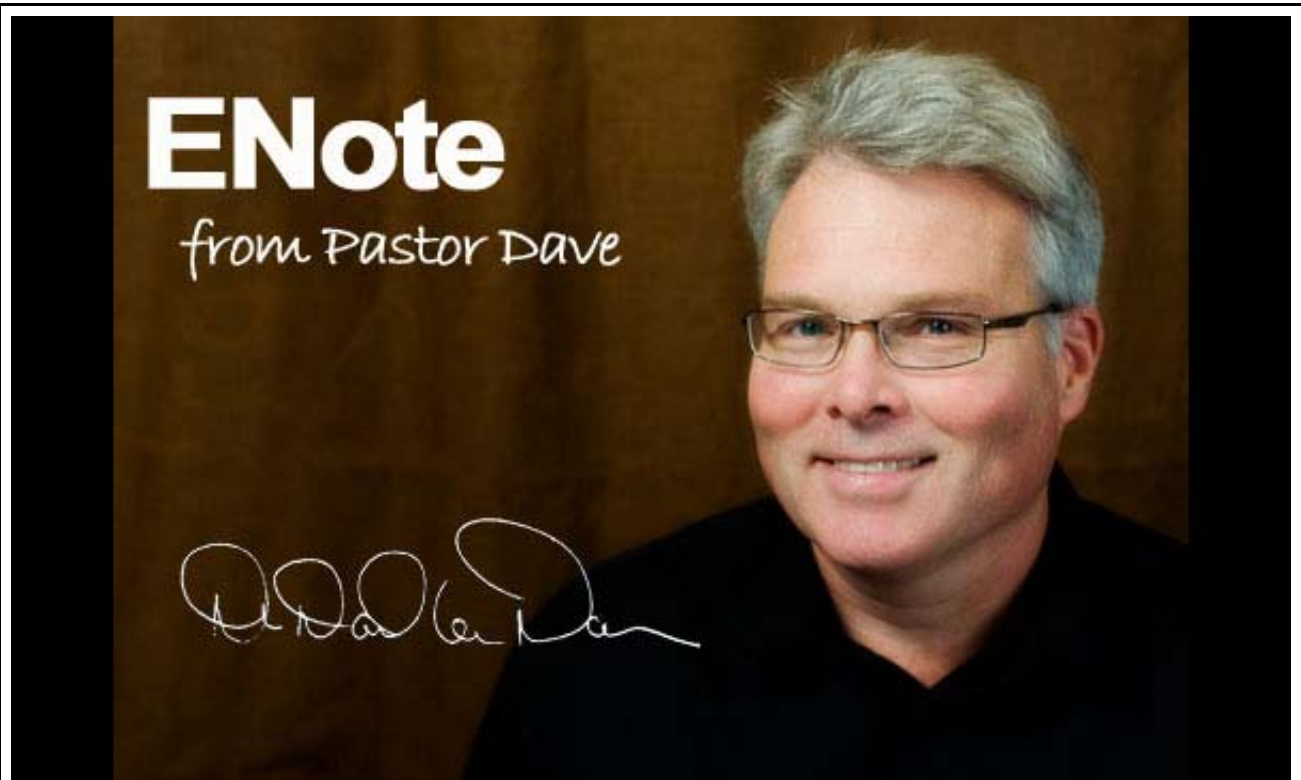


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Hamilton Mill United Methodist Church

We All Have "Special Needs"

April 21, 2011

"I want to be part of a church where my child, a special needs child, can be loved and accepted like every other child in this church." Those are the words that have lingered in my heart for a number of years. I saw the fulfillment of those words today. I don't think I have ever experienced the kind of joy I experienced tonight. As soon as the puppets started singing Claire Burke started dancing. With no real thought to the people around her she just abandoned herself to the music. And other children joined in. It made me smile. When it came time for the door prize drawing of some oversized stuffed animals, Christine Caballero drew out a slip of paper from the basket and Renee Dickhute read the name "Claire Burke." Claire, although with downs syndrome, knew exactly what had happened and she jumped up and down, laughed and ran to the stage to collect her prize. The audience erupted in applause. First the other children clapped, and then the adults. Claire's parents Tim and Marie (who is battling cancer) were filled with joy. And my heart was just overflowing. Sometimes it's right and the joy falls into place.

I didn't get a chance to stick around to thank the puppeteers because I had a Bible Study to teach, and Laura Ann Whitworth volunteered to close the presentation out. But I wanted to take this opportunity to thank Ashlee Davis and AJ Fish, and puppeteers Laura Ann Whitworth, Christine Caballero, Adi Stanescu, Amanda Garmon, Nichole Hughes, Ryan Coughlin, Christina Tsangarides and Renee Dickhute and her volunteers, as well as our Kitchen Angels for a beautiful night. I want to thank Kathy Ralya and her daughter Hope for helping with production and lighting and for Ian Brown who pulled it all together when I couldn't be there this afternoon. With confirmation and spring break we felt we needed more time - but God was ready.

Most of all I want to thank God for being a small part of this amazing community. And I want to thank Tim and Marie Burke for sharing their daughter with us. We are the ones with the "special needs" and without an opportunity to love her and children like her, we would be incomplete. If you get a chance we'd love to see you Thursday and/or Friday Night for Holy Week Services. Remember Easter services are 7, 8, 9:30 and 11:00am and who knows... this might just be the week God does something incredibly wonderful in your life.

Dave

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