

AMERICAN BAPTIST UNITED MISSION
THE CHURCH: A MIRACLE THAT DEPENDS UPON
THE RESURRECTION WORK OF GOD

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

"Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:54b-58 NRSV)

Greetings from your Ambassador for United Mission in these continuing days of Easter 2010. Easter continues beyond April 4! It is not to be celebrated only one day of the year.

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.

Several New Testament texts (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; and John 20:1, 19, among others) place the resurrection of Jesus on the first day of the week. The Lord's Supper was celebrated on Sunday (Acts 20:7). **The church is a miracle that really does depend upon the resurrection work of God.** The miracle—the wonder—is that God called the church into being to carry out God's mission.

During the time of Lent, which finished only a few weeks ago, we speak of Sundays as "days *in* Lent, not days *of* Lent, because the Sundays are *not* part of Lent. In fact, Sundays are more aptly described as "little Easters" in celebration of Jesus' resurrection.

Interestingly, one reminder that the gathering was to be on the first day of the week came as a statement about saving for the collections. Paul wrote: “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come” (1 Corinthians 16:2). Thus, it may reasonably be concluded, the first day of the week, Sunday, was adopted by the early Christians as the day of worship based on the fact this was the day of the resurrection.

Where does the household of Jesus Christ—the church—begin? M. Douglas Meeks has 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.”

In many regards, the world in this in-between-time is not a pretty place. A few examples are sufficient to remind us: genocide terrorizes the black population of southern Sudan; one fourth of the children in the United States are on food stamps; a civil war in the Congo (formerly Zaire) kills 5.4 million people, the deadliest conflict since World War II; a documentary on the lost boys of Sudan is called “Maybe God Forgot Us”; an earthquake strikes Haiti.

Yet God loves this world (John 3:16)! American Baptist and New Testament Professor, David L. Bartlett, wrote, “Easter is God’s great remembering. Told right, it is the story that does not invalidate all those threatening stories, but does assure us that no enemy, not even death, is stronger than our God” (*Journal for Preachers*, Easter 2010, p. 12).

In the Easter story, Bartlett continued, “We testify what the church has testified from the beginning: the Lord Jesus Christ is always best described in the present tense. He lives; he reigns; he does battle against our deaths and against Death and all Death’s minions. And of his rule, there will be no end” (p.15).

As American Baptists, we are part of the church that is a miracle of God. As a family—a household—**we are most effective in doing God’s mission when we are united in mission.** That is why I agreed to be, and serve gladly as, an ambassador for United Mission. Look at what United Mission does in carrying out God’s 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. 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 • National Ministries • 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