



Sharing the Good News!

Penn Northeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

Becoming Like a Child

by Alan C. Miller, Conference Minister

*Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them;
for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.
Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little
child shall never enter it. (Luke 18:16-17)*

I guess it is a sign of my age, but I am getting the “grandparent itch.” I am driving my kids crazy pestering them about a first grandchild and I find myself every December wandering aimlessly through the aisles of *Toys-R-Us*, looking for neat toys to buy the yet-to-be-born grandchildren. To me little children are amazing; I am captivated by their sense of wonder and awe, I love their innocent honesty, and the observations they make about life, with their cute little voice, make me melt.

Recently I visited a church that has initiated a new program for children’s education called Workshop Rotation Sunday School (you can learn more about the program at: www.rotation.org). The walls in the education wing are adorned with brightly painted murals of creation. Each week the children rotate between four different learning workshops where they encounter Biblical stories through crafts, plays, puppets, cooking, writing, and more. As I walked around each fascinating workshop room, I suddenly had the urge to explore and play like a child again.

I asked the pastor: “This is a major change, how was it received by *the powers that be* in the congregation?” “Well,” he said, “you know how it goes: some were upset because we were painting pictures on the clean walls, others couldn’t understand why the children were not being

taught lessons while sitting in neat rows, but the visionaries persevered and the children are loving the program.”

The pastor’s response reminded me of my now twenty-seven year old daughter when she was three years old. I was serving as the pastor of a local congregation. One of my daughter’s favorite activities on communion Sundays was to charge up to the altar after worship and eat the small loaf of bread that I had used during the Words of Institution. I would take her aside and scold her, telling her never to do that again. She would listen to me and then ask: “You said that God loves all of his children; doesn’t God want to feed all of his children at his table?” To which I was always tempted to answer: “Yes, God wants all of his children to eat from his table, but when little children start eating the elements it upsets the Women’s Guild and the Women’s Guild is more powerful than God.”

Whenever I used to see local church leaders and teachers and visionaries try to make changes to help the Gospel come alive for children and youth, and they ran into a wall of resistance from other adults, I used to feel sad for the children. But now I find myself feeling sad for the adults resisting the changes, for somewhere along the way they have allowed their cynicism about the world and life replace their childhood innocence, wonder, and awe. Maybe ... just maybe ... that’s what Jesus was talking about when he said if any of us are ever going to discover the kingdom of God, we must first become like a child.

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