

## **AMERICAN BAPTIST RESOLUTION ON BEING AN INVITING PEOPLE**

The Lord God reminded the Israelites that they should love the stranger who resides with them, for they were also strangers in the land of Egypt (Leviticus 19:34). This "love" includes hospitality to strangers, giving them food and clothing (Deuteronomy 10:18). The sojourners within the gates were among those assembled to hear to learn to fear the Lord, and to be careful to do all the words of the law (Deuteronomy 31:12). The ethnocentric impulse of the tribes of Jacob was in continual need of correction.

Though Jesus experienced the inhospitality of the religious community of the first century, he calls his disciples to model a new way. The universal gospel of Jesus Christ broke down the barriers that separated nationality, race, class, and gender (Galatians 3:28). All of the sojourners and strangers are invited to the community of faith. God will again rebuke and judge those who turn inward and ignore the commission to go and make disciples (Matthew 28:19), to be witnesses to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8), and who do not welcome the alien and the alienated. The Revelation of John closes with an invitation to "come" (Revelation 22:17). The church is the continuing incarnation of Jesus the great inviter and is empowered by his spirit to speak the ancient invitation, "Come."

A chorus of American Baptist voices affirms the biblical mandate to invite persons to new life and to welcome them to Christ's church and mission. Participants in the 1987 National Evangelism Convocation in St. Louis, Missouri, enthusiastically declared:

WE COMMIT ourselves, in Christ's name to invite those around us:

- to repent and put their trust in Jesus Christ;
- to enter into the fellowship, worship, witness and service of the Body of Christ;
- to enjoy new life in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit;
- to join in the global community of faith called to be stewards of Christ's mission in the world.

WE INVITE our sisters and brothers in the American Baptist family to become people centered in Jesus Christ so that inviting persons to new life in Christ becomes the heart of our ministry and mission. Transformed and empowered by the Holy Spirit, American Baptists can be a consistently inviting people reaching out to make new disciples.

WE URGE American Baptists to confess that we have not always been an inviting people, to repent of our failure to exercise the spiritual gifts of evangelism and hospitality; and to renew and strengthen our determination to be an inviting and welcoming people.

WE URGE American Baptists to recover the vision of caring ministries through which we express love of neighbor and stranger, trusting in the power of the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit to enable "community" where all of God's children find welcome.

WE URGE that the "survivalism" and inward focus that has eroded the vitality of the local church be supplanted with outreach, invitation, and welcome to the alien and the alienated, and that hostility be transformed to hospitality.

WE URGE that local congregations, national program boards, seminaries, ABC-related institutions, and NET (New Churches, Evangelism, Congregational Transformation network/alliance of National Ministries) lift up the priority of invitation to new life in Jesus Christ and be intentional about invitational ministry. This will require commitments of time and resources to motivate, interpret, equip, and train. We further urge that New Church Planting be supported as a key evangelistic strategy.

WE URGE that American Baptists study the twin meaning of "inviting." As a verb it describes the act of intentionally inviting the unchurched and non-Christian. As an adjective it describes the importance of being an attractive and magnetic fellowship. The spiritual gifts of evangelism and hospitality reflect this double meaning.

WE URGE that local congregations establish goals for baptisms and healthy membership growth and prayerfully adopt plans for reaching those goals.

WE URGE the rediscovery of the interconnectedness of worship renewal and the ability of American Baptists to be an inviting people.

WE URGE the reaffirmation of the interconnectedness of friendship and the ability of American Baptists to be an inviting people.

WE URGE that American Baptists learn again that the interconnectedness of community-based caring ministries which meet human needs and the ability to be an inviting people are primary issues of credibility.

Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches - December 1990

168 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstentions

Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - March 1992

Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - September 1996

Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - September 2000

Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - March 2005

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## POLICY BASE

American Baptist Policy Statement on Evangelism adopted by the General Board - June 1984.

## SUPPORTING POSITIONS

Resolution on Purpose of the Church adopted by the Northern Baptist Convention in 1926 and reaffirmed by the by the Executive Committee of the General Board in March 1986.

The American Baptist Commission on Denominational Identify states:

The "new" evangelism which understands the mandate for all of life has not yet been fully learned, but in the learning, there are aspects of the "old" evangelism which need new motivation in the life of American Baptist people.

The corrective efforts to keep this (Christian experience) from being an otherworldly, individualistic invitation cannot be allowed to hide the necessity of personal response in an encounter with the Risen Christ, an encounter which envisions forgiveness, repentance, and new life and new direction. The fact that some have prostituted personal evangelism through tricks of manipulation in no way negates the mandate of personal evangelism.

The National Ministries Goal Statement: "Encouraging Life in Christ" declares:

National Ministries shall encourage Life-in-Christ in and through persons...by enabling persons to experience conversion and regeneration through faith in Jesus Christ...by enabling persons to engage in effective evangelism and discipleship training. Encourage Life-in-Christ in and through Faith Communities by reaching toward the unchurched with the Gospel of Christ:

...by searching for and providing congregations ways for engaging in effective evangelism and discipleship;

...by enabling existing American Baptist-related congregations and other mission entities to experience renewal, revitalization and wholeness.

The Educational Ministries Statement of purpose says:

...to advance the educational mission of the American Baptist Churches so that persons respond in faith and love to God, become new creations in Jesus Christ, and grow as disciples equipped for ministry in the world.

International Ministries has this goal:

Goal 1: TO FURTHER EVANGELISM, developing effective methods and programs for fulfilling the evangelistic task. Such programs will take into account not only those areas which give promise of receptivity and rapid growth, but also continued need for creative witness among the major religions of the world where Christian growth is limited.

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