

## **AMERICAN BAPTIST RESOLUTION AGAINST MANIFESTATIONS OF PREJUDICE**

### **Biblical Mandate**

The Church, as the Body of Christ, is to be the locus of genuine reconciliation and true community. In Christ we are all one. The reconciling death of Christ has mandated the abolishment of all sources of hostility and separation. In church congregations there should be no stranger or outcast, for all are equal and full members. The Church is called to be faithful to this mission and become a model for all of humanity.

### **Testimony of the Past and Present**

The history of our world has been marked with periodic persecutions and crimes against humanity. Out of the intense desire to establish a nation which would "secure the blessings of liberty," the union of the United States of America was formed. While dedicated to the proposition that all are created equal, the history of our country has been marked with episodes of violent intolerance.

In spite of advancements made in civil rights, groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Nations are pushing for growth and the expansion of their platforms of hate. Recruitment has been discovered in civic organizations, schools, the military, prisons, and even some religious organizations. Demonstrations against civil rights, refugees, immigrants, and Jewish synagogues have turned violent and destructive. The incidents of crime directed against persons because of their ethnic origin, race, religion, or sexual orientation, and the establishments in which they gather, have increased significantly.

Immigrants and refugees have been assaulted, taunted, victimized, and murdered in incidents across the United States. Alleged favored treatment by the federal government and competition in the labor market have spawned resentment and hostility which led to violence.

Men and women with a homosexual orientation have become the targets of increased assaults and attacks. Despite the U.S. Surgeon General's effort to educate the public that the AIDS epidemic is present in both the heterosexual and homosexual communities, prejudice, fear, and hysteria have come together in tragic episodes of hate crimes perpetrated against homosexual men and women.

Religious intolerance has also become more visible in our society. Houses of worship have been vandalized and desecrated. Vandalized synagogues in Beverly, Massachusetts, and Ft. Lee, New Jersey, have installed new lighting and alarm systems. Tensions generated by international crises (e.g. the Middle East) spill over and strain our domestic

life. Highly visible security is the rule of the day when entering many ethnic minority houses of worship. Due to fear of acts of terrorism, religious observances and celebrations are conducted behind an expensive security shield. In a country settled by many seeking religious freedom, we are confronted with the dismaying and unacceptable situation in which some religious communities are free to worship only when, and if, they can afford and provide sufficient security.

In 1988, the Uniform Federal Crime Report Act of 1988 (PL100-96) was enacted and requires the Department of Justice to collect and publish data on crimes that manifest prejudice based on ethnic origin, race, religion or sexual orientation.

"A hate crime is an act of violence which is accompanied by an additional motive: an attempt to intimidate a larger group or class of people."<sup>1</sup> Although the FBI had published an annual Uniform Crime Report based on information from about 16,000 state and local law enforcement agencies, the report did not include a national count on hate crimes. PL100-96 is designated to help legislators see what patterns manifest themselves and what parts of the country are more plagued by this problem than others. The data will enable policymakers to enact new statutes to strengthen criminal penalties where an assault or murder is motivated by prejudice.

### **Call to Action**

It is God who calls us to serve as agents of peace and reconciliation. In response and discipleship of Jesus Christ:

We declare, as American Baptists, our opposition to manifestations of prejudices against persons because of their ethnic origin or race and persons because of their religion or sexual orientation regardless of our approval or disapproval of that orientation.

We ask American Baptists as individual Christians and in congregations to pray and work for the dismantling of the barriers of prejudice.

We further ask American Baptists to pray and work for an age of peace in which no one will be violently assaulted or threatened because of ethnic origin, race, religion, or sexual orientation.

We urge American Baptists in collaboration with all persons committed to freedom and justice:

- to speak out for an end to hate crimes perpetrated by persons in our society who believe they can violently act out their prejudices.
- to support the enforcement of legislation on the local, state, and national levels to collect hate crimes statistics (such as, crosses burned on black families' lawns or swastikas scrawled on synagogue walls; what groups are being victimized and who is perpetrating these crimes). The lack of comprehensive and uniform reporting system measuring the extent of racial/religious/ethnic/sexual orientation

- violence and intimidation hampers law enforcement, the development of preventative programs, allocations of resources, and public policy adjustment.
- to urge churches to conduct discussion of the nature and presence of hate crimes and specific hate crime bills.
  - to raise hate crime issues, including related legislative proposals, in ministerial councils, associations of churches and ecumenical/interfaith organizations for study, reflection and action.
- 

Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches - June 1989

165 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstentions

Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - September 1992

Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - September 1997

Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - September 1999

(General Board Reference #8175:12/88)

---

## **POLICY BASE**

American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights - Adopted December 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:

1. The right of every person to choose a religion freely, to maintain religious belief or unbelief without coercion; the right for communities of faith to meet together to engage in public worship, to witness publicly to others, to speak prophetically from religious conviction to government and society, to live out religious beliefs, and to be free from governmental intrusion, coercion and control in the free exercise of conscience and religion;

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.

**American Baptist Policy Statement on Racial Justice - Adopted June 1983**

Based on the mandate of our Christian faith and our belief that a nation cannot be secured unless it is founded on justice within their own societies and within the world. Therefore as American Baptists:

8. We recognize that violence against minorities has been a continuing factor in American Society. We will challenge the covert and overt violence that is a tool which gives expression to the hatred of one racial group for another.

---

**SUPPORTING STATEMENTS**

American Baptist Resolution on Anti-Semitism  
American Baptist Resolution on Fragmented Society  
American Baptist Resolution on the Golden Rule

1 Rep. John Conyers, Jr., Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee on Criminal Justice.

---