



JAMES UCC COURIER

DECEMBER 2016/JANUARY 2017



December 11, 2016: Children's Christmas Program

"The Christmas story never grows old.
It's still the greatest story ever told."

WORSHIP

Worship News

by Pr. Eileen

During the fall, our Worship and Music team convened conversations about the role of congregants in worship and how to have worship be a place that fosters our understanding of each of us as ministers. The results have been on display on paper leaves by the east entrance and on our rolling bulletin board. They will give a full presentation at Learning Center on 1/8 and in their annual report.

However, there was one consistent piece of feedback that we (WAM and your worship staff) decided to address right away: the desire to add more quiet in worship, particularly at the beginning of the service. To allow us to settle more fully into worship, we will shift the passing of the peace till after the prayer of confession. This will allow us to settle into worship before hopping back up in fellowship.

In the new year, we will also continue the practice of adding more silence by eliminating oral announcements, as we have done during Advent. Announcements already appear in the bulletin, weekly e-news, and Facebook. After Pentecost, we assess how having no oral announcements has been received.

I Was There When You Were Baptized

by Pr. Eileen

On Sunday, January 8 we will celebrate the baptism of Jesus by his cousin John (Luke 3:1-22). If you were baptized, and have a photo from that moment, I invite you to bring it to church by Sunday, January 1 for a display. I will handle them with kid gloves. Thank you!

Why I Serve as a Deacon

By Pat Spangler

My favorite duty as a deacon is ringing our old, historic church bell to announce the start of Sunday services at Ames United Church of Christ. As the bell tolls, it reaches out to the community welcoming and calling all to come.

Did you know that this old bell has also been rung every Wednesday at noon for the past 30 years as part of a **Peace Ceremony**? This is what happens. A few people gather in the belfry and take turns ringing the bell steadily for several minutes.

Next, the following prayer is read in unison:

Lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth.

Lead us from despair to hope, from fear to trust.

Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace.

Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe.

Afterwards, “We Shall Overcome” is sung while everyone holds hands. Anyone in the community is welcome to join in this tradition.

In 1985 the UCC General Assembly met in Ames and voted that United Church of Christ congregations could individually adopt being a “*Just Peace Church*”. This means peace with justice for all. Our members voted that Ames United Church of Christ would be a *Just Peace Church*. Bill Yungclas, whom I interviewed for this story mentioned that adopting a *Just Peace Church* title was not well received by all. Some felt it was a stand against the U.S. Armed Forces. A few church members left.

During Lent of 1986 the Peace Ceremonies began and continued on a weekly basis. I believe that God’s will is for there to be peace on Earth for all mankind. I thank those who came before me who have carried this message of peace into the Ames community by ringing the bell at the corner of 6th and Kellogg.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Come to Learning Center for Discussions on Current Topics... and Fun!

by Lynette Spicer

Join the conversation on Sundays at 9:15 a.m. in Fellowship Hall. The coffee and hot water are always on.

January 8, The Worship and Music Team's Listening Sessions on Lay-Led Ministry, Linda Shenk and Elaine Hieber will share ideas generated in October and November sessions with congregants. New ideas are welcome at this session.

January 15 Inter-generational Fun – Tying Blankets with Sunday School Children and Youth

January 22 Chair Exercises for the New Year led by Nanette Heginger

January 29 Update on Capital Campaign by the 150th Campaign Task Force, Ken Birt, chairman

MEMBER SERVICES

Keep Up To Date with the Online Calendar

Visit amesucc.org/calendar to see the calendar of events for Ames UCC. This is updated regularly with all meetings and events. If you need a paper print out of the calendar, you can contact our Church Office Administrator Katie Bonney at 515-232-9323 or office@amesucc.org.

Women's Fellowship

The dates for Women's Fellowship in January are January 11 and January 25. January 11 will be a Joys and Concerns meeting where we chat about what is happening in our lives. January 25 will be a SURPRISE MEETING. Look for more information in the Sunday Bulletin and our week e-blast newsletter. All women of the church are invited to our meetings as we have lunch together and get to know each other better. We hope you can join us for both or one of our meetings in January.

Church Library News

In November, during one of our Learning Center times, there was a panel on grief. Four members of our congregation shared a loss of a loved one and how they handled their grief. During this discussion there were 3 books mentioned that people had used during their grieving time. Those books are GHOST RIDER by Neil Peart, GOOD GRIEF by Granger Westberg and, HEALING AFTER LOSS: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief by Martha Whitmore Hickman. These 3 books have been purchased by the Church Library. They will be on display in the Parlor after Christmas or they are found in the library under the topic LIFE CRISIS.

