

AMERICAN BAPTIST POLICY STATEMENT ON HOUSING

Since shelter is one of the basic needs of human beings, the Christian concept of the dignity of the individual is not practiced unless this need is recognized and upheld as a right of humanity. The biblical mandate (Isaiah 58:6-7) that the people of God have a responsibility to see that shelter is provided for those who need it must have a high priority in the thinking of American Baptists.

The church's concern for the quality of housing stems from the belief that each person is precious in the sight of God and should have the opportunity to grow and develop his or her potential to the fullest extent possible. This development is threatened whenever social and economic forces dehumanize or degrade people or place them in living situations which are physically or socially hazardous to them.

In response to this biblical mandate and the concern for quality housing, American Baptist Churches USA will:

1. Be an advocate for the housing needs of the poor, persons with disabilities and the elderly.
2. Initiate and support programs for the development of housing for persons of special needs.
3. Oppose discrimination against minority groups in housing and support the embodiment of this principle into law.
4. 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.
5. Support efforts to provide decent affordable housing in rural areas, especially in areas with large numbers of minority groups and migrants.
6. Support the development of new, alternative , and innovative methods of financing to enable decent housing to be available for persons of all levels of income.
7. Support the development of technology, building codes, and zoning laws that will enable housing to be built, renovated or converted to become energy efficient.

8. Support the principle of local control over land usage but oppose the use of zoning to prohibit the provision of housing for persons with special needs.
9. Assist regions, associations and local churches to identify and use effectively the power and resources within their congregations or available to them to undertake housing ministries.
10. Encourage interest and participation in experimentation with and utilization of alternate forms of housing.
11. Study, support and monitor the effect of programs which seek to keep rental housing costs within reasonable limits and which provide reasonable benefits for landlord and tenant.
12. Encourage the creation of and experimentation with programs which mediate between landlords and tenants and which encourage both to be good stewards of housing property.
13. Keep alert to developing issues in the housing field identifying those which have implications for social justice.
14. Work cooperatively with other church-related organizations and other nonprofit groups in the support and development of housing.
15. Lift up vocations in the housing field as valid ministries and encourage Christians to secure the necessary academic and professional qualifications to undertake such ministries.

Because the development of adequate housing in the United States for all income levels, particularly for the poor and persons of special need, involves efforts by governments, business and labor to assume their social responsibility even though often at some risk, American Baptist Churches USA will:

1. Support efforts to ensure that federal, state and local governments
 - a. Use their power and authority to:
 - 1) Provide the necessary funds and subsidies to ensure adequate provision of decent, safe and sanitary housing for those persons of low income or with special needs.
 - 2) Develop and enforce laws, rules and regulations which facilitate the building and rehabilitation of safe, decent and accessible housing without adding excessively to its cost.
 - 3) Acquire property to be used for housing through negotiation and the judicious use of

eminent domain.

4) Generate and provide the necessary financial resources and instruments to effect the construction and rehabilitation of housing, especially for those groups whose housing needs are not met by the private sector.

b. Work in partnership with the private and nonprofit sectors to build and rehabilitate housing.

c. Encourage research and development with regard to innovative techniques and methods of housing construction, rehabilitation and recycling through the use of appropriate incentives and rewards.

d. Fund training programs for low income and unemployed persons to enable them to develop skills in housing construction, rehabilitation, management and maintenance.

2. Encourage the housing industry to:

a. Provide quality housing at appropriate market levels at reasonable profit.

b. Act (where feasible) in partnership with government and nonprofit sectors to meet the housing needs of lower and moderate income persons.

c. Share expertise with and provide support services to nonprofit organizations in the housing field.

d. Seek out ways to provide housing at lower costs by developing and improving technology.

e. Sponsor or participate in programs for training low-income persons in building trade skills to enable them to maintain and repair their own homes.

3. Encourage labor to:

a. Provide its services at reasonable cost levels which do not add excessively to the price of housing.

b. Work cooperatively with the government, business and nonprofit sectors in financing and developing housing for low and moderate-income persons.

c. Sponsor or participate in programs which train low-income persons in building trade skills.

4. Encourage the financial community to participate in combined government, nonprofit and private efforts to revitalize housing for the sake of the community.

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