



## Sharing the Good News!

Penn Northeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

### Hope in the Midst of Despair by Alan C. Miller, Conference Minister

As a person who indicates a fairly high preference for *Intuition* on the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator, I am always looking at how things tend to fit together in life. Thus I was struck by a possible connection between a quote in a recent article and conversations I recently had with four different pastors.

First the quote; did you know that the most prescribed medications in the United States are drugs for depression and anxiety?

Second the conversations: over the past five weeks I have had conversations with four different pastors, independent of each other. None of the pastors knew that three other pastors had called me asking the same question. Each pastor is serving a relatively active and healthy congregation. Each pastor asked me: *Do you know of anything that is going on right now, there seems to be a lack of energy in our congregation, there are no fights or major problems, but there seems to be this sense of malaise that is showing up as decreased worship attendance and a lack of enthusiasm?*

I wonder ... I wonder if there is a connection here. I personally believe that American society is feeling very depressed and anxious. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that appear to have no end in sight; an economy that appears to be slightly rebounding for Wall Street and banks but leaving millions unemployed with no hope of employment in sight; a legislature that is so crippled by allegiance to a two-party system and corporate lobbies that they cannot accomplish anything for the corporate good; and a national debt that has everyone scared about the future --- surely there is reason to feel depressed and anxious.

Paul wrote to the church in Colossae: *He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together.* (Colossians 1:15-17)

Times of despair, whether personal or corporate, are often a struggle between things seen and things unseen – the visible and the invisible. When we see the things we have come to depend upon start to collapse around us, our unseen fears often rear their ugly heads. The paradox is that for us as Christians, the power to endure, to find hope in the face of hopelessness, comes from things unseen. This is a problem for Christians, and particularly for Christians from western culture who have been so conditioned to put our trust in that which we can see.

Now I am not suggesting that people stop using prescriptions designed to help with depression and anxiety and just start praying harder. For I believe that God brings healing through a variety of means and practices. But I am suggesting that times such as these are good reminders that ultimately our sense of hope and our inner peace will not be found in things we can see but come from within as we allow our souls to be open to the presence of the Creator.

When things we see seem to be crumbling around us perhaps this is a perfect time to rediscover the unseen presence of God through prayer, meditation, Bible study, worship, and reaching out to the needs of our neighbor.

#### TO CONTACT US OR TO REGISTER FOR EVENTS

431 Delaware Avenue    www.pnec.org web page    610-826-3113 phone  
Palmerton, PA 18071-1908    610-826-5464 fax  
Alan Miller: [AlanM@pnec.org](mailto:AlanM@pnec.org)    Toby Holleman: [TobyH@pnec.org](mailto:TobyH@pnec.org)  
Nancy Azar, [NancyA@pnec.org](mailto:NancyA@pnec.org)    Barbara Jennings: [BarbaraJ@pnec.org](mailto:BarbaraJ@pnec.org)  
Patty Rehrig: [PattyR@pnec.org](mailto:PattyR@pnec.org)    Beverly McClure: [BeverlyM@pnec.org](mailto:BeverlyM@pnec.org)  
Fran Potters (Resource Center) – [Resource@pnec.org](mailto:Resource@pnec.org)