

AMERICAN BAPTIST UNITED MISSION
Silos of Ministry and United Mission

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**When we are united in God's mission,
our United Mission will grow.**

Just a few days ago I received an e-mail message from a colleague who is the president and scientific director of a noted cancer research institute. Earlier I had asked him some questions about the use of medical metaphors to aid in theological thinking and understanding. His response included these words:

...we have learned a lot about translational research and how challenging it is to get people to "collaborate." Most people are happy to practice benign cooperation (that is not harming each other, remaining in their respective silos), thinking they are collaborating. For real translation to occur, at least in cancer research, true collaboration is required and each party must give up some of its autonomy in order to achieve a greater good. This is something academic institutions find very hard to do as the culture is very much based on competition. I wonder if this applies to "theological translation"?

His comment about silos and true collaboration got me to thinking.

Two kinds of silos came quickly to mind: underground silos to house weapons of mass destruction and aboveground silos that house resources for life, such as grains. In our ministry together as American Baptists, we have many silos providing many kinds of ministries that are resources for life and are our way of participating in God's mission to the world through Jesus Christ. None of our silos is perfect, but each is important.

United Mission provides a way for American Baptists to provide financial support for all of our silos of ministry. Danger comes when some of our silos bypass collaboration and move into a mode of competition. That is a mode of death, not life.

A century or so ago, American Baptists did not have a United Mission. Rather each American Baptist Society (Foreign Mission, Home Mission, and Education and Publication) sent out representatives to go from church to church and from association to association to promote and raise funds for their particular society. The process was competitive and not cost effective.

Eventually a decision was made to leave the competition behind. A budget covenant was put in place and an agreement was made among the societies to do mission

support in a unified way. As a result, we became a denomination and the support of mission causes became less competitive and more effective. I remember when an executive minister said to me that it is the budget covenant that makes us a denomination. I think he was right.

Perhaps another way of saying this is that we need to keep our eye on the *whole* of God's mission. I believe firmly that American Baptist United Mission is a good way of doing this. We do not want to miss participating in *all* of God's mission—from where we live to the uttermost part of the earth.

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)

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.

In this fall season, many of our congregations are crafting budgets for 2012. Please be sure to include United Mission in your church's budget. Let's keep our eyes on all the silos.

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