

SOUTHWEST
ASSOCIATION

MICHIGAN
UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST

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

Calendar Highlights:

There are a lot of great digital opportunities!

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

- SWA Council Meeting
July 29 @ 5pm
- Church & Ministry Meeting
June 4 @ 10 am - 2:30 pm
- SWA Fall Gathering Nov. 1

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SWA Snapshot

Capture the highlights of happenings in the Southwest Association

June 2020

Being the Church in a Pandemic

There is no doubt that we find ourselves in trying times as the church. The Covid-19 pandemic affects so many parts of our lives. This is the time for us to be the church in creative ways. Here are just some of the ways our churches have done just that:

- † Galesburg UCC hosts food distribution and a “Little Free Library.” They also played outdoor music for the community, using the outdoor speakers for organ, ringing the church bell.
- † Many have created special videos and Zooms for children and youth (Union City, Galesburg UCC, FCC St. Joe, and more)
- † Union Church UCC in Tekonsha helped provide meals for children and some adults in partnership with Tekonsha Community Schools, in addition to other food distribution.
- † FCC Battle Creek raised money to help over 15 immigrant families in their community.
- † Wide Awake (UCC Church Start) delivered 60 Mothers Day dinners to single women in the Benton Harbor community
- † St. Paul's UCC Watervliet is working on learning the Doxology in American Sign Language, Knowing we should not sing even once we gather together. As the pianist plays they will sign as the offering is brought forward (plate will be at the sanctuary entry for people to place their offering as they come in.)
- † Portage UCC has been recruiting volunteers to shop for the most vulnerable among them, as well as holding virtual “Be The Church” programming.
- † FCC Kalamazoo is using funds to help the community, and working on a proposal for using their space to host socially distant and digital gatherings in the future.
- † FCC St. Joseph hosted a “drive-thru” Memorial parade in their church parking lot, started a card ministry, flower pick-up, and more.
- † Pilgrim Congregational hosted a food drive and distribution.
- † Zion UCC hosts food distributions and hosted a “Virtual Crop Walk.”
- † And many more!

Keep up the good work for a more just world for all!

Save the Date: SWA Fall Gathering Sunday, Nov. 1st



The Southwest Association is planning on a digital Fall Gathering on Nov. 1st. This will be a chance for us to join together to connect across congregations and ministries, see each other's faces, conduct business, and be creative together. All clergy and church members in our association are welcome! Stay tuned to your email, Facebook, and our website for more info on this and other opportunities!

Long Distance Spiritual Care — Rev. Mary Beth Moran Cross

Our very own Southwest Association Chaplain, Rev. Mary Beth Moran Cross who serves with PACE of SW Michigan was interviewed by WSBTV. Watch it here to learn more about her and her ministry:

<https://youtu.be/OAVk-AOvpg8>



The Gift of Chaplaincy — Rev. Caroline Keeney Meyers Moderator of SWA Council, SWA Chaplain

“Hello. I don’t have any pants on.”

That was how my day as a Chaplain began.

I am sometimes at a loss for words when people ask “What does a Chaplain do?” My answer often comes down to “compassionate listening.” It doesn’t sound like much. But the Chaplains within our Southwest Association (listed below) all embody this vital gift in varying ways and settings. Perhaps a description of my own work as a home-based palliative care Chaplain will provide an answer to those who question why “compassionate listening” would qualify as a job, and how it is especially needful in this season of separation and changes to our every routine.



First, a word about Palliative Care. I work with an interdisciplinary team that includes physicians, nurse practitioners, a social worker, and myself - all of whom visit patients in their homes, plus medical practice coordinators in the home office who triage patient calls and organize the paperwork of caring for almost 200 very sick patients. Like my medical colleagues, I and other Chaplains have gone through specific and intense educational and clinical training to do the work we do. The patients I see (or, these days, speak with on the phone) all have severe, chronic, life-limiting illnesses, often with a variety of co-morbidities that make getting out of their homes, even to doctor appointments, a challenge. Most are elderly. Many live alone, or have limited resources. They can not be cured, but they can be cared for in many ways to provide symptom relief, social services, and spiritual and emotional support. Within that general population description is a myriad of different personalities, needs, and situations. Our role as Palliative Care providers is to help improve their quality of life in the particular contexts where we find them.

“Where we find them” is also a good way to consider the unique gift of Chaplaincy. Whether we work in prison ministry, long-term care facilities, hospitals, the military, or hospice and palliative care, the training we have in compassionate listening has imbued us with skills to hear “where” people are, in body and in spirit. We listen especially for where there may be spiritual distress in their lives, whether or not they have a stated connection to any church, religion, or faith practice.

Some examples: I once had a “cold call” in pre-op with a man about to undergo surgery, and we talked about his love of rocks, which helped him find both calm and hope in the face of his fear. I’ve held the hand of an avowed atheist hours before he died, as he voiced fear that he was starting to question a god he didn’t believe in. And, in visiting the woman with dementia whom I found in her apartment with no pants on, after cleaning her up I sat with her in her living room as she ate ice cream and recited the entire poem by John Milton that concludes with: “They also serve who only stand and wait.”

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The Gift of Chaplaincy— Rev. Caroline Keeney Meyers Moderator of SWA Council, SWA Chaplain, cont'd



We never know where we will find people, but we stay there with them and, in doing so, we often help them to find, and hear, themselves as well. I have stopped counting the number of times a patient has said to me “I’ve never told anyone this before...” and then been witness to the weight of a lifetime lifting off their shoulders. Sometimes in listening to people we are able to help them reframe their experiences in ways that allow them to find meaning and purpose they had not previously felt, as with a woman who started the visit by lamenting how useless she was now, and how many people it took to care for her. By the end of the visit, though, she voiced her gratitude for the realization that she had been part of that same “village” of care for many others, and stated,

“I guess my life hasn’t been a waste. I’m at peace.”

