

8195:11/91

**AMERICAN BAPTIST RESOLUTION ON
POLICE AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS:
DIFFICULTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The ongoing fight between good and evil is illustrated throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. This battle has infiltrated our current government authorities, our families, and especially our police professionals. American society has become increasingly violent, and police officers are called to enter that violent world and put their lives and careers at risk to protect and serve the whole society. Overworked and understaffed police departments lead to stress and strained relations. Police officers' duty places them in danger both physically and emotionally. By being on the front line and confronting all sorts of violent activities, some police officers develop a shield of insensitivity towards persons in the community.

Violence can distort the perspective of the police, causing them to see the community or certain segments of the community as enemies. When this happens the guardianship bonds between police and community are broken and the police themselves are viewed as a threat by the people in the community. Situations of increasing animosity can develop, which are often fed by racism and emotional stress to produce an explosive climate. If unchecked these situations will undoubtedly lead to an increase in police misconduct and police brutality such as was seen in three highly publicized cases in 1991: the Rodney King beating in Los Angeles; the Jeffrey Dahmer killings in Milwaukee; and Operation Rescue in Wichita.

Police officers, local politicians and community leaders, and churches as moral and social pillars in the community, must work to counter these powerful dynamics of social violence. Paul speaks about the struggle between good and evil in the book of Romans as he addressed Romans, Roman soldiers, Gentiles, Jews and Christians. He states, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:21). Jesus calls us the "salt of the earth," (Matthew 5:13a) signifying the preserving and healing capacities Christ's disciples are to bring to the world in which they live. Many unsung heroes in police departments, community organizations, neighborhood watches and local congregations have worked to counter the violence in their communities and build safer neighborhoods.

Therefore, the General Board of the American Baptist Churches calls upon all members of American Baptist Churches, National Boards, Regions, and staff to:

1. condemn police brutality in all of its forms, for it undermines the very social order the police are sworn to uphold;
2. remember all the victims of violent crime and other acts of brutality and remember all police officers who have given their lives in the line of duty to protect society and uphold our nation's laws;
3. seek for more thorough and effective training of police officers on issues of racism, crosscultural understanding and respect, emotional respect and conflict resolution;
4. lead the fight for community support for police officers and their families, including the provision of pastoral care;
5. support the need for police departments to build stronger links with the neighborhoods and local organizations and work toward effective partnership for maintaining the public safety;
6. insist that police officers treat people engaged in acts of nonviolent civil disobedience with physical restraint and respect of their human and legal rights;
7. pray for those who risk their lives in the safekeeping of us all;
8. engage in, support and develop ministries which empower those whose calling is found in the law enforcement arena;
9. participate actively in community organizing efforts to work for public welfare and safety, including establishing creative partnerships with local police departments;
10. work with the community in remedying the political and budgetary needs that lead to the shortage of police officers in the majority of communities.

Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches - June 1992

169 For, 2 Against, 2 Abstentions
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Policy Base

American Baptist Policy Statement on Criminal Justice - 1983

American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights - 1976

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

9. The right to human dignity, to be respected and treated as a person, to be protected against discrimination without regard to age, sex, race, class, marital status, income, national origin, legal status, culture, or condition in society.

13. The right to be free from arbitrary arrest and detention and from torture; the right to a just and open trial with the opportunity to confront accusers and the right to humane treatment if incarcerated.