulus programs merely added to the pain.

Closer to home, the Grand Rapids/Wyoming metropolitan area reports 11.1% unemployment as of the end of July. My sense is that under employment and unreported unemployment are pretty severe here as well, but I have no evidence to support that opinion. For those of us who see more unemployed people every day than employed people it is easy to have that opinion. Just as those who are working probably are not as cognizant of the severity of the situation.

There is an old joke that says that a recession is when my neighbor loses his job and it's a depression is when I lose my job. Last week SECOM was forced to face up to the fact that unless something changes soon it would need to lay off Jonaton Palomino at the end of September. According to the joke that means we are still in a recession even if GDP growth has been positive the past few quarters

The reason for Jonaton's layoff certainly isn't for the lack of disadvantaged families to serve. It is directly related to reduced federal government spending. Jonaton has been single handedly operating SECOM's Encouraging Family Foundations (EFF) program for many years, which receives funding from the federal government. Recently the requirements for participation have become nearly impossible to fulfill. This may have been brought about by an austerity measure, a change in social priorities or something else.

Whatever the case for the loss of our funding is: it emphasizes the precarious situation we, as a country, are in and how dependent currently we are on government spending to keep the economy growing. For SECOM, when it is a close colleague that is on the verge of losing his job it feels more like a depression than a recession. So that Jonaton doesn't become another government or SECOM statistic, we will be making a concerted effort to find funding for alternative family education programming for him. It will be difficult. Finding private funding these days isn't easy either, but we live in a very generous community.

Being able to make that same effort for everyone that walks through our door is our lofty goal. Being successful at that goal involves financial obstacles that are far beyond our resources, especially in light of the employment predicament so many are facing. That is a discussion for the next newsletter.

Thank you for your support during these challenging times..

Best Regards,

Robert Heys  
Development Director

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Staff:  
John R. Smith  
Marcia Thompson (Koens-Miles)  
Cher Blattner  
Mildred Rodriguez  
Jonaton Palomino  
Sherry Storie  
Robert Heys