



Sharing the Good News!

Penn Northeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

The Gap between *What Is* and *What Can Be* by Alan C. Miller, Conference Minister

On Saturday, October 24, 2009 we held the 2009 Annual Meeting of the Penn Northeast Conference. As many of you know the theme of this year's meeting was *Surviving or Thriving?* We used the day to talk about those things in the lives of our congregations that tend to get them stuck and leave them feeling like they are merely surviving rather than *thriving* and growing.

Prior to the meeting, the Annual Meeting Planning Committee sent a request to all of our congregations asking them to keep a diary of the time spent discussing the various categories of business that they typically discuss at their monthly consistory/council meeting. 32% of our congregations returned this information.

By their responses they indicated that during their monthly consistory/council meetings they spend:

- #1 23% of the time talking about **Finances**.
- #2 17% of the time talking about **Property** issues.
- #3 13% of the time talking about **Personnel** issues.

At the Annual Meeting we divided the delegates and visitors into cohort groups with each group consisting of 8 to 12 individuals. The categories for the cohort groups were: "Laity," "Authorized Ministers," "Youth," and "Spouses of Authorized Ministers." We asked each group to decide as a group: "What should be the three areas that we spend most of the time in our leadership meetings talking about?"

Here are the responses by cohort groups:

Laity

- #1 **Evangelism**
- #2 **Christian Education**
- #3 a tie between **Music & Worship** and **Outreach/Mission**

Authorized Ministers

- #1 **Community Building & Spirituality**

#2 **Listening/Visioning/Discerning**

#3 **Mission/Outreach**

Youth

- #1 **Christian Education**
- #2 **Finances**
- #3 **Youth Ministry**

Spouses of Authorized Ministers

- #1 **Worship & Prayer**
- #2 **Mission**
- #3 **Youth Ministry**

In reviewing the results one of the members of the Annual Meeting Planning Team noted: "The responses sent in prior to the Annual Meeting are *the way things are*; the responses collected at the Annual Meeting are *the way people think they should be*."

Look at the difference between *the way things are* and *the way people think they should be*.

In my opinion, *the way things are* list (Finances, Property, & Personnel) is representative of leadership that is preoccupied with institutional maintenance and survival and has lost sight of the mission of the church. While the items listed on *the way people think they should be* lists are items that define the very purpose and mission of the church.

In light of this gap, I would challenge each and every consistory/council in our Conference to devote some time over a series of monthly meetings to ask and talk about these questions:

Why the gap between these lists of priorities?

When and how did we lose sight of our purpose and mission?

What would happen if we spent less time talking about money, the building, and staff and more time talking about spirituality, community building, worship, outreach/mission, evangelism, education, and youth?

And what would happen if we had these discussions within an atmosphere of prayerful listening, visioning, and discernment?

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

Toby Holleman: TobyH@pnec.org

Nancy Azar, NancyA@pnec.org

Barbara Jennings: BarbaraJ@pnec.org

Patty Rehrig: PattyR@pnec.org

Beverly McClure: BeverlyM@pnec.org

Fran Potters (Resource Center) – Resource@pnec.org