

SOUTHWEST  
ASSOCIATION

MICHIGAN  
UNITED CHURCH  
OF CHRIST

Website: [swamiucc.org](http://swamiucc.org)  
Facebook: [SWA Facebook](#)

# SWA Snapshot

Capture the highlights of happenings in the Southwest Association

March 2020

## Calendar Highlights:

See the website and Facebook pages, above for more events and details!

- EC for Rev. Mike Tupper  
March 14 1-3pm
- Clergy Retreat @Tower Hill  
March 17 @9:30 am - 3pm
- SWA Council Meeting  
March 25 @ 4-5 pm
- Church & Ministry Meeting  
April 2 @ 10 am - 2:30 pm
- Clergy Lunch  
April 21 @ 12 - 1:30pm
- Spring Gathering  
May 16 @ 10 am

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## Spotlight on Zion St. Joe, St. Joseph, MI

Congratulations to Zion St. Joe on 100 years of faithful ministry and service!

Here are some of the ministries Zion St. Joe is involved in:

- † Continued support of Southwest Michigan Human Trafficking Task Force
- † Support of the Benton Harbor Farmers Market—it's the only market that purposely serves the underserved by allowing them to use their food assistance. Zion St Joe provides games and crafts there.
- † Twice a year, Zion St. Joe hosts a Swiss Steak Dinner as a fundraiser for these ministries and more! Mark your calendar for the upcoming one on April 27.
- † See their active [Facebook page](#) for more details.
- † Keep Rev. Adam Bohland and Zion St. Joe in your prayers.



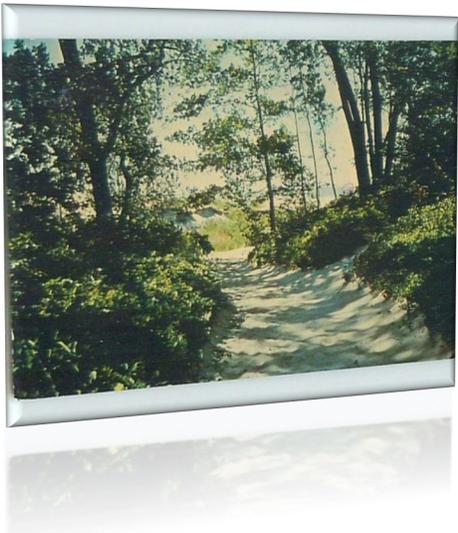
## Ecclesiastical Council for Rev. Mike Tupper

Join us Rev. Michael Tupper's EC,  
as he pursues Privilege of Call in the UCC,  
at 1pm on Saturday, March 14, 2020,  
at Phoenix Community Church, Kalamazoo.

Rev. Tupper is an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church and an associate member of Phoenix Community Church UCC, Kalamazoo.

He recently began a call as Associate Pastor at First Congregational Church of South Haven, MI.

See his paper and details in your official notice email.



## SWA Clergy Retreat

All clergy in the Southwest Association are invited to a day of relaxation and inspiration on Tuesday, March 17 from 9:30 AM - 3pm @ Tower Hill Camp. The Rev. Rebecca Anderson will lead our opening devotion time and lead two workshops on Storytelling as Spiritual Practice.

The cost is on a sliding scale of \$15 to \$25 depending on your ability to pay.

Lunch provided - Taco Bar with vegetarian options.

## Spring Gathering - "Why Don't They Just Get In Line?"

Save the Date for our Spring Association Gathering: Saturday, May 16 @ 10am.

We will engage in a special interactive presentation on immigration, called "Why Don't They Just Get In Line?".

All clergy and church members in our association are welcome!

Stay tuned to your email, [Facebook](#), and our [website](#) for more info to come soon!

## Blessings on your Retirement, Rev. Thomas Ott!



A great thanks to Rev. Tom Ott on your 12 years of faithful service at First Congregational Battle Creek.

May God Bless Tom and spouse Patrice on the next part of their journey.

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## Welcome Rev. Nathaniel Craddock & Michael Craddock!

An Extravagant Welcome to Rev. Nate Craddock, the new Senior Pastor of First Congregational, Battle Creek.! Welcome to Nate's spouse Michael Craddock, as well! To learn more about Nate, click [HERE](#).

