



Sharing the Good News!

Penn Northeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

Humility in the Face of Anxiety!

by Alan C. Miller, Conference Minister

To say there is an air of anxiety in American society today is surely an understatement. Home foreclosures, a volatile stock market, bank failures, and job losses have left Americans feeling lost and uncertain about the future. Many who have recently retired or who were hoping to retire soon are now facing serious losses in their retirement accounts. Plans for leisure or travel in retirement are now being replaced by questions about the ability to pay the basic bills in the retirement years.

Even though I am not planning to retire for another six to nine years (based upon what the market does to my retirement account), I find myself feeling so anxious that I have not even opened my last two quarterly statements – I can't stand to look. At times I feel embarrassed by my anxiety, after all as a preacher how many sermons have I preached on Matthew 6:24-33? Do you remember this text, or at least some of its more famous verses: *Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet our heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?* (Matthew 6:25-26, NRSV)

Recently my anxiety about the economy was challenged in an unexpected way. I was attending a three-day event at our National Office in Cleveland. The event was sponsored by the Wider Church Ministries unit of the United Church of Christ. The event was led by national Wider Church Ministry Staff, Area Executives for our various mission efforts throughout the world, and a number of missionaries.

The event was designed to help us understand and appreciate the breadth and depth of our United Church of Christ world ministries.

On the second night of the event we were worshipping in the Amistad Chapel. The preacher for the evening was the Dr. Dhyanchand Carr, a Global Ministries International Board Member and the former President of the Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary in Madurai, India. Dr. Carr has a Ph. D. in New Testament Studies and used his sermon both to teach and to preach. He led us through a wonderful journey in which we looked at the Apostle Paul's writings so that we might better understand Paul's understanding of mission. Following his sermon there was a time for questions. One of my colleagues from the New York Conference asked the question: "Dr. Carr, your message was excellent; but how do I take your message to the people in my area who are feeling great anxiety about the economy, particularly as winter approaches and they are worried about the cost of fuel to heat their homes?" Very politely, and humbly, Dr. Carr responded: "I don't know what to say to your question, for most of the people that I work with in India come from farming families of five or more members who must find a way to live on twelve dollars a day."

Friends, please do not misunderstand my words. I feel great empathy for those affected by our current economy, particularly those who were already at the bottom of the economic ladder even before this current crisis began. But as American Christians we often tend to forget that even during lean times, we are "millionaires" compared to the world's poor. Perhaps rather than being anxious about "... what we will eat, or what we will drink, or our body, what we will wear ..." this is the time to give even more to those who have nothing at all!

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