These days especially, we often find people missing their churches and other faith communities. Our role then may be to help connect them with services and/or visitors that their churches can provide. A Catholic patient of mine loves to repeat the story that it took a call from his Protestant Chaplain to nudge his church into sending a Eucharistic Visitor to his home!

While Chaplains remain connected to our own congregations, we take that grounding in faith and community out to people who may or may not have such connections. In doing so, we embody the UCC value of “wherever you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here,” and bring it out of our church buildings and into the presence of those we encounter, reminding them that they are welcomed and worthy of love, just as, and where, they are. It is a holy and sacred calling!

With thanks (and apologies if I missed anything important!) to my fellow Chaplains in the Southwest Association:

- * **Beth Code**
- * **Deborah Geiger**
- * **Vince Lavieri**
- * **Mary Beth Moran Cross**
- * **Bethany Schmall**

Recommended Resources for Racial Justice

- ◆ The Cross and the Lynching Tree - A Requiem for Ahmaud Arbery by Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III (live video & panel): <https://youtu.be/vkJIT00onrA>
- ◆ "What I Need from my White Allies" by Rev. Darrell Goodwin, ACM South Dakota Conference UCC: https://youtu.be/V3NdUmQd_ss
- ◆ [75 Things White People Can Do for Racial Justice](#)
- ◆ [Warner Bros. makes 'Just Mercy' free to rent for 'systemic racism' education](#)
- ◆ UCC Board Statement: [We Condemn Racist Actions](#)
- ◆ [Letter from Rev. Phil Hart, Transitional Conference Minister](#)
- ◆ [National Museum of African American History and Culture releases "Talking about Race" Web Portal](#)



Recommended Books for Racial Justice

- ◆ The Cross & The Lynching Tree by James H. Cone
- ◆ Reconstructing the Gospel: Finding Freedom from Slaveholder Religion by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove
- ◆ How to be an AntiRacist by Ibram X. Kendi
- ◆ White Fragility by Robin Diangelo
- ◆ The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas
- ◆ Waking Up White by Debbie Irving
- ◆ Lies My Teacher Told Me by James W. Loewen

Highlighted Resources for Churches during Covid-19

There are so many good resources out there to help churches navigate this trying time. We encourage you to follow the Southwest Association and Michigan Conference on Facebook, as well as sign up for the Conference E-news (see below) to stay up to date on the latest changes, special Zoom offerings, and more.

Remember, you can let Cal know if you need help or are looking for a specific resource.

Here are a few highlighted resources (each is a link you can click on):

- ⇒ [Sign up for the Michigan Conference E-Newsletter to stay connected and up to date!](#)
- ⇒ [Covid-19 Resources on Michigan Conference Webpage](#)
- ⇒ [Letter from Rev. Phil Hart, Transitional Michigan Conference Minister](#)
- ⇒ [New CDC Guidelines for Churches](#)
- ⇒ [6 Phase Plan for Michigan Re-Opening. Scroll down for a handy chart.](#)
- ⇒ [UCC Resources](#)
- ⇒ [State of Michigan Resources](#)
- ⇒ [Article from a Biology Professor—Erin Bromage, *The Risks—Know them and Avoid Them*](#)
- ⇒ [What Do Coronavirus Racial Disparities Look Like State By State?
— NPR Article by Maria Godoy](#)



THE EXPERIMENT

This project has many ways in which youth and Youth Champions can be involved. Registered youth participants will be sent a package in the mail that contains a weekly activity to encourage at-home, individual worship experiences. Youth and their leaders will also have the option to participate in a weekly Zoom discussion to share their individual experiences and learn from each other. All local churches will be sent details about {The Experiment} and have the option to utilize this program and resources in any way that makes sense at the local level. Weekly discussions will be supported by Jenn Ringgold and Phil Hart.

If you are interested in more information about how you can be involved, email jenn@uccmidland.org

During this time of physical distancing, there is a deep need to generate and provide opportunities for support and fellowship. Faith Formation and Youth Ministry Leaders are invited to a weekly Zoom on Thursday's at 11:00am. Link and agenda for discussion are sent out via email on Wednesday afternoon.

YOUTH CHAMPIONS

Youth are an integral part of the church. In order to share resources that help to encourage and teach youth and young adults, the Michigan Conference invites you to be a part of our Michigan Youth Champions. A *Youth Champion is any adult who supports and encourages youth in our Michigan UCC churches, and seeks to be in community with other adults doing this important work.*

Youth Champions are connected by an email distribution list. To be added to this list, please email Jenn Ringgold, Program Associate for Youth Ministries for the Michigan Conference at jenn@uccmidland.org

Stay updated about events being planned in the wider church to help engage youth. This summer, the National UCC has several video and virtual workshop events that will be taking place in June and July.

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.



Here are several to hold in prayer:

- + Pray for Rev. Whitney Brown, Galesburg UCC Pastor, as she visits her mother Alice and brother Chris, who are both struggling with health issues in New York.
- + Pray for Zion UCC Baroda as they search for a new pastor.
- + Pray for Wide Awake, UCC church start in Benton Harbor.
- + Pray for the safety of our black community both here, and in the country. And for the opening of eyes of everyone, calling us to action.
- + Pray for our chaplains in the SWA who have been hard at work, and putting themselves at risk for the sake of caring for others. Also for our healthcare, restaurant, grocery store workers, delivery drivers, and more.
- + Pray for all those suffering from Covid-19, and the many harms of it in our community and worldwide.
- + See the SWA Prayer Project List to pray for our churches and clergy by name.
- + Give thanks for the creativity and ways we can come together in this time!

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



To submit articles or ideas for the newsletter, or for questions or concerns, connect with
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