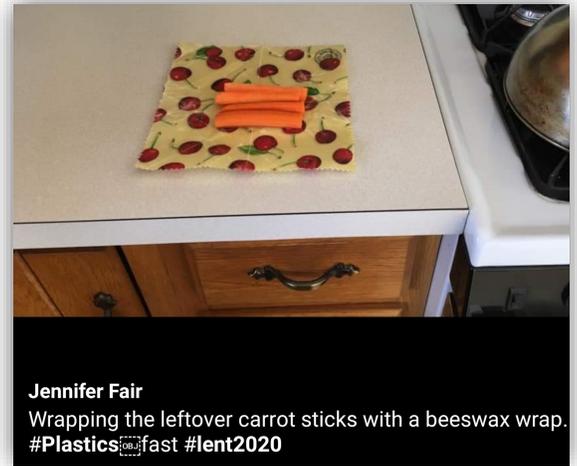


## #PlasticsFast: An Interview with Rev. Jennifer Fair on her Lenten Practice By Rev. Cal Nevenzal

### 1. *So Jenn, why fast from plastic? What first inspired you to do a Plastics Fast for Lent?*

Last year, I was browsing through some news articles on Facebook on Fat Tuesday. I stumbled on this [ONE](#). This article really challenged me to connect my fasting with activism, a connection which has existed since the early Church but hadn't quite connected in my own practice. I also believe that, if you can't refute a position, you have to accept it. So, without planning, I decided to "fast" by throwing away and acquiring as little plastic as possible.

As far as "why plastic", short answer is that plastic is an environmental disaster. Biologically, every living thing makes waste, but that waste is supposed to break-down into its organic compounds and be "recycled" by the ecosystem. Plastics disrupt that system. Most plastic is made from fossil fuels, and it never truly becomes organic again; "biodegrade" means that it breaks down into micro- or nano-plastics, which are so small they enter the food chain. Plastic waste is...wreaking havoc on marine ecosystems...The thing is, I knew all this before my fast, but in my mind that meant not putting recyclables in the trash; it wasn't really thinking about non-recyclable plastic!



### 2. *How do you see such a fast as relating to your faith and drawing you closer to God?*

Honestly, growing up I didn't have a connection between faith and activism. Looking back on it, I had an escapist view of religion; the point of religion, I thought, was to get us away from this mess! ... When I was in seminary, the full implication of the Incarnation finally dawned on me: God loves stuff! In other words, matter matters to God. Salvation encompasses bodies as well as "spirits" and is not limited to humanity, but encompasses the entire material creation. This was the link I needed to see: activism, specifically environmental activism, as a spiritual act. This brings me closer to God by making me care about the same things God cares about; this world God created and gave us responsibility for.

### 3. *What has been your biggest challenge?*

It's a tie between two. The first challenge is simply that I haven't found a way to be completely free of plastics. Eventually, something I need will be wrapped in non-recyclable plastic... The second is that "quitting" plastic opens up a whole new set of ethical issues. Paper and glass are renewable, but have their own environmental impact; same goes for metal. For example, canvas tote bags can be worse environmental impact than plastic bags, because cotton needs a lot of water and nutrients to grow. "Permeant" plastic items are better than disposable, but still require a creation process that is harmful to the environment. Sometimes the cheapest and healthiest food, such as lots of produce, or dried beans and legumes, are only sold in plastic. Is a locally-made item with plastic better than a mass-produced item with no plastic? Is organic tea wrapped in plastic better and conventional tea without plastic? Should I forgo a fundraising dinner for a good cause because they are using Styrofoam plates and plastic utensils? I suspect different "fasters" will have their own opinion on these matters...

cont'd on page 5

## #PlasticsFast continued

### *4. What have you learned that you didn't realize or think about before?*

In addition to the environmental system, plastics use intersects with a lot of systems of injustice. Plastic items/packaging are usually cheaper than non-plastic ones, meaning that non-plastic items are “out-of-reach” for the poor. This applies both to the problem of plastic pollution in developing countries, and to poor(er) folkx in the US. This not only includes the “purchase” price of non-plastics, but the cost in space (for storage) and the cost in convenience (and thus time) that makes non-disposable items/packaging out of reach for some consumers. Serious discussion about eliminating plastics will have to contend with these costs to consumers....

