



Every year at Lent people start to ask me what I am going to “give up” for Lent.

Fasting in the traditional sense (not eating or eating less) or from specific foods (chocolate, coffee) comes from our sisters and brothers in the Roman Catholic Church. But, like many of their practices, it was rejected or at least marginalized as a result of the Reformation that gave birth to Protestantism. It has never been a part of my spiritual practice.

Instead, I find that in Lent I just think a lot about Easter, usually ending up with more questions than answers: What is it? Why is it? Does it have meaning or relevance to me today? What kind of truth does it reveal? How does it guide me in radical welcome? What damage have churches and pastors done in the name of Easter? How have we borne false witness to the God of the cross and tomb? Is Holy Week just old fashioned and too depressing for words? Where is God? What’s the deal with the bunny and why don’t I get a basket any longer?

All of which makes me grateful for being in church community. Not only will we share in six weeks of worship throughout the season of Lent, but six weeks of Wednesday gatherings, too. (See the following pages.)

Christmas may be the most culturally prominent of our high holy days, but Easter is the most theologically significant. I do not think I am alone in being grateful for the extra opportunities to prepare.

I hope to see you at God’s table and at the dinner table, too.

Pr. Eileen

WORSHIP

Creating a More Open Entrance to the Northwest Door into the Sanctuary

by Linda Shenk, Worship and Music Team Leader

As you entered the sanctuary this last Sunday, you probably noticed the more open area around the northwest door of the sanctuary--the door closest to the elevator. This past week, we moved or relocated a few items in the back of the sanctuary to make this entryway to the sanctuary more open. Here is what we did-- relocated the coat racks to the alcove in the parlor, took out the small pew on the south end at the back, replaced the table and lectern (both used for leaflets and pew-related supplies) with just one piece of furniture at the back of the sanctuary, and are experimenting with having the name tag cart in the parlor close to the Welcome Table. If you are still looking for this cart, look in the parlor right underneath the large clock! Thanks so much for trying out these changes--we hope they help make it easier for folks to get into the sanctuary!

Thank You, Fellow Worship Leaders!

by Pr. Eileen

Thank you to everyone who helped to lead worship between Rally Day and the first Sunday after Christmas. Liturgy means “work of the people” and you lived into that work with grace and love. (Any omissions are unintentional.)

Allison Anderson, Eliana and Mariela Briseno; Kevin Binder; Katie Bonney; Jenna Buchele; Dan Coffey; Linda Shenk and Ailis Cook; Laura Deal; Bradley Duckstein; Barbara Faidley; Jan Flora; Jennifer Gelwick-Luecke; Hannah Hannover; Burton, Eli, Grace, and Nanette Heginger; Emily Kennecke; Dinah Kerk sieck; Charles Kniker; Lesley Lackore; Greg Lamont; Liz Moore; Emily Mullaney; Mary Mulford, John Uitermarkt, and Tom Uitermarkt; Laurie Olk; Jim Peake; Joshua Pilcher; Amanda Petefish-Schrag and Ben and Celia Schrag; Terry Potter; Doug Powell; Steve and Johnny Rogers-Smith; Rachel Schelle; Dale Shenefelt; Kristin Shields; Bill and Sharron Slinger; Carol Smith; Pat Spangler; Phil Spike; Sunny Stewart; Allen Trenkle; David White; Richard White; Greg Wool; and Bill Yungclas.

Worship and Music Team Goals for the New Year

By Linda Shenk, Worship and Music Team Leader

With each year's new team members and leaders comes renewed vision! Here are the goals, hopes, and dreams of our Worship and Music Team for this year.

1. Make greater use of the online system Sign-up Genius so that members of the congregation can sign up more easily for ushering/greeting. Using the Time and Talents survey, we would like to develop a solid core of ushers and greeters who can regularly sign up for these important roles in the worship service. Having members of the congregation sign up for several slots and regularly will allow the deacons to plan ahead better, so we would be especially appreciative to have folks use it (SignUpGenius can even link to your electronic calendar)! Use this URL to visit the sign up sheet: <http://ow.ly/XB8Tf>
2. Work with the worship staff to create meaningful worship experiences for and with the congregation.
3. Solicit and receive feedback from the congregation on ideas and interests for worship.
4. Bolster our emergency planning: Provide training/familiarization for the WAM team and all interested members of the congregation in such items as the defibrillator as well as have a more publicized plan/regular attention to what to do in emergency situations.
5. Partner with Sanctuary Arts to devise visual elements to enhance worship.
6. Coordinate with Lesley to determine what she needs regarding storage and organization support for instruments and music both during the months while the church is under construction and then more permanently after the next phases are completed.
7. Organize the decorations/worship supplies a bit more so that things are easy to find and can be found in central, accessible locations. For example, we have already worked on organizing the "banner room" on the second floor and have done some work in the sacristy.
8. Update the Deacons' manual/checklist