The Church Library has also purchased some new children's books. The Methodist Church has a national reading program and many of the books that were ordered were recommended children's books by this program. The titles include: AM I MAKING GOD SMILE?, FAITH THE COW (start of the Heifer Project), IT'S OKAY TO MAKE MISTAKES and DOES GOD EVER SLEEP?

The Church Library has also purchased the book recommended by this year's Theologian in Residence. LONG LIVE SALVATION BY WORKS: A Humanist Manifesto by Harry T. Cook

These new titles have much to offer adults and children. Please spend some time in the library. We have some GREAT books available. If you ever have any questions about where to find a book or to suggest a book, contact Barbara Faidley.

Church Sales

As you prepare for Christmas this year, are there items you no longer use to decorate your home. Remember, our church plans on having another Holidays and Cookie Sale in October. Save those items you no longer use and donate them to our church. Store them in a special place and you can bring them to the church after Easter when we will start collecting for the sales in 2017. Thank you for your consideration and remember, "Your unwanted items will be someone else's treasures."

Upcoming Book Club Selections

The UCC Book Club welcomes all readers and even those who just want to hear the discussion. The group meets in the church library on the third Wednesday of each month at 2 p.m.

January 18 – Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories That Heal by Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D. (1996 nonfiction, 384 pages). Discussion leader: Christa Andersen

In a deeply moving and down-to-earth collection of true stories, this prominent physician shows us life in all its power and mystery and reminds us that the things we cannot measure may be the things that ultimately sustain and enrich our lives.

February 15 – Long Live Salvation by Works: A Humanist Manifesto by Harry T. Cook. Discussion leaders: book club planning members
Harry T. Cook is a retired Episcopal priest, a scholar of ancient religious texts and the ideas that have emerged from them and the Theologian in Residence at Ames UCC on March 3-5.

March 15 -- The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness by Michelle Alexander (2012 nonfiction, 336 pages).

Discussion leader: Nancy Marks

With dazzling candor, legal scholar Michelle Alexander argues that "we have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it." By targeting black men through the War on Drugs and decimating

communities of color, the U.S. criminal justice system functions as a contemporary system of racial control—relegating millions to a permanent second-class status—even as it formally adheres to the principle of colorblindness.

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND OUTREACH

Ames Interfaith Refugee Alliance (AIRA)

Not since the upheaval of World War II have there been so many displaced persons on this planet at one time; 40.8 million are displaced within their own country, 21.3 million are refugees, and 3.2 million are waiting asylum decisions, 12.4 were newly displaced in 2015 and even more so far in 2016. Sixty percent of those are from Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Worldwide, the vast majority of the refugees came from just three countries: Syria 4.9 million, Afghanistan 2.7 million and 1.1 million from Somalia.

Germany has taken in roughly a third of these fellow humans. As of September, the United States had admitted 10,000 Syrian refugees in our national resettlement program. Fewer than 10 have been settled in Iowa. Iowa has a long history of welcoming refugees and immigrants and the Ames Interfaith Refugee Alliance seeks to honor and continue this tradition.

Members of the Social Justice/Outreach team of Ames United Church of Christ identified refugee resettlement as a priority and because of the likely need to resettle more than one family and the complexity of resettling refugees decided that it would be best to seek other like-minded individuals in Ames churches. The group initially reached out through our Industrial Areas Foundation affiliate, A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy (AMOS), as well as local religious leaders.

The interest from other congregations was phenomenal. When the group held its first meeting, the Ames Interfaith Refugee Alliance (AIRA) was formed. The AIRA agreed to seek further membership and AIRA membership rapidly expanded into service and other community

organizations. The initial activities of the AIRA included meeting with the US Committee on Immigrants and Refugees in Des Moines, inviting a city council member to discuss refugee placement in Ames. The overall working goals and objectives of AIRA are to 1) Seek to be inclusive; 2) Network with service providers; 3) Hold a Town Hall meeting; and 4) Address community concerns with refugee placement.

The first hurdle will be to secure approval from the State Department to settle refugees that have been vetted. The cost and availability of affordable housing will become one of the most immediate and long-term challenges for the Alliance. Like many small cities, Ames has a huge need for affordable housing. However, because Ames is a rapidly-growing university town rent prices have soared the past few years as Iowa State University keeps breaking records in attendance. This does have one advantage, though, as 110 countries are represented on the campus and, as a result, in the community. There is a large Muslim Student Association on campus and an active and centrally located mosque. Our church has also been active, through AMOS, in establishing a housing trust fund that will allow our county to access state monies to provide more access to housing (new, rental, and the like). We also recently donated \$40,000 for a Habitat for Humanity house.

We will invite area service providers (health, food, medical, etc.) to join in our work, many of which receive funding from Ames UCC. The Alliance also anticipates connecting with the Ames school system in order to prepare for admission of refugee children. The Ames schools provide an English as a second language program.