Racism and ableism also play a part in in the plastics-use cycle. Of course, people of color are more likely to suffer from the environmental effects on plastics disposal, because waste disposal sites are often located in communities of color. Disabled folkx are disproportionately reliant on disposable plastics, not by choice, but because those things they need to function in a society biased toward the “typically -abled” are made with disposable plastic. A good example was the choice by some restaurants to eliminate single-use, bendable straws. While the intention may be good, a sturdy-but-bendable straw can mean the difference for a disabled person between being able to drink and not! It’s clear that solutions to the plastics problem needs to have poor folkx, disabled folkx and people of color at the table.

### *5. What are your takeaways from this fast?*

As I alluded to earlier, this fast has really “filled in” what was a weak point in my theology. I had “faith” and “activism” in different mental compartments... I had also thought of “activism” as marching and waving signs, that kind of thing. Now, to me, “activism” is a part of my everyday decisions: what I buy, what I throw away. Really, “activism” and “stewardship” have become one and the same to me.

Also, when people talk about breaking the plastics-use cycle, they often play the “blame game”; either it’s the consumers’ fault for buying plastic, or it’s the manufacturer’s fault for making it, or it’s the retailer’s fault for stocking it. Let’s stop with the “blame game.” No matter where we fall in the supply chain, we can all do something to disrupt the cycle. If enough consumers vote with their dollars, retailers and manufacturers will change...

...Just remember the three Rs: reduce your plastic intake, reuse as much as you can as many times as you can, and recycle when you have no more use for it. Don’t be overwhelmed! No one can do everything, but everyone can do something! Doing something is better than doing nothing!

—Answers by Rev. Jennifer Fair

Pastor of Union Church UCC in Tekonsha, MI

To see Jenn’s article in full, including bonus advice and tips, click [HERE](#).

Follow Jenn on Facebook to see her updates: <https://www.facebook.com/jennifer.fair.146>

## Affordable Senior Housing & Senior Care in SW Michigan Can we talk about it? — An Article by Doug Stahnke

Today, 10,000 boomers are turning 65. Tomorrow, 10,000 more... and everyday for the next nine years. Generally speaking, baby boomers are not well-prepared for retirement. The median 401(k) balance of someone in the 55-64 age group is \$177,805, according to a report from Vanguard. Worse yet, 45% of baby boomers report having no retirement savings whatsoever. This is quite disconcerting.

As a lay delegate to our SWA, and a member of our Church Support Team, we are working toward building covenantal relationships throughout our SouthWest Association (SWA). Members of our Team have been regularly visiting SWA churches on Sunday mornings to help build those covenants. Another initiative toward our covenantal goal is the promotion of our 26-Week Prayer Project.

This is our way of praying-it-forward.

Still another way we could build covenantal relationships might be to work on a joint ministry within our Association. That is why this article has been written. As stated above, I see needs. I see possibilities. Here are some ideas.

Down in Bremen, Indiana, 12 UCC churches of the NorthWest Association (NWA) of the Indiana-Kentucky Conference operate a 55+ senior independent living facility called [The Whitlock](#).

It is a very important ministry in action, and a beautiful place to live. They offer studio, one bedroom and two bedroom apartments, and marvelous meals in their dining room.

The Whitlock is not a part of [United Church Homes](#) (UCH). However, UCH does have two affordable 62+ senior housing communities not far from the Michigan/Indiana state line, and within their NWA.

Oakhaven Community, is a UCH affordable senior housing community also in Bremen, Indiana.

As well, UCH has a wonderful independent living facility in Goshen, Indiana called Maple Leaf Commons. They offer HUD Rental Assistance based on income. The rent is 30% of adjusted monthly income. Don't let the low rent or HUD affiliation slow you down. These are very nice, well kept facilities which I would welcome as my close neighbor.

UCH owns and manages more than 70 Life Plan, healthcare and affordable housing communities in 14 states and two Native American nations. But they have nothing in SW Michigan. Are we ready for this?

The challenge also begs the question as to where to geographically start within our SWA. If you know of a great need in your community, speak up! Get a drum and start beating it! Bring your church voices to our SWA to be heard. Come with an open, caring, soulful, heartfelt mind ready to listen to other church members' ideas as well. Our goal is to strengthen our covenantal relationships through ministry in action. Also, take your ideas into your community, even into other churches. UCH is a UCC organization, but also very inclusive to all people of all faiths.

One significant challenge is funding. Now you may think funding such projects is going to be a monumental roadblock. Not so. UCH have many valuable resources. Do not let the fear of lack of funding hold you back in any way. I have been in touch with Ms. Cheryl L. Wickersham, Vice President of Housing Services, at UCH, and shared these thoughts and ideas with her. She is very willing to help support our dreams with UCH resources. If we proceed, and start to get organized, she will come and meet with us.