Lent Schedule

Lent begins this year on Ash Wednesday, February 10th. Ash Wednesday services will be held at Ames UCC, with Pr. Fred Lewis of First United Methodist Church preaching and Pr. Mary Jane of First Christian Church hosting Holy Communion. Ames UCC will be holding midweek Soup Suppers each Wednesday night in Lent at 5:30 p.m. followed by a book study at 6:15 p.m. of *Dear White Christians* by Jennifer Harvey. For more information on Ames UCC's Lent schedule, take a look at the calendar in your newsletter, look for the brochure in your bulletin on Sunday morning, or check out the special e-mail sent to our e-mail list on January 28th.

SOCIAL JUSTICE & OUTREACH

Thank You to Theologian-in-Residence Volunteers

Thank you to all the volunteers who helped make Theologian in Residence happen January 30 and 31:

Ellen Barnhart, Steve Barnhart, Jane Baty, John Baty, Diane Birt, Ken Birt, Jerry Chase, Barbara Faidley, Cornelia Flora, Jan Flora, Beverly Gelwick, Bob Kerk-sieck, Dinah Kerk-sieck, Bill LaGrange, Greg Lamont, Sue Lamont, Greg Luecke, Doug Powell, Peg Powell, Kristin Shields, Galina Spike, Phil Spike, Donna Starck, Tania Tipton, David White, Barbara Yungclas, Bill Yungclas

What Should We Bring?

by Pr. Eileen & Jean Watts

Now that we have begun our monthly offering of foodstuffs in conjunction with Holy Communion (third Sunday of each month), we thought it would be helpful to list what food pantries need. These come from Feeding America and the University of Maine Extension and Sipele Quezada, the District Homeless Liaison for the Ames school district, who spoke at Learning Center in January.

Ms. Quezada shared that many of those who do not have stable housing have little to cook with, usually just a microwave and sometimes a hot plate. Storage of the food can also be an issue especially if a family has to suddenly move. Taking these factors into consideration Sipele stated that the following items are the most needed and useful:

Single serve food items (apple sauce, pudding, easy Mac, soups, oatmeal cups, granola bars, etc), rice, beans, can openers, personal hygiene products, feminine hygiene products

For those with more stability, include the following:

Protein Foods: Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans, and Nuts

Canned tuna, canned chicken, canned beef stews, canned salmon, bean soups, canned or dried beans, baked beans, canned chili, peanut butter, canned nuts

Grains: Bread, Cereal, Rice, and Pasta:

Rice and rice mixes, canned pastas, noodle mixes, dry noodles and pastas, macaroni and cheese mix, cold cereals, bran cereal, shredded wheat, infant cereal, hot cereal mixes, oatmeal, bread, muffin, and pancake mixes, whole-grain crackers, granola bars, graham crackers, flour, bread

Dairy: Milk, Yogurt and Cheese

Infant formula, nonfat dry milk, evaporated milk, instant breakfast drinks, shelf-stable (UHT) milk (small boxes), canned and boxed pudding

Vegetables

Canned vegetables, vegetable soup, canned tomato products, spaghetti sauce, baby-food vegetables, V-8 juice

Fruits

Canned fruit, raisins, applesauce, dried fruits, baby-food fruit, fruit leather (100% fruit), canned and boxed 100% juice

Oils and Condiments

vegetable oil, salad dressing, syrup, jelly and jam, honey, sugar, mayonnaise

Please do not include anything packaged in glass or home made food items. Neither can be distributed and only add to the food pantry's garbage costs.

Thank you for expanding God's banquet table in such a tangible, life-saving fashion!

