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AMERICAN BAPTIST RESOLUTION ON CHILDREN IN POVERTY

When the disciples spoke about children, Jesus immediately envisioned the Kingdom of Heaven. "Let the little children come to me and do not stop them for it is to such as these that the kingdom belongs." (Matt. 19:14)

And when asked by the disciples about the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus again refers to little children, adding that anyone who puts a stumbling block before one of these little ones, it would be better if a great millstone drowned that person in the depth of the sea. "Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks." (Matt.18:6)

In the United States today, between one-quarter and one-fifth of our children are growing up in poverty, often resulting in inadequate nutrition, mediocre education, deficient health care and many other stumbling blocks to living an abundant life.

These impoverished children are of all races, ethnicities and heritages. They live in city centers, in suburbs, in rural villages, on farms, and in industrial centers through out the country. They are in all of our communities and churches. They are our children.

Sadly, poverty in America is far more pervasive than we are ready to admit. As people in America are often falsely measured by material success, people who are economically vulnerable hide their poverty out of shame. Yet, we know how hard many families are struggling to keep food on the table and a roof over their head. Even a household with two incomes, living modestly, may be mired in credit card debt, resulting from unexpected medical bills, burdensome student loan debt, sudden unemployment and myriad catastrophes. In the course of a lifetime, over half of our population experiences poverty at one time or another.

Poverty affects us all, whether directly or indirectly, and the harsh reality that so many of our children are living in poor families is a moral outrage.

As American Baptists, we have heard the judgment of the prophets: "What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?" (Isaiah 3:15). We seek to answer the call of Jesus Christ, who at the beginning of his ministry, speaking to the people of his home town of Nazareth, quoted from Isaiah 61:1-2, saying, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor." We are moved by the vision of life that is reflected among the early Christians, who provided for one another in such a way that there was no needy among them (Acts 4:34-35).

We therefore resolve:

1. To recognize that while each of us is responsible to make the very best of our circumstances, many among us face overwhelming barriers and stumbling blocks to

fulfillment; some of the children among us are deprived of the full advantage to grow in wisdom and stature, as God intends;

2. To break down the stereotypes that classify poverty by race or national origin and that isolate poor people;

3. To reach out to all among us who are economically vulnerable, so that together we may make common cause toward the end of poverty;

4. To promote national policies that overcome inequitable wealth and income distribution, provide equal opportunities for all, regardless of our economic status and ultimately reduce the need to meet emergency needs;

5. To learn from one another in churches and regional mission endeavors as well as from other denominations and organizations that are having a positive impact on issues of children in poverty;

6. To pray for ourselves that we not lose the vision as well as for those whom we wish to help.

Adopted by the General Board of American Baptist Churches USA – June 2008
63 Yes, 0 Against

POLICY BASE

American Baptist Policy Statement on Family Life, June 1984

American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights, December 1976
