

AMERICAN BAPTIST UNITED MISSION
“The Dancing and Laughter of Easter and 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.**

God has a mission to the world. Perhaps it is summed up best in the familiar words from John 3:16: “God loved . . . God sent.” And whom did God send? Jesus Christ—Messiah. And whom did God “call out” to carry out God’s mission in the name of Jesus and with the power of the Holy Spirit? The “called-out” ones—known as the church—are also referred to at times as the household of Jesus Christ.

Where does the household of Jesus Christ begin? Christian theologian M. Douglas Meeks said, “The household of Jesus Christ begins with the dancing and laughter of Easter, or it does not begin at all. The household of Jesus Christ lives between two realities: the destruction of death in Jesus Christ and the destruction of death in all things. The in-between-time history in which we live is the time we call **mission.**”

Yet, if one takes an honest, objective look at the life of most congregations, it is usually only on and around the time of Easter that real celebration is made of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For the most part, it is rarely mentioned during other times of the year. It is forgotten that the reason most Christians gather for worship on Sunday is because that was the day Jesus rose from death.

The role of memory is crucial. Peter Marty recounted the role of memory (in words written by Craig Dykstra; see *Christian Century*, April 10, 1996):

Without a narrative that sustains us, the world--and we ourselves--are virtually phantom. But the issue is not just whether one has a narrative or not. The issue is whether we have one that is true and genuine, one that can sustain us in reality, one that, having been given and committed to memory, frees us from desperately having to make one up.

We have a true and genuine narrative as recounted by Luke in his Gospel (24:13-35). Here are excerpts:

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and talking with each other about all these things that had

happened. 15While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. . . . 22[They said,] . . . some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.’ 25Then he said to them, ‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ 27Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So he went in to stay with them. 30When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’ . . .

“At table,” after the seven-mile walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus, the two disciples finally realized that the Risen Jesus had joined them. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” The very same hour, they returned to Jerusalem and began to spread the word the Lord was risen indeed.

In writing about the two who traveled with Jesus to Emmaus, Peter Marty (Christian Century, April 10, 1996) concluded:

Until Jesus reminded the travelers to Emmaus who the Messiah was and what his resurrection meant, they were as desperate as most of us are to make sense of life. Their existence was as phantom as their faith. Their identity was elusive as people believed the risen Christ to be. Their hope was as uncertain as the future of their nation. Then they remembered. They remembered that they wouldn’t have to make up life anymore. Jesus had set them free.

Memory is critical for a congregation striving to become a household of God. Without a memory, a state of amnesia will continue to shroud the life of the congregation. We must remember the Risen Christ and God’s mission for which the Church was called into being.

In these days of earthquakes, tsunamis, tornadoes, nuclear waste radiation, wars, and economic stress, it is a time when God’s call upon the Church is more urgent than ever. Does God strangely warm our hearts today? That is my prayer and hope. It is my belief that the best way for us to respond as American Baptists is to give generously, yes even sacrificially, to American Baptist United Mission.

- 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.

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THANK YOU for your support of American Baptist United Mission!

Ron

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