

8076:3/87

**AMERICAN BAPTIST
RESOLUTION ON OLDER AMERICANS**

>

WHEREAS, the persons in the United States over the age of 65 will continue to increase both in number and in percentage of the population;

WHEREAS, these adults will be better educated, and in better health, and thus will enjoy a degree of unprecedented longevity;

WHEREAS, their state of physical, mental, spiritual well-being, their capacity for responsible citizenship, and the grace with which they participate in family and community life and encourage younger generations to choose constructive options to condition their own aging process;

WHEREAS, the wholeness of life at every age, including old age, depends on the appropriate integration of body, mind and spirit, and witnesses to the fact that the last part of life gives meaning to the first;

WHEREAS, many of society's values and institutions whether private, government, or religious undermine an older person's sense of self-worth, thereby distorting God's plan for all members of the human family to live together in supportive community; and

WHEREAS, on the basis of Biblical record we believe that persons who have lived through accumulated years "in the way of righteousness" (Proverbs 16:31) can be expected to witness both to God's constancy and to God's innovative love breaking into history (e.g. Genesis 12-16; Luke 2:25-40), and are needed to serve as models of faith-filled living; (II Timothy 1:5);

Therefore, we as the General Board of the American Baptist Churches call on:

1. Older persons in light of their Christian commitment to:

a) do justice to the gifts of love and empowerment they have received in their lives by identifying these and employing them in Christian discipleship wherever they live and relate to others;

b) be change agents in the events and affairs of church and society toward the fulfillment of Christian community;

c) extend love and care to the poor, the deprived, the afflicted, the home-bound, and the institutionalized, calling on them in turn to fulfill the capacities which are theirs;

d) support all age levels alike in their need to continue in personal growth, especially spiritual, and to relate this growth to their caring for others in Christ's name;

e) seek with sympathy others to discern the presence of God in their lives, past and present, and to grow in accepting Jesus' promise that our relationship with God survives death.

2. Churches, in partnership with older adults, to:

a) initiate periodically a survey of older adults in their congregations and in geographic areas in order to determine their needs for transportation, housing choice and maintenance; to assess their physical and spiritual well-being; and to collaborate with other churches and organizations to develop coordinated church and community resources in response to these needs;

b) provide programs and resources for all ages to accurately inform about the aging process, and about society's values and attitudes that make aging difficult; to eradicate the misperceptions and unjust assumptions about growing "old," and to alleviate gerontophobia (the fear of growing old and fear of older persons) ;

c) provide continuing education opportunities for older adults to help them realistically identify and/or develop their gifts, skills and interests for ministry in family, church and society;

d) provide opportunities for all ages in a supportive context to engage in wholistic life planning, in new or continued career planning, and to acquire faith and skills needed to move creatively in Christian perspective through life's demanding periods of transition;

e) develop innovative ways to include older adults in the worship, prayer life, Bible study, and mission of the congregation regardless of their state of mobility and place of residence;

f) alter its buildings and patterns of functioning so as to facilitate the presence and participation of infirm and older persons in the life, worship, and mission of the church.

3. American Baptist colleges, universities, and theological seminaries to include in their curricula opportunities that will:

a) acquaint students with the nature and situation of older adults in our society, and encourage them to respond in ways that will incorporate older adults in the church's

ministry;

- b) train persons in pastoral skills to counsel those involved in multigenerational family life;
- c) train persons in administrative and organizational skills to relate to older adults in identifying their roles and to develop their potentials in church, family, and society;
- d) involve persons in an inner-spiritual journey through devotional disciplines and various methods of Bible study to help older adults with their in-depth spiritual needs;
- e) offer training in life-planning skills and in skills for coping creatively with life's transitions in Christian perspective so persons may learn through their own experiences to assist others in comparable ways;
- f) provide continuing education opportunities for older adults.

4. Administrators and boards of directors of American Baptist related retirement communities and long-term care facilities for older adults to:

- a) assure that informative programs and resources about the aging process will be available to Board, staff, residents and their families;
- b) provide training opportunities in personal growth for staff and residents that contribute to a sense of self-worth, mutual respect, and the development of community;
- c) encourage residents to be involved with the activities and resources of the larger community;
- d) encourage partnerships between the retirement/care facilities and the local churches by involving residents in the life and worship of the church and by involving congregations in the life and program activities of the retirement/care facilities.

5. Various branches of government to enact and implement legislation that:

- a) provides for life-long learning toward self-sufficiency in matters of economics, physical adjustment, community participation, and personal development;
- b) enables older persons to have a choice of housing arrangements;
- c) provides adequate health care for older adults at affordable prices, supports preventive health care, and encourages personal responsibility for health maintenance;

d) assists older persons to maintain a viable economic base by abolishing mandatory retirement and by encouraging employers to provide alternative patterns of employment for older adults.

Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches - December 1981

Adopted Unanimously

Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - March 1987

Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - December 1990

Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - March 1996

(General Board Reference # - 8076:3/87)

POLICY BASE

American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights - Adopted December 1976

As American Baptists we declare the following rights to be basic rights and we will support programs and measures to assure these rights:

2. The right to the basic necessities of food, shelter, clothing, and health care.
8. The right to develop skills and abilities, to utilize these in economic, political, social, intellectual and religious institutions...
9. The right to human dignity, to be respected and treated as a person, and to be protected against discrimination without regard to age, sex, race, class, marital status, income, national origin, legal status, culture or condition in society.

SUPPORTIVE POSITIONS

American Baptist Convention Resolution on Senior Citizens - Adopted 1962

We recommend:

- a. That all churches establish creative programs to utilize the abilities of senior adults, remembering such people not only need to be served, but have great abilities and talents to offer.

American Baptist Convention Resolution on Older Christians - Adopted 1958
