

**AMERICAN BAPTIST  
RESOLUTION ON ALCOHOLISM AND OTHER CHEMICAL DEPENDENCIES**

All are created in the image of God, and God has entrusted us to be stewards of the whole creation. As stewards of the Divine Image, we are called to be responsible in relationships of faith toward God and of love and justice toward humankind. As stewards of the natural world, we are called to manage the world for the well-being of the present and future human community. Stewardship includes responsible use of the gifts of body, mind and spirit, as well as the gifts of grapes, grain and chemicals.

The Bible asserts that our rebellion against God perverts our relationship to our neighbors and distorts our relationship to all creation. Dependency upon alcohol and other chemicals not only reflects a misuse of creation because of the harmful effects upon body, mind and spirit, but also thwarts the creative potential because of the harmful effects upon the human community.

The biblical vision of God's shalom (wholeness, health, well-being, harmony and peace) provides an image of what God intends for creation. In our brokenness, disharmony and ill-health we prevent shalom and participate in "the whole creation...groaning in travail until now" (Romans 8:22).

Dependency on alcohol or other chemicals is a primary, progressive and chronic disease which attacks body, mind and spirit. Drugs and alcohol are indeed potentially addicting. At least 10% of the adult population is dependent on alcohol or other drugs. One out of four families is suffering from the effects of alcoholism and other drug-related problems. This dependency is a leading cause of death in the United States and a major factor in accidental death and violent crimes.

All chemical dependency is a concern because of the effects upon individuals and upon human relationships. Dependency may come about by the use of legal substances such as alcohol or prescription drugs, or it may be due to use of illegal drugs.

When one person in a family system is affected, every member is affected and the family becomes dysfunctional. Alcoholics and other chemically dependent persons, as well as those who love them, avoid the associated pain by defensive behaviors such as denial. They become victims to their own distortion of reality. They suffer the harmful consequences of loss of control over the effects of alcohol and drugs and the unmanageability of their lives.

Persons who come from families where alcoholism or other chemical dependency is a problem for a parent or grandparent are particularly susceptible to being addicted themselves or marrying persons who are chemically addicted. When children from such homes show symptoms of inappropriate behavior, that behavior is often diagnosed as an individual problem rather than a family illness.

While adults may drink or use drugs for 10 to 15 years before they become addicted; children, teenagers and the elderly can become chemically dependent in as short a period of time as eighteen months. It is especially important for children, teenagers, and the elderly to use care with prescription drugs since many are potentially addicting.

Alcoholism and other chemical dependencies are recognized by health care professionals as a primary disease. The related dysfunctional behavior will be unlikely to change if the disease is left untreated. While assessment, intervention and treatment are necessary for chemically dependent persons,

they are more likely to recover if they become part of a life-changing fellowship. Local congregations, as proclaimers of the healing power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, can be such life-changing fellowships for chemically dependent persons, and their families, if they recognize that their ministry is to sick people. The person must be accepted without enabling the behavior. Chemically dependent persons and their families also need the support of other life-changing fellowships such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon, Alateen and Narcotics Anonymous which can focus on their specific problems.

In light of the tremendous problem of alcoholism and other chemical dependencies in our society and the many people whose lives are torn apart by it, the General Board of the American Baptist Churches urges the leadership and members of our local churches to:

1. Become familiar with the problems related to alcoholism and other chemical dependencies and the ministry that can be given to chemically dependent persons and their families through local church fellowships;
2. Create an environment in their churches in which caring, sharing and learning about alcoholism and other chemical dependencies can occur;
3. Make use of the educational materials already available to: (a) understand alcoholism and other chemical dependencies; (b) help families become aware of and knowledgeable about the disease; and (c) enable persons to make responsible decisions about alcohol and other chemical use;
4. Create openness and honesty in their churches to minimize judgmental attitudes, fear, denial and prejudice so that persons and families suffering from the disease will feel safe and accepted in the community of faith;
5. Enter into a supportive personal relationship with alcoholics and other chemically dependent persons without protecting them from the consequences of their actions;
6. Identify and refer to resources in the community such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon, Alateen and Narcotics Anonymous and wherever possible make church facilities available to such groups.

Clergy are frequently the first persons whose help is sought when something is wrong in the family. The General Board of the American Baptist Churches, therefore, urges American Baptist seminaries and others responsible for the training of clergy to:

1. Equip ministers with an understanding of the nature of alcoholism and other chemical dependencies;
2. Provide the tools for assessment and intervention in the disease; and
3. Teach pastoral care of families dealing with dependencies.

Since alcoholism and other chemical dependencies are deeply embedded in our society and touch all facets of our common life, governmental action will also be required to deal with the problem. The General Board of the American Baptist Churches will support efforts to:

1. Raise to a higher status those governmental agencies using preventive and rehabilitative approaches to alcoholism and other chemical dependencies, and secure more adequate support for them;

2. Designate income from taxes on liquor and liquor substances to fund treatment of alcoholism and other chemical dependencies;
3. Standardize laws associated with addictive substances so that the laws can be used more effectively;
4. Increase efforts to combat organized crime and its lucrative traffic in drugs;
5. Restrict advertising which encourages the use of chemicals that can result in addiction;
6. Mobilize our church bodies to assist teenagers in resisting the peer pressure that seeks to draw them into the use of alcohol and other addictive drugs.

Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches - December 1986  
158 For, 13 Against, 7 Abstentions  
Modified by the General Board Executive Committee - September 1992  
Modified by the General Board Executive Committee - September 2000  
(General Board Reference - #8149:12/86)

---

#### **POLICY BASE**

##### **American Baptist Policy Statement on Health Care**

We support programs which:

1. Make health care resources, private and public, available in keeping with the total needs of people;
2. Direct health care resources toward the prevention of diseases and the maintenance of health as well as toward the treatment of illness.

##### **American Baptist Policy Statement on Health, Healing and Wholeness**

##### **American Baptist 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:

2. The right to the basic necessities of food, shelter, clothing and health care;
4. The right to a secure and healthy environment;
9. The right to human dignity, to be respected and treated as a person.

#### **SUPPORTING POSITION**

##### **American Baptist Resolution on Alcoholism and Highway Safety**

We, as American Baptists...

4. Encourage clergy and others in helping vocations to receive special training in the prevention and treatment of alcoholism;

**American Baptist Resolution on Family Violence**