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Souper Bowl of Caring

by Pr. Hannah

Once again this year our youth will be participating in the national SOUPER BOWL OF CARING on Sunday, February 7. Bring your loose change and non-perishable food items with you to worship that day to support our youth and cheer on your favorite Super Bowl team! All of the food and money will be donated by our youth to Food at First.

During the Sunday School hour (9:30 a.m.-10:30 a.m.) on Sunday, February 7, as part of Souper Bowl of Caring, we will be tying fleece blankets to donate to ACCESS. ACCESS is a local shelter for woman and children that have been affected by domestic abuse. This time of service is for EVERYONE! We need children, youth, and adults to help cut and tie blankets and be in fellowship together!

Youth News

As you may have heard, our youth will be participating in the UCC National Youth Event this July in Orlando, Florida! At this time we have 7 youth committed to go and there may be more! We will also have 2 or 3 adults attending! One of the ways our youth will be raising money for their trip will be to clean up after the Soup Suppers each Wednesday during Lent. If you attend a soup supper you can expect to find a special place where you can make donations. We are so thankful to have such a vibrant youth group! Let's give generously to show our support!

MEMBER SERVICES

Help Us Help Each Other

by Pr. Eileen

In my sermon on Jesus' healing of the bleeding woman and the dead girl child, I named a common phenomenon in churches: as congregants age out of life, so too do they (we) age out of community. The loss can be emotionally and spiritually devastating. (To hear the sermon go to amesucc.org/Sermons, to read it go to eileengebbie.com.) I then invited you to help me maintain connections between our Sunday services and members who are no longer able to be with us in person. This can be through dropping off bulletins or flowers from worship, a phone call, or a monthly visit. If you are interested, please let me know so that we may talk more about what would work for you. And if you are terrified by the idea, intimidated by reaching out to a stranger or someone who is not well, please let me know that, too. More often than not, Jesus leads us into spaces that initially cause us anxiety but ultimately leave us stronger and closer to God.

Talent Show

by Tom Meyer

Get out those musical instruments, tune up your vocal cords, and practice your recitation skills! We have rescheduled the "Joyful Noise" talent show for 3 p.m. on Sunday, February 28. We are looking for people to do any kind of performance: music, poetry, drama, even corny campfire skits. To sign up, see one of the committee members: Tom Meyer (quarkbuster@gmail.com), Kristin Shields, Greg Lamont, or Laura Deal, or simply email the church office (office@amesucc.org). Youth members should sign up with Kristin Shields. Please state the nature of your performance and approximately how much time you need. Don't delay, share those talents!

Women's Fellowship

by Barbara Faidley

On the second and fourth Wednesday of each month the women of the church meet from 12 noon to 1:00 p.m. to discuss various topics and learn about each other. In February, our first meeting is on February 10, which happens to be Ash Wednesday. We have invited Pastor Eileen to join us and lead us in a discussion about Lent. This might include practices we have seen or done in other churches, or what we think about giving up something for Lent or taking something on during Lent. Bring your lunch and join us in an interesting discussion of various practices occurring during Lent. The second meeting of Women's Fellowship is on February 24 for a good time of sharing all of our Joys and Concerns.

Library News

by Barbara Faidley

Look for the new book shelf in the parlor. On it will be featured books-children and adult-from our Church Library. The current Book Review Books will be displayed and other books of interest available from the library. The books can be checked out by taking the card from the book and signing the date and your name. Then put the card in the basket on one of the shelves. One of the library committee will file the card. Keep it a reasonable time and return it to the large basket on the floor of the library labeled RETURNS.

The featured books change monthly. Take advantage of the good books that we have in our library. CHECK A BOOK OUT the next time you are in church. Every time I am in the library I find a new book to examine and want to take home and read. Visit the Church Library.

Library Work Group

by Barbara Faidley

We will try to get together to work in the library every first and third Tuesday from 10:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. We are in the process of labeling all of the children's books so they are easier to find and return to their correct cubbies. We are still processing new books and deleting older books from our shelves. Any and all volunteers are welcome to the work group.

Book Club Spring Reading

by Lynette Spicer

The UCC Book Club's meeting day and time has changed to the third Wednesday of each month at 2:00 p.m. in the library for the new year. Please join us!

