



## *Sharing the Good News!*

Penn Northeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

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### ***Loving God and Neighbor in the Ordinary*** **by Alan C. Miller, Conference Minister**

Often when I am working with church groups around the topics of spirituality and service, those present appear to be intimidated by what they consider to be the magnitude of the challenge. In their minds to get closer to God or to serve God means that they must either live like a monk in a mountain-top monastery or go to some far-off land and serve as a missionary. Both of these endeavors are worthy and surely ways of serving God, however we miss opportunities to see and serve God by loving our neighbor in the everyday, ordinary activities of our lives.

My daughter (Tina) is a 4<sup>th</sup> grade school teacher in North Carolina. She has a special gift for working with children with a variety of learning disabilities. Thus every year her principal loads up her classroom with an extraordinary number of children with special challenges.

For the last seven years, one of her most able teaching assistants has been Pringle, her classroom bunny. She uses Pringle to teach the children responsibility as they sign up to feed Pringle, clean his cage, and give him fresh water. As reward she will occasionally let Pringle out of his cage so that the children can watch him hop around as he explores the classroom and so the children can take turns holding and petting Pringle.

Last year Tina had a boy named Bobby in her classroom. Bobby had a horrible home life and as a result was timid around the other children and seriously lacking social skills. As a result Bobby was often teased and picked on by the other children.

One day Bobby came to school very ill and had an accident in his pants. By the odor in the room Tina immediately knew what had happened, and also knew that if the other children found out that it was Bobby they would tease him mercilessly. All of a sudden the students began to yell out: "Miss Miller what is that terrible smell." Before they had a chance to figure out the cause Tina replied: "Boys and girls, this is what happens when you do not follow through on your chores and clean Pringle's cage. If this continues, I guess I will just have to take Pringle home." The children yelled: "Oh no Miss Miller, we love Pringle;" and then they rushed his cage to give Pringle's cage a cleaning like it had never seen before. As the children rushed Pringle's cage, Tina quietly ushered Bobby out the door and to the Nurse's Office where he could be helped without embarrassment.

Now I am sure that to many of you this story sounds simple, perhaps even mundane. But I would suggest that this simple act of kindness, and particularly kindness shown to one who most often was treated by his peers as an outcast, was an act of loving God and loving neighbor.

How many times during each of your days does God present you with an opportunity to speak a word of kindness, encouragement, or comfort? How many times during each of your days does God present you with an opportunity to just sit with someone who is feeling lonely and abandoned? How many times during each of your days does God present you with an opportunity to smile, greet, or compliment one who needs to hear a word of acknowledgement? These might all feel small or ordinary to you, but to God they are important ways of loving those around us! God and Pringle would find great joy in these simple acts of love and kindness.

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

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