

Collecting school supplies to stuff backpacks for children (like this awesome 2011 volunteer group from Altria) is just one way to give to UCOM. Read on for more ways to support UCOM's neighbors.



Resources for living. Hope for life.

Spring 2017

United Church Outreach Ministry

1311 Chicago Dr. SW, Wyoming, MI 49509 616.241.4006

www.UCOMgr.org

No Toilet Paper?

**Erik Keener –
Assistant Executive Director**

“Did you know that our neighbors can’t use their bridge cards to purchase toilet paper?” UCOM Program Director Shawn Keener asks a group of students. “Our neighbors can get food from us and they can purchase more food with their bridge cards, but they can’t use that assistance to get household items like toilet paper.” The students look surprised. Shawn explains that UCOM can only provide a few personal care items for our neighbors when they do their monthly shopping. For most families that simply isn’t enough.

“How much toilet paper does your family use in a month?” Shawn asks the group. A few of them giggle but several answer. Then Shawn drops a real shocker, “If you’re shopping at the pantry you can only receive one roll of toilet paper for the month.” Shawn explains to them that because UCOM’s most well known program is its food pantry, people don’t often think to donate personal care products.

Shawn tells this story to most of the student groups that come to volunteer at UCOM. It helps put into perspective the support that UCOM is able to provide to our neighbors, and also the areas in which more help is needed. In most cases the students nod their heads, think about the personal care products they use at their house, and then head home. Hopefully they leave UCOM with a clearer picture of the needs that our neighbors experience.



Longtime volunteer Carmen stocks the personal care section at checkout with toilet paper from a young volunteer's school collection

Recently one 6th grade student couldn't quite shake the image of a family relying on a single roll of toilet paper. After he left UCOM he set about organizing a toilet paper drive at his school. He told all of his classmates the story Shawn had shared and encouraged them to donate to his collection.

When the student and his mother came back to UCOM he and his classmates had collected hundreds of rolls of toilet paper to donate to our neighbors.

No matter how old or young you are, no matter your ability to give financially, no matter how busy you are, there is always something you can do to support UCOM's neighbors. There are ways for everyone to give at UCOM. Can we help you to find yours?



Linda Looney: “I’ve Been There”

**By Dr. Bruce Roller –
Executive Director**

I was not surprised when my invitation to Linda Looney’s 70th birthday party requested personal hygiene items for UCOM’s neighbors in lieu of gifts for her. Linda’s association with UCOM began during the organization’s gestation period 20 years before its 1985 incorporation. Linda’s mother, Evelyn Coleman, was one of the leaders at Smith Memorial Congregational United Church of Christ when the church began to serve hot lunches to the children at Hall School every day. Linda would sometimes come in to help with set-up or clean-up for that project.

Later, as a young mother, she would donate time a couple of days a month to do paper work or whatever needed to be done.

When she and her husband Dave were struggling through a 3-year bout of unemployment, times were tough - so tough that the two sold their gold rings from previous marriages to get groceries for their family of six. During that period, Linda felt odd being on “the other side of the table” at UCOM, but she knew that “they wouldn’t judge”. Several trips to UCOM helped the family until Dave was able to

Interested in Volunteering?

UCOM is currently in need of drivers to help make weekly pickups from our donating partners. We also need volunteers to work in the pantry, clothing space, and to work as tutors in our education programs.

Wherever your passions lie, UCOM has a volunteer opportunity for you. Give us a call today to get started.



Volunteers Linda and Dave Looney love volunteering at UCOM

procure a job with Consumers Power.

Dave is retired from Consumers now, but neither of them will ever forget what it felt like to know that they could depend on UCOM for help in the time of need. Since then, Linda served on the board of directors of UCOM during the period when the agency moved into the building that we now inhabit. She and Dave were able to contribute significantly to paying off UCOM’s mortgage ten years ago, and they are regular monthly contributors. In addition, they volunteer to do registrations for Holiday Giving Network; they purchase food baskets for a couple of families during the holidays; and drive for UCOM picking up donated product from Costco and delivering it to the pantry.

Linda’s explanation for why they look for these innovative ways to support this ministry: “I’ve been there—on the other side of the table—needing help and finding it at UCOM. Now we look for ways to make other people’s lives better too.”



Are you as ready for change as we are--changing the way we think about food and hunger for instance?

Will you do by choice what so many Americans must do out of necessity: go without food?

Can you skip a meal a week for the next 52 weeks and donate the money you would have spent to support our neighbors as a part of our #Fastfor52 Campaign?

48.8 million Americans live in households that lack the means to get enough nutritious food on a regular basis. As a result, they struggle with hunger at some time during the year. One in 5 children in this country lacks consistent access to food. That is a staggering 16 million children. **22 million children** eat free or reduced lunches at school.

Can our neighbors count on you to show your support and solidarity for those in this country struggling with the most basic of needs? By skipping one meal a week and donating \$10, you can support some of the most vulnerable people in our community. As a part of the #Fastfor52 Campaign you will be a positive voice for change and a powerful advocate for the food insecure.

To join the campaign, simply visit the UCOM webpage (www.UCOMgr.org) and select how you'd like to give. You can donate in monthly, quarterly, or annual installments.

The Companies You Keep

**By Erik Keener –
Assistant Executive Director**

What do GE Aviation, Target, and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan have in common? They've all sent teams to UCOM to volunteer as corporate mission work.

GE Aviation has been a particularly active philanthropic partner of UCOM. Past undertakings of GE Aviation's volunteer teams have included; building a separate space for the NOW program, building food storage racks for the warehouse, building garden boxes, adding a ramp for easy warehouse access, and several other projects.

The end result of these endeavors and those taken on by teams from other supporters, have been indispensable to UCOM's operations. The work of these groups has been a tremendous blessing to our organization and we are proud to have earned their support.



Hard at work

A volunteer from GE Aviation cuts wood to build garden boxes for a service day at UCOM in 2013



Resources for living. Hope for life.

United Church Outreach Ministry
1311 Chicago Dr SW
Wyoming, MI 49509
www.UCOMgr.org

Board of Directors

Maureen Downer, President
Michigan Works!

Laurie TenHave-Chapman, Secretary
First Congregational Church of Rockford

Tom Hyde
Habitat for Humanity/Re-Store

Lynda Sweigart
Hope Network

Rebecca Rynbrandt
City of Wyoming

Andrew Zylstra
MI Dept. of Community Health, Retired

Maria Alvarez de Lopez
Mercy Health Saint Mary's

Hank Hondorp
Progressive AE

Courtney Banks-Tatum
Calvin College

MISSION

UCOM values individuals and builds community in southwestern Kent County by providing material and educational assistance to meet basic needs, improve quality of life, and promote self-sufficiency.

Please accept my donation in the amount of \$ _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

UCOM makes it easy for you to donate at UCOMgr.org
My friend gave me a copy of your newsletter,
I would like to share "love" with our neighbors too.