

CHURCH UNITY

Michigan: churches get together

"We've got a problem, but it's a good problem," Jimmy Rose said as he and Robert Burke discussed the Sept. 15 reuniting of the Westland Church of Christ and the Inkster Church of Christ, both in southeast Michigan.

The problem?

No longer the strife which in 1978 divided the members of the Inkster church, but now a problem of how to fit all the members into a building that will only hold about 350—if you "stuff 'em in there" according to Rose.

The excitement over the emerging of the two congregations into the Carlyle Street Church of Christ is contagious.

Conferences have been held, plans have been made, and a full day of activities is scheduled for the "special celebration" as the occasion is referred to in the numerous flyers that have been distributed.

On the morning of the fifteenth, Calvin Gray, minister of the Harrison Street Church of Christ in Longview, Texas, will hold the first service in a week-long series of meetings. Members will then join in fellowship for a noon meal, after which J. S. Winston from Dallas, Texas will speak.

Then it will be on to the business of evangelizing the Inkster/Westland area.

"We had already scheduled a one-week gospel meeting and we really planned the reuniting on the fifteenth because we thought a meeting would be a good way to kick it off," Burke said.

"We want to show the community that we had problems but we can work out those problems and work together," Rose said. "I won't deceive you into thinking that everybody is for this because along the way you have casualties where people cannot divorce their feelings from what really needs to be done.

"It will take some people a little more time than others, but I think eventually we will be able to gain them back. It's going to take patience."

The problem Rose and Burke speak of began in the middle 70s and came to a head in 1978 when Rose was asked to resign from his duties as minister of the Inkster Church of Christ.

The church had begun in the early 50s, and a building was erected in 1960. Rose was hired as minister in 1972 after the death of Homer Black, the first preacher of the congregation.

"Actually, the problem that we had was that the Board of Trustees, who called themselves the quorum, was in total control of the church, and they made decisions on every issue," Burke said. "Basically, what they said happened.

"It is a difficult task convincing brethren on a board such as this where you don't have elders that they are not elders because basically they are the only leadership you've got and they generally have the tendency to assume the responsibility," Burke continued.

In the seven years since Burke became the minister of the Inkster congregation, changes in the board took place.

"That, along with some teaching," Burke said, "and they were made to

come to the conclusion that they were not spiritual leaders of the congregation."

Rose said it had always been his intention that someday they would get the problem solved and would be working together as one congregation again.

Then, about a year ago, Burke, who only lives three blocks from Rose, called and asked him out to lunch. They talked about definite changes they felt should be made, and Rose went back to share the conversation with his brethren.

The reuniting is the result.

Plans for the future are bright. The two will share the preaching responsibilities and each will work in his area of expertise.

Rose will be in charge of edification and teaching by the Bible school departments. Burke will work in the area of personal evangelism, programs for new converts, and on the zone programs.

Rose's eyes light up as he speaks of the Fishers of Men program Burke has started in the Inkster congregation. Burke took the evangelism course in Pontiac a few years ago and has found it to be an effective method of teaching the lost about Christ.

The Fishers of Men program is a 10-week course of study taught by Darryl

O'Rourke and Chuck Tyne of Naperville, Ill.

Since completing the course himself, Burke has already trained 49 people from the Inkster congregation and two from the Westland congregation and is also teaching the course to members of the nearby Southgate Church of Christ.

"The good thing about this program is it has a built-in follow-up program," Burke said.



ROBERT BURKE AND JIMMY ROSE
reuniting churches in Michigan

"We're not just interested in baptizing the people and then letting them go. We're going to close the back door. That's where your real growth comes from." Rose added.

Both congregations already own vans in which the members pick up neighborhood

children, and both have dozens of children besides the 300 members in the two churches.

"And we have a lot of young families over in Westland now, families with two, three, four children, families that are still producing," Rose said.

"With the Fishers of Men program, I see in a couple of years we will have over 500 people, easily," he added.

Both men know that in the near future the churches will have to decide whether to build a new building on the 4 3/4 acres that the Westland congregation now owns or whether to expand the current Inkster facility.

But for now, the excitement lies in the September reuniting of the area brethren.

All men on the most recent Board of Trustees agreed to vacate their office, and a new board has been selected from the total membership.

"As a matter of fact," Rose said, "everybody resigned all positions effective Sept. 15 except Brother Burke and me, and now all positions and all Sunday School teachers will be jointly selected from the new body." Linda Case, special to the Christian Chronicle