

8164:12/87

AMERICAN BAPTIST RESOLUTION ON HOUSING AND THE HOMELESS

We proclaim that each person being created in the image and likeness of God possesses an inherent dignity from which stems a basic human right to shelter.

As people of God we are mandated to actively demonstrate our concern for those who lack shelter. In Isaiah 58:6-7, the worshipers are exhorted by these words:

This is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, setting free the oppressed; breaking every yoke, sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, not turning your back on your own. Then your light will break forth like the dawn.

Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46, instructs his followers to take care of the physical and emotional needs "...of one of the least of these."

There are thousands of homeless persons in this country; a diverse population comprised of people who are unemployed, underemployed, deinstitutionalized with mental illness, chemically dependent or dispossessed.

Those local churches and nonprofit organizations that are meeting the immediate needs of the homeless through the provision of shelters, soup kitchens and day programs should be affirmed and supported while acknowledging these are only temporary solutions to broader and longer range problems.

Though the problem of homelessness is not a new one, it has taken on a new dimension due to the decrease in the supply of affordable and standard housing for low and moderate income persons. Severe cutbacks in federal funding for housing programs; the demolition or conversion of existing housing; and unjustified inflation of rents are among the causes of this today. Often these have been the catalysts which have led persons into the condition of homelessness and prevented others from escaping such a condition.

We therefore call upon American Baptist Churches USA related organizations and churches to take seriously the American Baptist Churches USA Policy Statement on Housing (6/83) and continue:

1. To raise the awareness of church members to the short and long term plight of the homeless;

2. To use their resources to provide appropriate temporary solutions;

3. To advocate on behalf of state and federal legislation which will increase the supply of assisted housing for the poor and destitute;
4. To lobby for and support federal, state and local legislation which prevents the indiscriminate and irresponsible demolition and conversion of low and moderate income housing;
5. To develop and promote innovative alternative housing programs (rehabilitation or new construction) for low or no income persons;
6. To discover and support strategies and programs which address the permanent housing needs of the homeless.

Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches - December 1987
168 For, 2 Against, 0 Abstentions
Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - December 1990
Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - March 1995
Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - March 1999
(General Board Reference # - 8164:12/87)

POLICY BASE

American Baptist Policy Statement on Housing - June 1983

Be an advocate for the housing needs of the poor, persons with disabilities and the elderly.

Advocate and support public and private rehabilitation projects for the urban poor and elderly and the protection of their rights when neighborhoods in which they live are taken over by higher income people or commercial establishments.

Encourage interest and participation in experimentation with and utilization of alternative forms of housing.

Work cooperatively with other church-related organizations and/or other nonprofit groups in the support and development of housing.