

7025:6/79

**AMERICAN BAPTIST
POLICY STATEMENT ON NATIVE AMERICAN INDIANS**

Underlying all efforts to work toward solutions of issues affecting the lives of Native Americans is the basic concern for justice. Christian love can never be less than justice, however much more it might be.

The demanding precept of Micah "...to do justly" has often been neglected because of inadequate understanding of the issues, difficulty in confronting the powers which perpetuate injustice, lack of commitment and attitudes of racism.

Out of Christian commitment to both love and justice, the following policy principles emerge.

A. Because we believe each person and nation has the endowed right and responsibility for self-determination we support the following regarding Native Americans:

1. Sovereignty. We recognize the right of Native American Indian governments to govern within the boundaries of their nations and to assess their own needs and priorities. Further, we recognize the rights and privileges of Indian nations as established under treaties to be valid.

2. Governmental Policy. We recognize that the unique relationship between Indian nations and the United States Government makes it essential that we keep abreast of federal and state legislation and regulations affecting Native American Indian nations. We must promote passage and implementation of legislation that enables Native American Indian self-determination and self-development and that maintains Indian rights.

3. Trust Relationship. We believe that the United States government has both a moral and legal duty to faithfully keep the trust relationship existing between it and Native American Indians. This relationship is a partnership insuring that Native American Indian tribes have the tools and resources needed for political and cultural survival.

We recognize that the United States Government has had many conflicts of interest in its trust relationship with Native American Indian nations. We must see that the government exercises the highest moral commitment and expertise in meeting its trust relationship to protect Native American Indian assets, and to promote and ensure self-

government by Native American Indians.

We must inform and educate the American public to understand that Native American Indians tribal members are United States citizens as well as citizens of their tribes. This dual citizenship gives them rights and privileges distinct from other racial or cultural groups.

4. Organizing in Community. As numerous Native American Indian peoples move to urban areas for employment and/or training it is essential for us to support their attempts to develop their own Native American Indian communities, and enable them to determine the spiritual, political, social and economic life of their community. We must also open the door for full participation in the larger community.

B. Because we believe the Christian Gospel demands that we care for one another and help bring about human wholeness, we support the following regarding Native American Indians:

1. Indian Ministries. We must continue priority budgeting for Native American Indian programs which implement relevant ministries, both traditional and innovative ministries which spread the Gospel with its message of good news and wholeness to the entire community, and which express our affirmation of American Baptist Native American Indian churches and continue to stand by our Native American Indian churches as they minister to their own communities.

2. Special Services. Because our government and society has for generations been insensitive to many of the needs of Native American Indians, we must encourage the members of the churches to assume an advocacy role with state, federal and private agencies so that effective delivery of social services to Native American Indians becomes a reality. We must also advocate for innovative programs that not only help meet basic social service needs, but do so in a manner which is appropriate to Native American Indian culture.

3. Health. We recognize the critical health and nutritional needs of Native American Indians and the poor delivery of medical services to them. We urge those federal and state agencies responsible for health care delivery and nutritional education to tribes to provide adequate culturally-sensitive services and outreach.

4. Corporate Responsibility. We must carefully assess any complicity that may be ours through investment in or use of corporations that will compromise our actions in any way with Native American Indians. We must commit our human and financial resources to a stronger partnership with Native American Indian tribal governments in retaining the use and control of the development of tribal land and other resources in order to more directly

benefit Native American Indian people.

5. Education. We must see that both the public and federal educational systems provide a higher level of literacy and quality education among all Native American Indians. We must explore and encourage alternatives to formal education which will provide not only academic knowledge but vocational skills as well. We must support existing educational programs in Christian institutions which provide an appropriate and adequate curriculum for Native American Indians.

C. Because we believe in the constant search for truth and understanding as lived out in the person of Jesus Christ, we support the following regarding Native American Indians:

1. Advocacy. We affirm the responsibility of American Baptists to be advocates for Native American Indian concerns at all levels of decision-making and interpreters of those concerns to our constituency, the ecumenical community and the United States public.

2. Consciousness Raising. We recognize that the complexity of historical and political relationships affecting both Native American Indian and non-Indian persons requires that we monitor and combat the forces that undermine the political, social, cultural, and economic life of all Americans. Christian institutions should be aware of adverse activity and generate a spirit of understanding and feeling of sensitivity with all parties.

3. Communication. We must recognize the need for the dissemination of information which translates and interprets the value systems, dignity, and rights of Native American Indians and which negates the image/stereotype most commonly reflected in printed matter and other media.

4. Ecumenical Responsibility. We must increase the support and commitment of financial and human resources of American Baptist Churches, USA to ecumenical programs which strengthen the advocacy role of denominations in speaking and working on behalf of Native American Indians.

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