

The Rev. Lawrence Witmer, right, joins the executive officers of member communions, communion delegates to the GEM Ecumenical Strategy Board and the congregation in a reading during his installation as Executive Director Sunday, Oct. 24. The service was held at St. Thomas More Church on East Avenue.

Larry Witmer, as he prefers to be called, is more like the man with the impossible dream or like the man assigned to impossible mission — and then sets out to fulfill both.

He was installed head of the six-year-old Genesee Ecumenical Ministries agency, usually called by its initials GEM. Its first director was Rev. Henry Atwell who resigned for health reasons two years ago. Rev. Marvin Chandler and Rev. Melvin Hoover then served as temporary directors while a search was made and concluded with the selection of Mr. Witmer.

GEM is the successor of the former Rochester Area Council of Churches, which in turn was the successor of the Rochester Federation of Churches — both of which were all-Protestant in membership.

During the ecumenical euphoria of Pope John's years, Catholics most everywhere decided to join the various church councils, coalitions, cooperative agencies. During the late 1960s, the Rochester Area Council of Churches was redesigned to include Catholics and aimed in a direction of "mission to the community" and that led to adopting its new name GEM, Ministries — service.

It is the natural focus for people concerned about people in today's complex world where solutions cannot be found in isolation. Christian moral concerns and ideals concerning human rights and dignity transcend denominational and creedal differences.

The major cooperative ministries currently supported by GEM include:

JUDICIAL PROCESS COMMISSION

A social ministry aimed at such objectives as involving citizens in evaluating the Monroe County Jail, seeking alternatives to imprisonment, assuring a competent public defender, and securing legislation to improve the state penal system. JPC offers a variety of educational programs to schools, churches and community groups to heighten awareness of how the criminal justice system works and what its problems are. 101 South Plymouth Ave., 14608, 325-7727.

URBAN EDUCATION TEAM

A social ministry developing new roles for the church in public education. UET has focused on race relations, values in schooling, and parent participation in school affairs. UET sponsors the EDUCATION RESOURCE NETWORK (ERN) under a federal grant to link all parent, student and school-related community groups. A unique newsletter is published monthly. A Resource Bank provides a wide range of supportive services for

citizen groups working on behalf of better schools. 50 N. Plymouth Ave., 14614, 428-9913.

CHURCH WOMEN UNITED

A variety of special ministries including staffing an information desk at the County Social Service office, monitoring the courts as observers, phoning shut-ins daily, promoting the Girl Scout "God and Country" award, assisting disaster victims through Church World Service, and encouraging personal and political action to alleviate the world hunger crisis. Women from many denominations study, worship, and serve together. 17 S. Fitzhugh St., 14614, 454-6443.

ROCHESTER VISTA PROJECT

A service program sponsored by GEM in cooperation with the federal and city governments to provide 21 full-time volunteers to work in 10 community agencies. VISTA workers engage problems that beset many low-income people in such areas as health and nutrition, employment, housing, legal rights, neighborhood development, and nursery care. 17 S. Fitzhugh St., 14614, 325-1920.

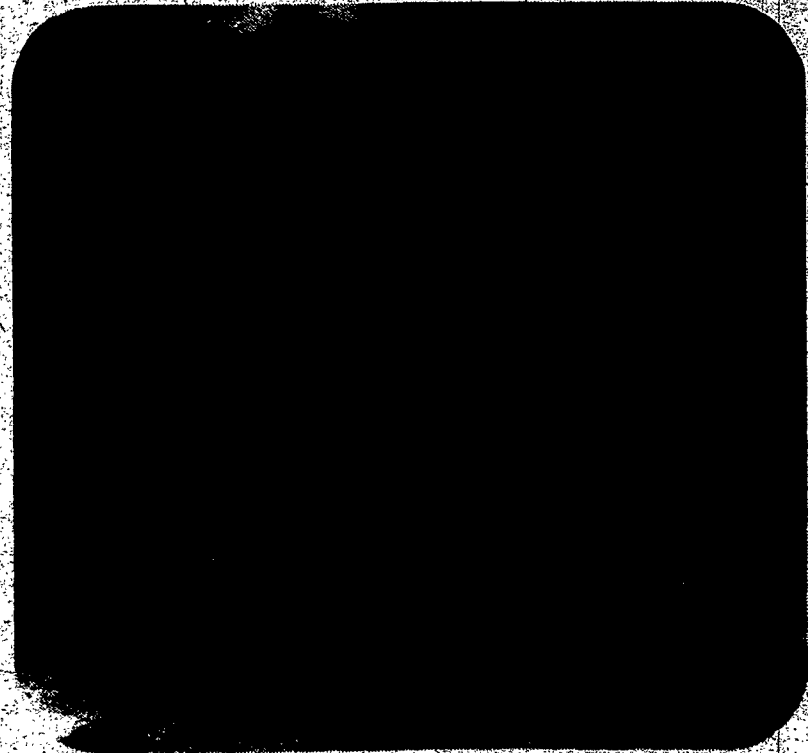
GEM is governed by an Ecumenical Strategy Board made up of two delegates from each member communion. Officers are elected from among the board members.

The GEM Office is at 17 South Fitzhugh Street, Rochester, N.Y. 14614, telephone 232-6530.

Other GEM related projects or programs are the GEM Pastoral Counseling Center which provides trained counselors for individuals, couples or families; the Campus Ministry at the University of Rochester, Rochester Institute of Technology, Monroe Community College, the State University of New York at Brockport and Genesee; the Rochester Interfaith Jail Ministry and the United Church Ministries (UCM), a coalition of churches whose membership is predominantly Black.

GEM publishes a Newsletter, quarterly at this time, which is available free upon request at the GEM office. GEM also sponsors ecumenical church services as on Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, and during this past summer, the unique Service at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in downtown Rochester to mark the national Bicentennial.

Bishop Hogan has been a consistent supporter of the GEM agency and is currently represented at its many events through Sister Kathleen Kircher, diocesan director for Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs, and by GEM Strategy Board delegates Msgr. George Cocuzzi, diocesan Vicar for Urban Ministry, and Father Charles Mulligan, diocesan director for Human Development.



Father Henry Atwell, a past executive director of GEM is still very much involved in GEM activities.



VISTA volunteers at work in the library of Monroe County Legal Assistance. From left to right, seated are: Ian C. DeWaal, Inez Maria Haettenschwiller, and G. Stephen Hill. Standing from left to right are Dean Murray Harris, Stephen Brandt and Michael Lebowitz.