

AMERICAN BAPTIST UNITED MISSION

“The Invisibility of 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.

See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand! It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised—only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. From now on, let no one make trouble for me; for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen. (Galatians 6:11-18 NRSV)

What was the problem mentioned by Paul in verse 11 in the text above (“See what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand!”)? It was Paul's eyesight. Earlier in his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul wrote that if it had been possible, they would have plucked out their own eyes to give to him (4:14-15). Paul usually had a scribe who actually penned his letters, but sometimes he would write short portions in letters large enough that he could read what he was writing in spite of his poor eyesight.

Reading Paul’s words reminded me of the time when I realized that my eyesight had changed (“my arms were not long enough to read ordinary print”). The solution was to wear bifocal lenses. With bifocals, I could see things near and far. This worked well until about a year ago when my ophthalmologist told me that I had cataracts in both eyes. This led to lens implants in both eyes. Now I see well at a distance and read without wearing glasses. Wonderful! Some things that had been invisible (or clouded) became clear.

In the larger view, does our view of God’s mission sometimes become clouded or distorted, especially if we draw too sharp a distinction between near and far?

The Amish community in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, is remembered for its response to the horrific slaughter of five young girls and severe wounding of five more.

My first response when I read about the senseless crime was to think of the 10 young girls, their families, and the Amish community as the only (or major) victims. But the Amish community had a larger vision.

They forgave the shooter, reached out to his family with food that same day, and later shared with them the cash that poured in from sorrowing Americans. Their vision of the gospel of Jesus Christ shone brightly. That vision of the gospel of Jesus Christ produces a church with a clear vision of God's mission and our role in fulfilling it. My personal belief is that Paul wrote the words of the text quoted above in his own hand (*"See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand!"*) to emphasize their importance to him. He gave us the vision of a new creation in which the legality of "circumcision" or "uncircumcision" is not the issue. **Having a vision of God's new creation and bearing fruit are the issues.**

The old proverb, "You can't see the forest for the trees," is pertinent here. Most of us know about some of the "trees"—that is, various ministries that we have as American Baptists. As a church family participating in God's mission, we are called to be united in mission. Another way of expressing this is to make sure that we are aware of the whole forest, not just some of the trees.

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 (now 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
- and more.

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

This list shows the trees of the forest. That is good. Perhaps you even have your favorite "tree." But let us not forget that the entire "forest" represents our participation as American Baptists in God's mission. Some trees are mighty and majestic—even glamorous. Other trees, however, are smaller and seemingly less significant. But one tree does not a forest make! Together all the trees constitute the forest that we know as American Baptist United Mission. **When we support United Mission, we see and care**

for the whole forest of God's mission. Is United Mission visible in your church's budget?

THANK YOU for your support of American Baptist United Mission!

Ron