

AMERICAN BAPTIST UNITED MISSION
“Dismembered Mission or United Mission?”

Rev. Dr. Ron Vallet, Ambassador for United Mission from ABC/NYS
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**When we are united in God’s mission,
our United Mission will grow.**

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. (Romans 12:3-8, NRSV)

Greetings from your Ambassador for United Mission in these days of Advent 2010!

The Apostle Paul pointed out, wisely it seems to me, that **“we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.”** God calls us to unity, not a competition in which one member assumes that it is superior or uniquely important. This is true of a congregation and its members. It is also true of a denomination, such as American Baptist Churches, and its “members”—national program boards, regions, associations, and congregations. Each “member” has gifts and responsibilities that differ from the others. Some are more glamorous than others and, seemingly, more worthy of attention and support. But, and this is Paul’s crucial point: “...we who are many, are one body in Christ.” Each member of the body needs and deserves support.

Paul also wrote, in 1 Corinthians 12, *“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”*

Isaiah 11:1-10 is one of the readings for Advent this year:

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious. (Isaiah 11:1-10, NRSV)

The words of the prophet Isaiah, in this last verse, tell us that a king, an anointed son of David (“root of Jesse”), whom we know as Jesus Christ, is to come. This kingdom will encompass all peoples of all nations. As Christians, we read this text as a generation that lives between two times: the coming of an anointed son of David in Jesus Christ and the promised final consummation of God’s peaceable kingdom yet to come.

And what do the readings from Isaiah 11, Romans 12, and 1 Corinthians 12 have in common? It is **God’s Spirit at work**—the One who provides and activates the gifts we have. It is the same Spirit who rested on the Messiah—God’s Anointed One.

The greatest gift that God ever gave was given on that first Christmas, when Jesus was born and God took on human flesh. And the news spread—to shepherds, wise men, and beyond.

John Buchanan wrote about a trip Barbara Wheeler, president of Auburn Theological Seminary, made from New York to California one December to speak at Fuller Theological Seminary. She used three of her valuable upgrade coupons to secure a seat in first-class so she could work on her speech during the flight. Just before takeoff, the seat next to her was taken by a mother with a baby—one “small enough to be carried in her lap, big enough to resist being restrained.” When Wheeler took out her computer and papers to go to work, the baby batted her computer and grabbed her papers. When Wheeler put her papers away, the baby kicked and screamed. Other passengers, who were also trying to work, glared at the mother and baby. Finally, the flight attendant

placed the mother and baby in an empty seat in coach. Wheeler said, “We all went back to work, they no doubt to projects related to mammon, I to writing about God.”

Here is Buchanan’s description of the rest of the story (See John M. Buchanan, “A Good Cry” [*Christian Century*, December 27, 2005], p. 3.)

When she arrived at Fuller, seminary president Richard Mouw began the meeting with a brief homily. It was Christmastime, and he read the familiar story in Luke 2. Then he talked about the carol “Away in a Manger,” which is attributed to Martin Luther. “A great hymn,” he said, “but one line is just wrong.” ‘Little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.’ Not so. He cried. He cried for us. He died for us.”

Wheeler said she was cut to the quick, and felt terrible all weekend. She knew that the Holy Spirit had arranged for her to be rebuked for her self-importance and intolerance.

Of course he cried. He was a baby, a totally human baby. That’s the point. That is the incredible claim Christians make at Christmas: a claim about the soul-stirring, heart-warming, intellectually challenging notion of incarnation. Emmanuel, God with us, God among us in the birth, the child, the man Jesus—God living among us, God teaching us, God showing us what it means to be human in his humanity, God speaking the final word about us and to us about our death. Of course, he cried.

The word of God can cut through our pretensions and feelings of self-importance. In worship we come to the Holy One and see ourselves as we really are. In so doing we are open to becoming more faithful stewards of the gospel—ready and willing to carry out God’s mission.

As part of the between-the-times generation, American Baptists are called to help carry out God’s mission. As a matter of fact, **God’s mission is why the church exists.** Funding through American Baptist United Mission (UM) helps us to carry out God’s mission throughout the world. United Mission makes it possible for each American Baptist congregation to join together with other congregations to do collectively what we cannot do on our own. Do we choose dismembered mission or United Mission?

We are in the last month of 2010. *It is a time not to **dismember**, but to **remember**.* As your congregation completes its budget for 2011, remember that God will measure us not so much by our survival, but by our thankful and gracious participation in God’s mission. As American Baptists, I believe that our greatest expression of thanksgiving and participation in God’s mission is to budget and to give generously to **United Mission**. Here are specific ways that our contributions help:

- Your church’s United Mission giving supports your local region, which makes it possible for the region to provide more effective support for your church and others. In

fact, most of the income for each of our regions comes from **gifts to United Mission**. Our giving to UM pays the major parts of the salaries of our region's staff who provide:

- staff service for search committees;
- assistance resolving church conflicts;
- area ministers to maintain contact with individual pastors and with associations and small groups of churches;
- camping ministry;
- resources to assist your church in growth and spiritual health; and
- education and training of pastors, youth, and lay leaders in congregational empowerment.

UM giving also supports:

- The Office of the General Secretary
- American Baptist Men
- American Baptist Women's Ministries (through the Love Gift)
- ABC Information Services
- American Baptist Home Mission Societies
- International Ministries
- Colleges, Seminaries, Homes Hospitals, etc.
- Career Centers
- Mission Resource Development
- American Baptist Historical Society
- American Baptist Personnel Services
- Orientation to ABC Life

Reminder: If you need a remittance form with your church's name, address, and PIN number, please contact your regional office.

THANK YOU for your support of American Baptist United Mission!

Ron

P.S. Again, I ask you to share this letter electronically or in print with others in your church.