

8185:12/90

**HISTORIC AMERICAN BAPTIST
RESOLUTION ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND THE 500TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ARRIVAL OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS TO THE AMERICAS**

The demanding precept of the Old Testament prophet Micah "to do justice" became the foundational point for the American Baptist Policy Statement on Native Americans in 1979. Our Christian commitment to full discipleship demands that we hear these words as an individual and a corporate call to action. We believe that we must be in communion with those who suffer from injustice and present a challenge to systems which directly or inadvertently perpetuate oppression.

In order for people to be set free from oppression we must face the full scope of our history without fear or denial. Jesus said, speaking about the connections between freedom and truth; "the truth shall set you free" (John 8:31-32).

As the nation approaches public observances marking the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' first landing in the Western hemisphere, we are called to examine the forces which this event put into motion. This anniversary has surfaced the pain and intensified the sense of isolation for the indigenous people of the Americas. Thus, this is an opportunity for reflection and action as American Baptists.

In 1992, the descendants of these indigenous people having been subjected to genocide, slavery, and exploitation, cry out that a celebration is not an appropriate observance of this anniversary.

There is documentation of how the peoples of Central, South and North America, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Hawaii and African Diaspora suffered exploitation of their mineral and other natural resources, loss of self-determination, national divisiveness, victimization and plundering.

We consider the quincentenary a "kairos" moment in history. It is an appropriate moment for healing, reconstruction and reconciliation. American Baptists, led in our understanding and sensibilities by American Baptist Native American Indians and other indigenous people, must face together the exploitive sides of our history. Many of the benefits which we enjoy are the by-product of our inadvertent complicity in perpetuating the oppression caused by Western conquests. We believe that this moment can mark an opportunity to develop collective clarity and unified strategies against all forms of oppression. We realize that a call to repentance is necessary. We can use this moment as an opportunity for repentance and renewal of our stated convictions on human rights.

Therefore, we call upon all American Baptists to make individual and corporate opportunity to express concern for the pain of Native American Indians and other indigenous people at the observance of this 500th Anniversary of the arrival of Columbus to the Western Hemisphere.

THEREFORE, we call American Baptists to:

1. Declare 1992 a year of reflection and repentance, and as a result, a time to be involved in activities affirming 500 years of survival for Native American Indians and other indigenous peoples.
2. Use 1992 as the occasion to re-educate our American Baptist Churches constituency about the historical perspectives of indigenous people, particularly the concern for the preservation and the healing of the land.
3. Cooperate with interfaith bodies in calling for a gathering of the religious community to analyze the effects of the European invasion of the Americas.
4. Strengthen our churches' and communities' knowledge of and respect for each others' integrity and history and provide opportunities for education and consciousness-raising experiences in various ways such as special events, worship and publications.

*Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches - December 1990
166 For, 3 Against, 3 Abstentions
Modified by the Executive Committee to the General Board - March 1992
Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - March 1996
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POLICY BASE

The Policy Statement on Native Americans - June 1979
The Policy Statement on Human Rights - December 1976
