



## *Sharing the Good News!*

Penn Northeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

---

---

### ***Christmas won't be the same this year!*** **by Alan C. Miller, Conference Minister**

Frequently after the loss of a loved one people will comment "Christmas won't be the same this year." However, this year I have heard that lament used in a different context. A man from Texas lamented that he and his family were looking forward to their first Christmas in their dream home until foreclosure forced them to move; now they are simply looking for a place to live. A major retail chain announced last week that this year they will not be hiring the 10,000 additional seasonal workers that they usually hire for the Christmas season as retail sales are expected to plummet. And a few weeks ago, while talking to Rev. Chris Nelson, the Executive Director of the Lehigh County Conference of Churches, she noted that the services they provide are being stretched to the limit by an economy that has turned entire families into street persons. Lost jobs, housing foreclosures, and struggling stock markets have left many lamenting "Christmas won't be the same this year."

Christmas during my first year in seminary was an unusual Christmas for me. It was only the second Christmas for Candy and me in our young married life. Candy was a fairly new employee at the hospital where she was working, thus lacking seniority, she was unable to take Christmas day off. This would be the first Christmas ever that we could not get home and spend the day with family. To be able to afford the cost of seminary, we had moved out of our apartment and were renting the upstairs of a home owned by a wonderful woman named Helen, who quickly became our grandmother away from home. Helen was a dietician and was the head cook for the North Hills Meals-on-Wheels in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She was so committed to her work, which to her was truly a ministry, that she kept the kitchen open on Christmas day. Noting that I looked blue the week before

Christmas, she invited me to come along with her to the Meals-on-Wheels kitchen on Christmas morning. Feeling sorry for myself, missing both Candy and family on what was supposed to be the best morning of the year, I drove in silence through the desolate streets of Pittsburgh under an overcast sky to the Meals-on-Wheels kitchen located in the basement of a Lutheran Church. However, my pity party soon turned to unexpected joy as I carved six turkeys in a kitchen with eight ladies, all sixty years old and older, volunteers dressed in red and green dresses adorned with Christmas corsages. Their energy was contagious as they laughed and sung carols while preparing Christmas dinner for those who otherwise would have gone without. It surely wasn't the same as any other Christmas I had ever experienced or expected – no not the same at all – but it turned out to be one of the most meaningful Christmas's I have ever known.

This year, for many, Christmas won't be the same. For some, there will be no money for the mortgage payment, let alone presents. For others there might not even be the resources for Christmas dinner. Maybe for us as Christians, these needs provide us with a unique opportunity. Each year most of us complain and listen to sermons about how Madison Avenue has taken the real meaning out of Christmas --- yet we still buy into the craziness of unbridled materialism in our search for a meaningful Christmas. Perhaps this year instead of spending your money on all of the trappings that most often go unnoticed and are quickly discarded on December 26<sup>th</sup>, you could contact a church or a council of churches, or some nonprofit helping ministry and ask for the name of a family that needs help. Then you could help them with perhaps a tree, or presents, or a meal, or pay their heat bill or do all of these things; and do it without them knowing who it is who is blessing them with these gifts. Try it – I guarantee that if you do – both for you and for them – *Christmas won't be the same this year!*

#### **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  
Barbara Jennings: [BarbaraJ@pnec.org](mailto:BarbaraJ@pnec.org)      Patty Rehrig: PattyR@pnec.org  
Beverly McClure: BeverlyM@pnec.org  
Fran Potters (Resource Center) – Resource@pnec.org