

CHRISTIAN EVANGELICAL BAPTIST UNION OF ITALY

*"One Lord, one faith, one baptism,
6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all,
and in you all.*

The President

Giovanni Arcidiacono

To The Churches,
To the Pastors

Rome, 19th December 2018

Dear Churches, dear Pastors, dear sisters and dear brothers,

This year, the customary Christmas message is also addressed to the sister Baptist churches of Zimbabwe with whom we share projects and the hope of eternal life for the common faith in Jesus Christ.

Last fall an Italian Baptist delegation led by Pastor Anna Maffei - our referent for Projects in Zimbabwe – was supposed to go to Harare to visit the Churches of Zimbabwe with which UCEBI has been working for several years to promote and support some significant projects financed mainly by the generosity of many brothers and sisters.

Unfortunately, the visit was not possible because of the uncertain political situation in the country and, in particular, due to the explosion of the cholera epidemic which already in year 2008 had devastated the population of Zimbabwe.

Despite this, the proper caution adopted in postponing the visit to another date, has further strengthened the desire to embrace and personally know one by one the brothers and sisters of Zimbabwe because it is in the fraternal embrace that is confirmed and strengthened in Jesus Christ the fraternal communion that feeds on the love of God for us all.

Zimbabwe, one of the poorest countries in the world, today lives a disastrous social and economic condition. Political instability, drought, high levels of poverty and unemployment have hampered access to education, health care and adequate nutrition. Furthermore, families encountered considerable difficulties in coping with basic school fees. From a political point of view, the struggles for the succession of power within the ruling party have intensified in recent months, making freedom and rights subdued to a harsh regime of restrictions.

Even in Italy, the seventh industrialized country in the world, suffers from increased unemployment, poverty, the hydrogeological instability of the territory, criminality and social inequalities that reduce and threaten the space of solidarity, of joy of acceptance and love of neighbour through restrictions of civil liberties. All this, risks of leading the country towards European scenarios governed by nationalism and racism that so much evil brought in the twentieth century all over the world and that use fear as their workhorse for power.

But God is faithful: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16)

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not."

"But as many as received him, to them gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:11-12)

He came: this is the Good News to be announced to the world!

He came to practice, with meekness, mercy and love towards the neighbour.

He came to give us a new life, regenerated by the love of God.

He came because everyone could be called by name by the Good Shepherd and know how to know his voice.

He came not to be discouraged by threats and fears.

He came not to be imprisoned by the paralysis that the fear of men procure.

He came because we were free in him.

He came to reconcile the world to God.

He came for the victims of violence, of wars, of unjust riches, for those who ask Jesus: "Show us the Father and that will be enough for us" and for those who want to see God.

He came to give rest to the troubled and the oppressed.

He came because his disciples did not follow other "lords".

He came to give his life on the cross for his friends.

He came to pour out his Spirit abundantly in us.

He came to make our hearts burn: "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:32).

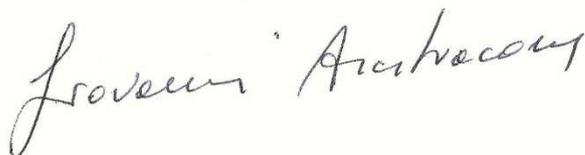
He came because we first sought the Kingdom of God and his justice, here and now.

Dear Churches, let us experience in the joy of Christmas the eternal promises of the Lord, knowing that "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

May the Lord bless you and give you grace and peace.

A holy kiss

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Giovanni Archibugi". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.