

**AMERICAN BAPTIST  
RESOLUTION CONCERNING ABORTION AND MINISTRY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH**

The General Board of American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. has solicited and received significant response through hearings, letters and questionnaires from individuals and congregations across the country. The response indicates that American Baptists believe that ministry to persons in situations of crisis pregnancy and abortion is a concern that primarily rests within the local churches. ABC USA encourages churches to continue studying these issues, prayerfully seek, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to come to a position that will guide them in ministry. The role of the General Board in this matter is not to direct churches, but to assist them in carrying out ministry and advocacy according to their convictions. Therefore, as a reflection of American Baptist thought, this resolution is offered to assist our churches.

As American Baptists, members of a covenant community of believers in Jesus Christ, we acknowledge life as a sacred and gracious gift of God. We affirm that God is the Creator of all life, that human beings are created in the image of God, and Christ is Lord of life. Recognizing this gift of life, we find ourselves struggling with the painful and difficult issue of abortion. Genuine diversity of opinion threatens the unity of our fellowship, but the nature of the covenant demands mutual love and respect. Together, we must seek the mind of Christ.

As American Baptists we oppose abortion,  
as a means of avoiding responsibility for conception,  
as a primary means of birth control,  
without regard for the far-reaching consequences of the act.

We denounce irresponsible sexual behavior and acts of violence that contribute to the large number of abortions each year.

We grieve with all who struggle with the difficult circumstances that lead them to consider abortion. Recognizing that each person is ultimately responsible to God, we encourage men and women in these circumstances to seek spiritual counsel as they prayerfully and conscientiously consider their decision.

We condemn violence and harassment directed against abortion clinics, their staff and clients, as well as sanctions and discrimination against medical professionals whose consciences prevent them from being involved in abortions.

We acknowledge the diversity of deeply held convictions within our fellowship even as we seek to interpret the Scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Many American Baptists believe that, biblically, human life begins at conception, that abortion is immoral and a destruction of a human being created in God's image (Job 31:15; Psalm 139:13-16; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:44; Proverbs 31:8-9; Galatians 1:15). Many others believe that while abortion is a regrettable reality, it can be a morally acceptable action and they choose to act on the biblical principles of compassion and justice (John 8:1-11; Exodus 21:22-25; Matthew 7:1-5; James 2:2-13) and freedom of will (John 16:13; Roman 14:4-5, 10-13). Many gradations of opinion between these basic positions have been expressed within our fellowship.

We also recognize that we are divided as to the proper witness of the church to the state regarding abortion. Many of our membership seek legal safeguards to protect unborn life. Many others advocate for and support family planning legislation, including legalized abortion as in the best interest of women in particular and society in general. Again, we have many points of view between these two positions. Consequently, we acknowledge the freedom of each individual to advocate for a public policy on abortion that reflects his or her beliefs.

Respecting our varied perspectives, let us affirm our unity in the ministry of Christ (Colossians 3:12-17):

- Praying for openness and sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit within our family,
- Covenanting to address both the causes and effects of abortion at the personal and social levels.

WE CALL UPON

American Baptist Congregations

- To challenge members to live in a way that models responsible sexuality in accordance with biblical teaching,
- To expend efforts and funds for teaching responsible sexuality,
- To provide opportunities for intergenerational dialogue on responsible sexuality and Christian life,
- To provide relevant ministries to adolescents and parents of adolescents in and outside the church.

Pastors and Leaders

- To prepare themselves to minister compassionately and skillfully to women and men facing problem pregnancies, whatever their final decisions.

American Baptist Regions

- To provide leadership and support for appropriate programs and ministries to aid the local churches in these tasks.

Seminaries and Institutions of Higher Education

- To provide counsel that will enrich the theological understanding and counseling skills of American Baptist leaders so that they will be able to assist persons facing decisions regarding responsible sexuality and abortion.

National Program Boards

- To assist churches by maintaining a current study packet on abortion which could be helpful to any church's ministry regardless of its position on this subject.
- To prepare, identify and make available other appropriate materials relating to responsible sexuality at all age levels.