February -- Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End by Atul Gawande (2014 nonfiction, 304 pages) Discussion leader: Nancy Marks

March -- The Long Walk: A Story of War and the Life That Follows by Brian Castner (2012 nonfiction, 240 pages) Discussion leader: Barbara Faidley

April -- I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban by Malala Yousafzai (2014 nonfiction, 368 pages) Discussion leader: Barbara Faidley

May -- Reaching Beyond the Waves: The Inspirational Story of One Teacher's Sixth Grade Students' Search for the WWII Survivors of a Downed B-17 by Suzanne Kelly (Local Author, 2015 nonfiction, 346 pages) Discussion leader: Christa Andersen

June -- Select titles for upcoming book club year

Directory Updated

By Barbara Faidley

We have received back from Lifetouch the proofs for the Pictorial Directory. We have gone through the pages and found spelling errors and misplaced pictures. Things are looking in good shape. We are very pleased at how it looks. We are sending it back to the printer with all of the corrections on January 21. Hopefully we will have it back at the church by the beginning of March. All of the updated information will be very helpful for the members of the church.

PROPERTY & OUR CAMPUS

Wednesday Work Crew

Join other Ames UCC-ers in keeping our campus clean, maintained, landscaped, and safe. The Wednesday Work Crew meets at 9:30 a.m. each Wednesday. Come for as long as you are able, as often as you want.

A Note from the Property Team

by Ken Birt

The property team is getting rid of some unneeded items. Members get the first choice of these items, if they are interested.

- Three pews of the following lengths: 10 feet 10 inches, 13 ½ feet and 16 ½ feet. These can be shortened.
- A large wooden beam, it appears to be oak. 8 ½ feet long and 12 inches by 7 ¾ inches.
- The metal shed between the parlor and the fellowship hall entrance. It is about 6 feet wide and 4 feet, 8 inches deep.

If you are interested in any of these items, please contact Ken Birt, 238-1699 or ken.birt.118@gmail.com.

ODDS & ENDS

Book Review

by Barbara Faidley

“A Time to Mourn, a Time to Dance: Help for the Losses in Life” by Margaret Metzgar, The author is the founder and primary therapist at the Transition and Loss Center in Seattle, Washington. She specializes in working with individuals, families, children and groups dealing with issues of crisis, loss and transition. This book has four sections: 1) Your journey through grief, 2) The different faces of loss, 3) Giving Help to others and 4) Additional Resources. In this book the author will explore significant losses. She looks at the grief that comes from death, divorce, unemployment and other important losses that may impact your life. She looks at how it feels and how it affects our lives and the lives of those around us. She searches with the reader to find a meaning to grief. And she looks at coping strategies that would help to lessen the

pain and promote healing. In the last section she also suggests resources for when the journey seems too difficult to be traveled alone. These include a chart for your own Personal Circle of Support, selected Bible readings for certain types of loss and also National support resources and additional books. This book is for anyone who wants to understand grief; griever as well as persons who want to improve their ability to help those who are experiencing a loss.

Children's Book Review

by Barbara Faidley

“The Mitten” adapted and illustrated by Jan Brett. This story is a Ukrainian folktale where a boy named Nicki loses his snow-white mitten in the snow. He can't find it in the snow . . . but the woodland animals do! The author Jan Brett travels around the world to research the architecture and costumes that appear in her pictures. Each 2 page spread in the book has a main illustration and on each side there are two small drawings. In each of these small drawings she draws things that will be happening on the next large picture. Her illustrations are incredibly realistic and detailed. Even though the book is meant for children, adults enjoy reading it for the realistic details in the illustrations. Jan Brett has a website which has more than 2,900 free coloring sheets, activities, etc. on it. The website is www.janbrett.com. This is a classic winter tale by an extremely talented writer and illustrator.

AS GOD HAS WELCOMED US

The Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, President and General Minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), preached at a joint service of First Christian Church and Ames UCC on Sunday, January 17. This is the text of her sermon that day.

One Sunday after church, back when I was in high school, the family was eating dinner, some good fried chicken. Along with the chicken, my dad and I were picking apart the morning's sermon. My mom finally broke in, “We don't go to church for the sermon. We go for communion.”

My mom has a classic Disciples view of worship. The sermon? Take it or leave it. (For a preacher, that can be good news . . . or bad news!) But communion? – Not an option.

