

**Lining up:**  
*Because of you  
 hundreds of people  
 can acquire  
 supplemental food  
 from a food truck  
 monthly. There is  
 such a desperate  
 need for food  
 people come out  
 rain or shine, often  
 in frigid temps in  
 the winter.*



**Spring 2015**



Resources for living. Hope for life.

United Church Outreach Ministry 1311 Chicago Dr. SW, Wyoming, MI 49509 616.241.4006 www.UCOMgr.org

## Equality and Justice Fuel UCOM's Collaborations

**By Bruce Roller –  
 Executive Director**

UCOM's service area is a rich cultural, racial and ethnic tapestry. Four or even five generations live here in peace and relative harmony. To be cultural-ly sensitive, social service, community and faith-based organizations are coming together to make every door that people turn to the right door into whatever brave new world they want to enter.

Three current collaborations exponentially increase good outcomes for our neighbors.

- UCOM and Jubilee Jobs, located in the Baxter Community Center, share a staff person who provides customized success programs for people involved with the Criminal Justice system. BettyBeth Johns' job is to help people to identify their assets and their goals, set up logical steps to use the assets to reach the goals, and then to assist them in implementation.
- UCOM partnered with six other local agencies to establish The Community Food Club of Greater Grand Rapids which is a three-year pilot project designed to impact food security for a limited number of area households. This is essentially an "experiment" to test the Food Club model that promotes greater food choice; a membership-based approach; and greater self-reliance. Due to the limited capacity of the Food Club, only organizations that are part of the collaborative may refer households for membership. The participating organizations in this collaborative effort include: Westminster/Downtown Food Pantry, United Church Outreach Ministry (UCOM), The Salvation Army Social Services, Feeding America of West Michigan, Access of West Michigan, Habitat for Humanity of Kent County and Home Repair Services (which also serves as the Fiduciary). The Community Food Club of Greater Grand Rapids opened in January, 2015.

- UCOM is one of eight organizations that are collaborating to help move 15,000 families out of poverty by 2020. This is a big audacious goal that is a countywide indicator of economic stability for our community. This provides even better opportunities for our neighbors. Not only do they get the customized service for which UCOM is well-known, they also get "no wrong door". Wherever in the collaborative people turn for help, that agency personally navigates them through what can be a complex and confusing system of programs. With only one application to complete, people get the most appropriate help possible from agencies with the most experience and success in their area of expertise.



Everyone has a right to good nutritious food. Those who want to work deserve the right to do so without being penalized for their pasts or slighted for trying to better their economic situation. Through your continued support and these intentional collaborations UCOM is positioned to do more than ever,

not only to provide basic emergency relief, but to be present to our neighbors who are willing to work for a more secure future for themselves and their families.

**Partnership:**  
*UCOM is  
 proud to  
 collaborate  
 with other  
 nonprofits and  
 businesses to  
 better serve  
 the community*





# Fire & Fight = Inspiration

## *UCOM's journey to becoming racism free*

By Erin Mann –  
Community Development Manager

UCOM is a unique community asset. Over the years we have grown, manifested and transformed into a “Community Resource Center”. Not just a tutoring program. Not just a food pantry. Our different programs touch so many different cultures, races, ethnicities. Not only do we think it is important to know where we are going. We think it is important to know where we came from. And the way that we do that is through special opportunities provided by supporters like you.

This past fall UCOM staff was humbled, educated and inspired by the Jim Crow museum in Big Rapids. The museum at Ferris State University serves as a tool to teach about racism through artifacts, cartoons and mementos displaying racism. The museum houses items dating back hundreds of years and includes items as current as the mocking of President Obama. The displays are upsetting. Black men are portrayed as lazy, black women presented as Jezebels and the n-word is widespread. Why would it be important for UCOM staff to go to such a museum? Because it fosters our journey to eliminate racism and it inspires us to work harder to eliminate it, espe-

cially within the walls of 1311 Chicago Dr. SW.

Our social justice journey was further fueled when we went to see the movie Selma in January. Staff and volunteers attended this showing as a part of our commitment toward being racism free and in doing so supported our allies, the Partners for a Racism Free Community. It was so much more than a fundraiser though. The celebrity faces of Oprah and Common did not soften the story. Staff members left the movie feeling vulnerable, saddened and with a fire in our hearts to continue this journey, to be steadfast in the elimination of racism.

