

AMERICAN BAPTIST UNITED MISSION
A Miracle of God and United Mission

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

The story of Jesus feeding a large crowd with a few loaves of bread and fish is recorded six times in the four Gospels (Matthew 14:13-21, 15:32-39; Mark 6:30-44; Mark 8:1-9; Luke 9:10-17; and John 6:1-13). That is impressive. It is a story worth paying attention to because it is more than a story about Jesus feeding a lot of hungry people.

Here is the account found in Mark 6:39-44:

39Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. 40So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. 41Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. 42And all ate and were filled; 43and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. 44Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men. (NRSV)

Jesus taught the people until it grew late. The crowd became hungry. Even though his disciples resisted, wanting the people to go into town and find food there, Jesus wanted the people to be fed where they were. He told the disciples to check and see what the people had. It came to five loaves of bread and two fish!

“When Jesus prayed to heaven to bless the food,” Brock and Parker wrote, “he paid tribute to the divine source of the food he offered, and he symbolically stood against the Roman Empire. The Roman emperors maintained their power by distributing bread to the poor. Jesus’ feeding of the multitudes suggested that he—not Rome—was the true source of life.” (See *Saving Paradise*, p. 30.) This was a powerful action. It is no wonder that officials of the Roman Empire and religious leaders began to take notice of Jesus. Later, as we know, Jesus’ teaching and miracles led to his execution by crucifixion.

This miracle of Jesus feeding the hungry crowd is framed biblically by God’s providing manna for the children of Israel in the wilderness and the Eucharist, or Holy Communion, that we celebrate regularly as Christians.

Biblical scholar John Dominic Crossan noted the significance of this practice (the Eucharist): “*It is in food and drink offered equally to everyone that the presence of God and Jesus is found.*” But food and drink are the material bases of life, so the Lord’s Supper is political criticism and economic challenge as well as sacred rite and liturgical worship.” (See Brock and Parker, p. 31.)

Notice the words, “economic challenge,” in Crossan’s words. The word “economy” comes from the Greek, *oikonomia*, which literally means “household management.” For me, the household is God’s household, of which we are called to be stewards. I sometimes put it in these words, “We are called to be stewards of the gospel.” This understanding placed Jesus and his followers in direct conflict with Rome’s claims of power. One part of our identity as stewards of the gospel is to stand against the powers and principalities of our age. Another part is to support God’s household and mission with our material resources. As an American Baptist Christian, I support American Baptist United Mission as a vital piece of being a steward of the gospel.

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.

- 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.