My mom may have been on to something. Whether we take communion weekly or monthly, the open table says something important about who we are – who we understand God to be.

All are welcome at Christ's Table. As this morning's passage makes clear.

There is Jesus with the disciples and a great big crowd. Out on a wide, open hillside.

After noting what it would cost to feed 5000 people, after collecting just 5 barley loaves and 2 fish from a generous little boy, Jesus gives thanks, the people eat. . . and . . . there are 12 baskets left over!

A miracle!

Even a casual Bible scholar knows that the number twelve is no accident: twelve baskets of bread → 12 tribes of Israel. The whole nation. Everybody got fed. But there's even more to this number 12 than that.

The readers of this story in New Testament times, who knew their Bible well – would have seen something more in those twelve baskets of bread. Knowing what they knew, they, too, would have understood by the number twelve, that “all” means all – and they would have been shocked!

To see what they saw, we need to know about the table of presence. The holy table that rested in the temple, a table first described in the book of Leviticus. The original hearers of this story would have known that the “table of presence” marks that place where God lives.

They would have known it to be an extravagant table. It would have “plates and dishes for incense . . . flagons and bowls to pour drink offerings.” – All of pure gold. It would have frankincense arranged alongside twelve specially baked loaves of bread made of choice flour, placed in two rows on the golden table.

Ohh, it was a beautiful table! ...Or so they had been told.

See, the crowds wouldn't actually have ever seen it, this special table located in the holy place where God dwells. The priest was the one who would see and set the table, with the twelve loaves of bread meant for God who dwells there – in that holy place.

But, though the people had never actually seen the breads of presence, they knew all about them. As this story ends with twelve baskets of bread, these twelve loaves of bread would have come to their minds . . .

– And the people would have been surprised.

Because unlike the twelve breads of presence, these twelve baskets of bread, are not back in some set-apart, holy place where only the elite get to eat with God. These twelve baskets are out here in this open space, right among the people. All the people.

Surprise! No table of gold but an open field. Not the social elite of Rome, or the religious elite only, but a crowd– children and women and men. Out here, where the people are – the hoi poloy, anybody, you and me – becomes the dwelling place for God.

A miracle occurs: the people are fed.

Only: the miracle is not how many people are fed; the miracle is which people are fed. All the people are fed!

Oh my goodness! Say the hearers of the story. God is with us. Not only in places set with tables of fine gold, but out in the open field with the hurly burly crowd!

. . . For the original readers, it is a delicious moment of new insight. All are welcome at God's table, set in the midst of all of us! . . .

That was then. This is now.

We are not the oppressed masses of the Roman Empire. We are not shocked to find that there is room for us at the table. We are Disciples and UCC (whoever you are and wherever you are along life's journey...) Our very identity is partly about an open table. Where is our surprise? Where is the challenge for us?

Let's look yet again at the number 12 – for the twelve tribes of Israel, for the twelve breads of presence.

Twelve also for the 12 disciples. Let's look again at those twelve who Jesus has gathered around him. Jesus has invited Matthew – the tax collector! – to the table. (That's kind of surprising, right? I mean – even today who really wants the tax collector at the table!)

But wait! There's more. Jesus has also invited Simon the Zealot – the violent revolutionary – to the table. A Zealot is as opposite from the government's tax collector as you can get.

You know that's Fox News and MSNBC together every night right there with Jesus and the disciples at the dinner table! There's a challenge!

And yet, as different as they were, they were known by one name – they were Jesus' disciples.

We 21st century followers of Jesus don't live with the class structure of the Roman Empire. We are already people of an open table. But it's still hard, sometimes isn't it? The good news is, "all are welcome." The challenge is "all are welcome."

My sweet husband, Rick, grew up in another denomination that will go unnamed. One Christmas, home from college, he went to Christmas Eve Eucharist at the Episcopal Church. Word got back to his elders who called him in.

"Rick – we heard you went took communion at the Episcopal Church."

"Yes, Sir, I did."

"But Rick, if you take communion with them it means you agree with everything they teach."

Young Rick responded, "Well, Brother Bill I take communion with you every Sunday, and I don't agree with half of what you teach!"

