

AMERICAN BAPTIST UNITED MISSION
“United Mission: Treasures on Earth or Treasures in Heaven?”

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

The economic situation in our nation and in almost every state indicates that things are not good. The old saying that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer is becoming more of a reality. Bill Moyers quoted from a Citigroup document, “Revisiting Plutonomy: The Rich Getting Richer”: “a rising profit share and favorable treatment by market-friendly governments have allowed the rich to prosper...[and] take an increasing share of income and wealth over the last 20 years...[and the wealthy] are likely to get even wealthier in the coming years.”

Yet this is not God’s desire. As recorded in Amos 3:15, God warned the rich: “I will tear down the winter house as well as the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall come to an end, says the Lord.” It seems that today’s economic situation is not new in human history.

Most American Baptists do not fall into the category of the rich. Yet, compared to most people in our world, we *are* wealthy—wealthy enough to continue to give generously to help carry out God’s mission in the world.

Lent arrives later this year than usual, not starting until Ash Wednesday, March 9. Instead of thinking of Lent as a season that ends in six weeks, why don’t we think of Lent as the beginning of a process of building a life—an ongoing process?

Jesus gave important instructions that, in my mind, apply both to individuals and to Christian congregations: “*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (See Matthew 6:19-21).

When we participate in God’s mission as American Baptist Christians, I believe that we lay up treasures in heaven as we and our congregations participate regularly and give to American Baptist United Mission.

One of the greatest influences in my life was *The Steward*, written by Douglas John Hall. Decades later, he wrote these words in an article in *Feasting on the Word* (Year A, Vol. 2; 20, 22):

Religion is such a noisy affair. Apparently it was that in Jesus' time too, but today we have raised the noise to unbelievable levels. This applies to virtually all the religions, not only Christianity, but Christianity, the conventional religion of the technologically advanced and competitive West, has surely outdone all the others. What would stewardship campaigns and every-member canvasses be without the hoopla of strategic planning, grand meetings, charts, publicly displayed "thermometers," and the like.

Perhaps we need less hoopla, slick-paper illustrations, and "you are there" videos and more writing that explains the "what" and the "why" of God's mission on earth and the role of the church in that mission. This is what I hope to accomplish through these monthly columns for American Baptists

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