No mandate is clearer within our Bible than to care for the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. Time and again, God and the prophets of God return our attention to those in need, without protection and without homes. It is the same vision of beloved community that Jesus lived for unto death. As a congregation with a radically open table, we support this effort to make a safe landing for refugees here in central Iowa with our whole hearts (and bodies and minds and dollars).

ODDS & ENDS

Iowa Conference UCC Annual Meeting 2016

by Bill R. Yungclas

The Iowa Conference of the United Church of Christ had its Annual Meeting in Des Moines on Saturday, October 22. Following a 45 minute hearing on the “Tri-Conference Staff Proposal”, Rev. Lillian Daniel led worship with a very challenging message.

There are presently 168 congregations in the Iowa Conference with nearly 30,000 members. The Conference is made up of six associations with the Ames UCC being in the Central Association consisting of 25 churches and 7300 members. The Ames UCC is one of 19 Open and Affirming Churches in the Iowa Conference.

The proposed budget income for 2017 is \$913,850 of which \$845,000 is expected to come from the local churches from their OCWM commitments. The projected expenses are set at \$957, 200, of which \$260,100 will be passed on to the National Church budget as the Iowa Conference OCWM commitment. The Ames UCC was recognized as one of 44 churches who increased their giving in 2015. We also were acknowledged as one of 56 churches who were designated as a “5 for 5 Congregation in 2015”, which means we contributed to OCWM and each of the other four church offerings called for by the National UCC. The Ames UCC’s OCWM commitment of \$21,264 in 2015 ranked us 7th among the 168 churches and our “giving per member” also ranked 7th.

In the Nominating Committee report I noted that Diana McHenry was nominated to be re-elected for her second term on the Board of Directors, and Paul Lasley was nominated to be re-elected Chair of the Conference Committee on Authorized Ministry. Allison McHenry was nominated to be elected as a Delegate to the Class of 2019 of General Synod. The Nominating Committee report was approved.

Probably the biggest topic (other than budget) was the vote on the “Resolution to Initiate Tri-Conference Joint Staffing Model” whereby the

South Dakota, Nebraska, and Iowa Conferences would be served by one staff. This would create a structure by which to share one head of staff, Executive Conference Minister, and four Associate Conference Ministers – two in Iowa and one each in Nebraska and South Dakota. This has been in the planning stage for several years and had already been approved unanimously by the Nebraska and South Dakota Conferences. The proposal passed by a vote of 116 “yes” and 13 “no”.

Much information was provided in the way of “Staff Reports” from each of the six Conference Staff, Nominating Committee Report, Business Documentation, Budget, and Statistical Report, which will be on file in the church office for perusal. I would attempt to answer any questions.

Book Review

by Barbara Faidley

WHEN “SPIRITUAL BUT NOT RELIGIOUS” IS NOT ENOUGH: Seeing God in Surprising Places, Even the Church by Lillian Daniel. This author is one of the writers for the “Still Speaking” Daily Devotionals for the United Church of Christ. She is the pastor of a UCC Church in Dubuque, IA. The author says the phrase “I’m spiritual but not religious” has become a cliché. It’s easy to find God amid the convenience of self-styled spirituality—but is it possible (and more worthwhile) to search for God through religion? As one of the reviewers said. “Lillian is as fed up with bad religion as anyone else, but she’s also careful to celebrate good religion and good spirituality that bring people to life and make the world a better place. She reminds us that God is always doing a new thing, but that doesn’t negate the old things God has done over the centuries.” The author gives a new spin on church with stories of what a life of faith can really be: weird, wondrous, and well worth trying. The author says, “I wrote this book to paint a different picture of the church. One that is open, inclusive, intellectual and fun.” So church people who go to churches like that love this book. She is also writing for people who have been wounded by the church but aren’t aware there are other options.” Does this sound like AMES UCC? Read this entertaining and enlightening book. It will be displayed in the Parlor after Christmas.

Children's Book Review

by Barbara Faidley

The book that is being reviewed this month is newly purchased and very appropriate for our life styles. The name of the book is UNPLUGGED: Ella Gets Her Family Back by Laura Pedersen and illustrated by Penny Weber.

Ella is really frustrated. Lately it seems like the whole family has forgotten how to be together. Instead of playing Hangman and making waffles, everyone is talking on cell phones, playing video games and using the computer. What's a girl to do? When Ella makes her move, everyone is confused. This is a lively book about the issue of managing technology so that it can become more family friendly. This is the author's first children's book. She is currently a teacher in East Harlem. The illustrations add much to the story as they are so realistic. This problem of being tethered to our screens 24/7 is a huge societal concern to children, families and teachers. Ella (in our story) comes up with a solution that gives her and her family what studies show they want most—time to be together and have fun.

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Tues-Thurs 8:30 a.m.—4:30 p.m.

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