On that hillside with Jesus, there were twelve baskets left over – standing in part for twelve disciples with at least 12 different points of view. Coming together with their differences.

All are welcome.

But even yet, we haven't gotten to the deepest challenge. Yes, it's hard to stand at the table side by side with people who hold opinions we can't abide. But sometimes there's something more active between us. Words spoken. Hurts caused.

The deeper challenge is for us to make sure that all are welcome and safe at this table – even from us, even from each other.

There's an old Hollywood movie that gets at this: Places in the Heart. A woman's husband is murdered. An unlikely array of individuals come together to bring in the cotton crop and save the widow's farm.

Toward the end of the movie, there's a communion service where the tray is passed from the blind guy to the black man to the white widow lady to . . . (wait a minute!) to her (murdered) husband – Now we know something unusual is happening here . . .

. . . Then the woman's (deceased) husband passes the communion tray . . . into the hands of the young man who is his murderer, and the table has become a table not just open to all, not just for all opinions to rest uncomfortably side by side, but a table bridging the gap of the violence that is between them, a table calling out for reconciliation as they share the bread of life and the cup of hope that we know in Christ Jesus.

Those people gathered on that hillside with Jesus that day, who ate and had 12 baskets left over, were peasants and soldiers and children and women and Pharisees. They had much between them to forgive. And yet all were welcome and all were fed. All were embraced by the present love of God.

Critics of open table theology consider it to be "easy," "loose." Maybe. I think it's hard. Hard for Fox News and MSNBC to eat together at table, united in the love of God, even in their abiding differences of opinion.

Hard to eat at table with people who have wronged you – or who you have wronged, whose forgiveness you need to seek.

Those 12 baskets of God's presence standing for those 12 disciples, call out for a table where all are enfolded in God's love, where all are welcome and safe.

Henri Nouwen, the great writer on prayer and spirituality, was a professor at my seminary. He celebrated the Lord's Supper daily in a little stone chapel there. It was usually an intimate service with a few students.

One evening in the circle was a middle aged woman, unknown to the students.

The passage that evening was a tough one from Mt 5. Jesus is speaking:

(But I say,) "30 if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off . . . 31 "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' 32 But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

In the informal discussion always a part of that worship, the woman said haltingly, "I am a divorced woman, remarried, with a son by my second husband. According to my church's tradition, I've not had communion since my divorce. If I understand that passage right, in order to be faithful, I have leave my husband, cast aside my son as illegitimate."

All eyes on Henri – who didn't respond right away. Finally he, said, "There are many things that can separate us from God. Sometimes it is the church."

Right? Sometimes within congregations – or among congregations - we pick each other apart like the bones of a chicken at Sunday dinner.

But with Jesus, twelve baskets of bread left over proclaim the good news. Embraced by the presence of God – easy or not – all are welcome at Christ’s reconciling table.

At that seminary chapel, that evening, when it came time for communion, usually passed from one to the other around the circle, Henri himself, held the elements in his own hands and he served each one, starting with that woman.

The good news of that hillside feast – all are welcome at Christ’s Table. The challenge – all are welcome here.

May it be so with us!

Glory be to God, our Creator, our redeemer, our friend. As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be. World without end. AMEN

Stay In Touch Throughout the Month

Please join us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram @AmesUCC, or send an e-mail to office@amesucc.org to receive our weekly e-mail announcements.

Be In Touch with Ames UCC

217 6th Street, Ames, IA 50010

515-232-9323

Mondays—Thursdays

8:30 a.m.—4:30 p.m.

24-hour pastoral emergencies:

515-428-1779

Katie Bonney,
Church Office Administrator
office@amesucc.org

David Cook, Sexton
cookdavi@gmail.com

Jim Dickson, Treasurer
dje49@opencom.net

Eileen Gebbie, Minister
eileen@amesucc.org / Ext 11

Hannah Hannover,
Minister to Children & Families
hannah@amesucc.org / Ext 12

Nancy Heathman, Financial Secretary
heathman@mediacombb.net

Lesley Lackore, Music Director
llackore@gmail.com

Karen “Sunny” Stewart, Keyboardist
kstewart@ames.k12.ia.us

Jean Watts, Youth Director
jean@amesucc.org

Ames United Church of Christ
217 Sixth Street
Ames, IA 50010

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