

AMERICAN BAPTIST RESOLUTION ON FOOD AND FUEL ASSISTANCE

Holy Scriptures, both Old and New, consistently teach that caring for the poor, destitute, and disadvantaged is a necessary expression of God's love and justice, and that the denial of the basic necessities of life to them is contrary to the will of God and draws down God's anger and judgment. The author of I John 3:17 wrote that God's love does not abide in those who have the world's good and do not respond to the needs of others.

In II Corinthians 8:13-14 (RSV) Paul lays down the rule of equality for the life of faith. Citing the experience of the Israelites in the desert he states: " it is a question of fair balance between your present abundance and their need so that their abundance may be your need in order that there may be a fair balance" (NRSV).

We realize that regardless of one's wealth or poverty, all are called to be faithful stewards of what they have and of the earth's resources. As incomes and resources diminish, it is necessary to remember that Scripture attests to the importance of sharing not only of one's abundance, but also of one's scarcity. The examples of the widow of Zarephath and the boy with the loaves and fishes teach us that what at first seems to be insufficient to share, by God's grace becomes sufficient to bless not only the receiver, but also the giver. In giving of our scarcity we experience that our security is not immaterial plentitude, but in participation in God's love and life.

The tremendous cost of heating fuel and food means that many poor and elderly citizens on fixed low-level incomes face the dreadful choice of heating or eating. This is unacceptable in a country that has a high level of self-indulgence and waste. We have adequate food resources for our own use and for export, spend millions on nonessentials (i.e. tobacco, pet food, junk food, alcohol) and buy enough gasoline to continue our pleasure driving and boating and to keep our recreational vehicles operating.

Whenever access to the basic necessities of life, including food and fuel for heat is denied to anyone, Christian people must act. Wealth cannot be the measure of a person's right to live. Therefore, when demand, scarcity, marketing practices or other forces raise the price of basic necessities out of the reach of the poor, the Body of Christ is compelled to act to safeguard the right of the poor to those necessities. In doing so, the church affirms that the law of the love of God is a higher law than the law of supply and demand.

The scope and seriousness of the problem require a concerted response by our society, both private and public sectors, toward an equitable resolution of what is a chronic problem and an immediate need.

Therefore, motivated by the love of Christ, instructed through Scripture by the Holy Spirit, and mindful of our opportunity to shape public policy as citizens in a democratic society, we urge all American Baptists to:

- 1) Commend and support legislation for food¹ and fuel assistance, especially the federal feeding programs;
- 2) Use every means possible to publicize and inform the public, especially local church congregations, about fuel and food assistance programs available in their communities; Federal food aid programs include: food stamps; free or reduced price lunches for poor children; free school breakfasts; child care and summer food service; supplemental feeding for women, infants and children (WIC); and nutrition for the elderly.
- 3) Develop programs in local churches such as emergency food banks, emergency shelter for families without heat and light, and nutrition programs for the elderly and be in liaison with poverty programs to find ways to be of assistance;
- 4) Survey their congregations and communities to identify persons who lack fuel or food and see that the need is met;
- 5) Resist efforts to cut benefits for the poor;
 - 6) Support lifeline utility rates which provide a basic amount of energy at the lowest rate;
 - 7) Support state and local ordinances preventing the cutting off of utilities or fuel supplies without proper safeguards for those with limited income;
 - 8) Encourage local food retailers to participate in the WIC² and food stamp programs;
 - 9) Work for the implementation of all the federal feeding programs within their communities;
 - 10) Support efforts to end the regressive sales tax, as well as oppose any proposed value added tax on food;
 - 11) Encourage the food industry to provide a variety of nutritious, inexpensive quality foods; and
 - 12) Begin now through the study of energy and hunger issues to work toward long-term solutions to the problem of access to basic necessities.

WIC - (Supplemental feeding program for women, infants and children)

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POLICY BASE

American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights - December 1976

As American Baptists we...will support programs and measures to assure these rights...

2. The right to the basic necessities of food, shelter, clothing and health care;

American Baptist Policy Statement on Hunger - June 1976

IV. Domestic Hunger

A. As American Baptists we shall support programs to alleviate hunger and malnutrition within the United States.

VIII. Emergency Aid

As American Baptists we shall support denominational, ecumenical, and governmental programs which provide short run emergency food relief.

American Baptist Policy Statement on Energy - June 1977

A. Criteria for Energy Decisions

1. All persons have a right to the energy necessary to sustain life and to meet their basic needs.
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