WE ENCOURAGE CONGREGATIONS AND INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS

- To engage in meaningful dialogue on abortion with openness and

Christian compassion,

- To initiate and/or become involved in creative community ministries in their communities that provide alternatives to abortion for women with problem pregnancies and for their loved ones,
- To provide appropriate financial and emotional support for those women who carry their pregnancies to term and further to maintain contact and provide loving community for them after birth,
- To acknowledge that men are equally responsible for the creation of problem pregnancies and to help them to recognize their responsibility for the social, medical, moral and financial consequences of their behavior,
- To minister with love and spiritual counsel to those who choose to terminate their pregnancies,
- To be actively involved in caring for children who are potentially available for adoption, including those with special needs, and to assist agencies in order to facilitate placement for them, and
- To participate in organizations addressing abortion issues in ways that are consistent with their beliefs, and witness to the reconciling love of God.

BEYOND OUR OWN HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH, WE CALL UPON:

- Government, industries and foundations to support the research and development of safe, reliable, affordable and culturally appropriate methods of contraception for both men and women worldwide.
- Our governmental institutions to continue to pursue the goals of economic justice, social equality and political empowerment without which the painful human dilemmas now being faced will continue without relief. We are concerned that many women receiving abortions are themselves adolescents who are often economically disadvantaged.
- Public media (television, cinema, audio and print) to stop the depiction of sex outside marriage as normal and desirable, the portrayal of women, men and children as sex objects and the elevation of sex as the source of all happiness. We particularly oppose print and cinematic pornography.

We acknowledge that we often lack compassion, insight and the necessary commitment needed to serve our Christian community and the wider society adequately. We affirm our commitment to continue to counsel and uphold one another, to maintain fellowship with those whose opinions differ from ours and to extend the compassion of Christ to all.

Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches - June 1988  
161 For, 9 Against, 2 Abstentions.

Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - March 1994

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## **Policy Base**

### **Statement of Purpose of American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.**

To seek the mind of Christ on moral, spiritual, political, economic, social, denominational and ecumenical matters, and to express to the rest of society on behalf of American Baptists, their convictions as to the mind of Christ in these matters.

### **Policy Statement on Christian Unity**

We can also explore with others the Bible, seeking with them the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in an effort to discover more fully what is the will of God and his people in this time and to determine the nature of the unity we seek and how we can manifest it.

### **Policy Statement on Family Life**

We affirm that children are a gift from God, entrusted to parents for love, care and nurture.

We are committed to providing programs of education and support to

- guide and nurture persons making choices about singleness, marriage, divorce, remarriage and parenthood;
- strengthen family units of all kinds, including single parent and blended families, foster/adoption families, those living in group homes and other covenantal family-like groups.

We are committed to working with others for public policies and practices which enhance the status of families and empower them to do their unique work of nurturing succeeding generations of citizens.

### **Policy Statement on Health Care**

As American Baptists we affirm and support programs, legislation, research and other formulations which help develop a new comprehensive health care delivery system which provides quality services for all people.

Therefore, we support programs which make health care resources, private and public, available in keeping with the total needs of the people, rather than on the basis of economic, geographic or racial factors.

### **Policy Statement on Human Rights**

As American Baptists we declare the following rights to be basic human rights, and we will support programs and measures to assure these rights;

The right to human dignity, to be respected and treated as a person, and to be protected against discrimination without regard to age, sex, race, class, marital status, income, national origin, legal status, culture or

condition in society.

**Policy Statement on Women and Men as Partners in Church and Society**

Human beings--male and female--are created in God's image. Both are given responsibility as stewards of the world. Tragically, this partnering has been marred by the Fall. Exploitation, manipulation, and oppression appear in human society more often than partnership. Women and men are continually used as objects instead of being regarded as responsible beings made in God's image and therefore worthy of respect. Such behavior and oppression damage both the oppressed and the oppressor.

Each partner has a voice and a valued judgment in the conduct of the enterprise, with full powers and discretion in leadership decisions.