This fire, this inspiration, this fuel, would not exist without our supporters. UCOM supporters inspire us to learn more, to be more, and to fight for more. UCOM cannot thank you enough for trusting, knowing, and valuing our journey to becoming a racism free organization.



Provided by: Associated Press/Paramount Pictures, Atsushi Nishijima

**Inspiring Action:** *Selma* stars British actor David Oyelowo as Martin Luther King, Jr. You inspired and empowered 12 UCOM staff members and volunteers to attend a private showing of *Selma* where Partners for a Racism Free Community hosted a poignant and powerful post movie discussion.

**Overcome**  
*“The fate of millions of people—indeed the future of the black community itself—may depend on the willingness of those who care about racial justice to re-examine their basic assumptions about the role of the criminal justice system in our society.”*

— Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*

**Please pass this newsletter onto a friend and show that you care about racial justice issues.**



# Embrace Diversity



*UCOM Benefit Grupo Tarasco performs a dance routine at last year's benefit concert*

Join us as we celebrate and embrace the diversity of our community, our supporters, and our neighbors.

*This year's concert features the GR Women's Chorus conducted by Lori Tennenhouse; Maureen Kirkwood, Barbara Osburn, and Annie Beals, vocalists; and pianist Philip Pletcher.*

Following the concert there will be a reception including Tacos el Cuñado authentic Latino food, hors d'oeuvres, and a 50-50 raffle.

There is still time for you, your church, company or agency sponsor or to advertise in our concert booklet. Please call or go to [UCOMgr.org/concert](http://UCOMgr.org/concert) and click on the link at the bottom of the page.

Tickets are on sale now for \$20 and may be purchased at the [UCOMgr.org](http://UCOMgr.org) store, or by calling UCOM at 616.241.4006.

Can't make it to the Concert? You can sponsor a UCOM neighbor to come instead! Call for more info!

**Sunday, March 29th at 4:00 pm**  
**12th Annual Friends of UCOM Benefit Concert!**  
**First (Park) Congregational UCC**  
**10 E. Park Place NE**

## ***Around the World A Global UCOM***

**By Erik Keener –  
Assistant Executive Director**

UCOM's tremendously talented volunteers, staff, and supporters come to us from all corners of the globe. From Africa to India, Vietnam to Guatemala, Mexico to Russia, Columbia to Canada, and all places in between, the UCOM family is a brightly colored multicultural quilt stitched together by the desire to give back to our community.

Born and raised in Texas by her Mexican immigrant parents, Grandma Lucy has been a fixture in the Roosevelt Park neighborhood for nearly 50 years. And for over 20 years she has been a volunteer, friend, and cheerleader for all things UCOM. Whether she is cooking for the staff and volunteers, helping translate, or just lending a sympathetic ear, Grandma Lucy's love for UCOM is unquestioned and her efforts greatly appreciated.

John came to this country under trying circumstances. A Christian missionary in his home country of Liberia, John was forced to leave his home when civil war struck for the second time. Fearing

for his family's safety John made the difficult decision to leave the only home he'd ever known and seek refuge in the United States. Nearly 20 years later John spends days at UCOM working through a placement program with the Area Agency on Aging. His joy and zeal for life are as infectious as his smile, and his presence makes UCOM a better place.

Jeanette and Tina both immigrated to this country from Germany many years ago. Each of them ended up in Wyoming and eventually they became close friends. In difficult times they knew they could count on UCOM for help and we knew we could count on them too. Their love and support for UCOM and their community was great and unwavering. Tragically, Tina was killed in an act of domestic violence this past February. We will never forget her great spirit, her kind soul, and everything she brought to UCOM as a volunteer.

The people mentioned in the story above are just a small sample of the many different cultures and backgrounds of our friends and volunteers. Each one of them brings something special and helps us grow. For that we are truly grateful.



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

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**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](http://UCOMgr.org)  
My friend gave me a copy of your newsletter,  
I would like to share "love" with our neighbors too.