Contact me if you would like to pursue this with me, or if you have any questions or ideas.

— Doug Stahnke, SWA Church & Ministry, Church Support

[dougstahnke@gmail.com](mailto:dougstahnke@gmail.com)

## Joys & Concerns

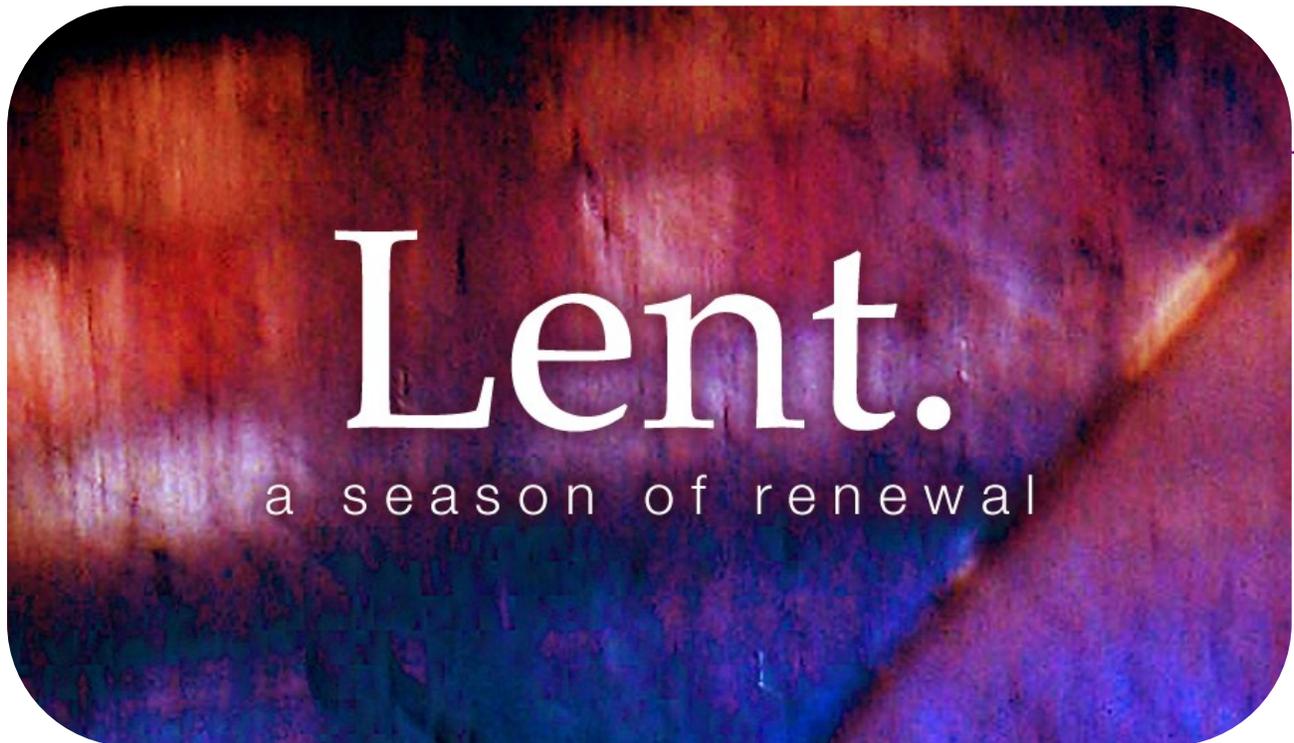
Here is where we will highlight joys and concerns submitted from churches and leaders like you! Please share prayers and announcements about you, your ministry, members of your church, the community, country, and world.



a just  
world  
for all  
ucc.org

Here are a couple hold in prayer:

- + Pray for First Congregational Battle Creek, Rev. Tom Ott as he retires, and Rev. Nate Craddock begins as Senior Pastor.
- + Pray for Zion UCC Baroda as they search for a new Senior Pastor.
- + May we all feel a closer connection to God and one another in this Lenten Season.
- + Pray for our country in this divisive time.
- + See the SWA Prayer Project List to pray for our churches and clergy. Lent would be a great time to start this practice, whether as a ministry, group, or individually.



Thank you for all you do to serve  
our churches and our community!