

AMERICAN BAPTIST UNITED MISSION
The Gravedigger's Two Dollars and United Mission

Rev. Dr. Ron Vallet, Ambassador for United Mission
December 2011

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

My column this month is on a more personal note than usual:

In September 1957, my bride of two years, Rose Marie, and I moved from Oxnard, California, to Howard, N.Y., where I had been called to be the pastor of Howard Union Church in New York's Steuben County in the Southern Tier. I was originally from Fort Worth, Texas, and she was from Canisteo, N.Y. We met in 1954 and got married in 1955 in Oxnard, California.

At the time of our move to Howard, I was 27 years old. After about a year in Howard and after some medical tests, we learned that Rose Marie needed hormone treatments. To our joy, the treatments worked and Rose Marie became pregnant. We soon learned that she would have twins.

Our twin sons were born in the early morning of Saturday, December 5, 1959, in the Ira Davenport Memorial Hospital in Bath, N.Y. However, they were born three months prematurely. We named them William Carey Vallet and Adoniram Judson Vallet. They each weighed two pounds and one ounce. Adoniram died a few hours later.

Our doctor gave orders for William to be taken by ambulance to Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester. In my car, I followed the ambulance to Rochester. I remember the ambulance stopping once at a "general store" to get a new supply of hot water for the hot water bottles. William died on December 7 in Rochester.

A few days later we held a funeral service in the Howard Church. My good friend, the Rev. Samuel Keister, pastor of the Baptist Church in Bath, presided. Burial followed in the Howard Cemetery. A member of the church gave the gravesite to us.

After the graveside service, a man whom I had never seen before walked up to me. He was probably in his fifties; I was 30. He said, "I am the man who dug the grave for your boys. They paid me two dollars to do the job. I want you to have it." With those words, he pressed two crumpled dollar bills into my hands. I shook his hand and thanked him. I never saw him again. I suspect that he didn't possess much more than the two dollars he had handed to me.

God touched me that day in many ways, but especially through him. Even in my grief, I had had a glimpse of the Kingdom of Heaven—the Kingdom of God!

As I reflect on that experience, I express my thanks to God for the gravedigger that day.

Later we had the boys' gravestone placed in the Howard Cemetery. On it were inscribed their names and dates, along with these words, "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." The complete verse is "But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 19:14, KJV)

In subsequent years, my wife and I were blessed with three other children, yet we never forgot our first two and the lessons we learned from them. My heart then and ever since has been filled with carrying out God's mission through the ministries of God's church. I believe that American Baptists are a significant part of what the church does to help to fulfill God's mission on earth—the entire world. I have had the privilege of visiting more than 30 countries in my lifetime. In most of these countries, I have seen American Baptist men and women, even children and young people, doing ministry in the name of Jesus Christ.

To some, the list that follows may seem to be just a list. But it is more than a list. These are silos of American Baptist ministry, all supported by American Baptist United Mission. May we all have the generous spirit of the gravedigger.

- 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.