

Mission Table 2015: Case Statement on Ending Poverty

The existence of the poor throughout the world and the substandard conditions under which they live are undeniable. The question is what does God require of us? How do we seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God? Matthew 25 provides an answer: *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,*³⁶ *I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'*³⁷ *Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?'*³⁸ *When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?'*³⁹ *When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'*⁴⁰ *The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'* Matt 25:35-40.

For more than 200 years, American Baptists have served the most vulnerable, sought justice and shared the Good News of Jesus Christ over all the earth. Despite countless individuals, groups, corporations, denominations, entire communities, states, and even nations committing massive resources to help the poor, the generational cycle of poverty continues and the demand for assistance with basic needs such as food, clothing, affordable housing and transportation continues to grow.

Because of our long history and commitment to helping the poor and the pressing and increasing urgency, the issue of poverty is a priority for American Baptists. The commitment and collective power of the denomination with all churches working together will result in a deeper understanding of the issue and better outcomes for the people whose lives we hope to impact. This is fundamental and necessary in order to get beyond well-intended solutions that may meet an immediate need, but fail to identify and focus on root-cause issues associated with poverty. Many of society's greatest concerns: lack of living-wage jobs, crime, addiction, violence, human trafficking, terrorism and the increasing inability of people to provide for their own basic needs, all have some connection with the traumatic impact of poverty.

This case addresses the overall issue of poverty and the church's obligation to respond with urgency. If we fail to see and address the needs of the least of these, the negative impact on the church will be great. On the other hand, the positive impact that opening our eyes and ears, increasing our understanding of the issue of poverty and taking collective action will be even greater, on earth and in heaven.

We must acknowledge the negative progression of the working poor, the uneven distribution of wealth and disappearing middle-class, marginalization of immigrants and disenfranchisement of peoples. Economic indicators such as a decreasing gross domestic product and increased consumerism further support this negative progression and it impacts every living generation and socio-economic class. Even if you are not poor, you and your community are affected by poverty and are being called on to help the poor. Poverty impacts everyone and the issue is urgent.

We will start by coming together seeking to understand, and like Jesus, we must humble ourselves in order to identify with the poor or perhaps better said, we need to be such that the poor can identify with us. We must move away from the ethos of ministering to the poor and toward ministering *with* the poor. We must hear their voices, see their plights and invite their gifts into all dialogue and actions about the elimination of poverty. Human stories of struggle and accomplishment must be written and recorded and told. Our obligation does not end with other faith-based and human service organizations in our communities, and we must advocate by addressing corporate and political policies and the effect they have on the poor. Our churches must be bold leaders in the midst of a humble endeavor, bringing stakeholders together to listen, to understand the needs of the people, and to utilize all available resources to demonstrate love and compassion to the poor and teach as Jesus did during his ministry on earth.

We are well familiar with both Old and New Testament declarations that “*The poor will always be among us,*” and yet we cannot allow this to be an excuse for the church’s lack of action. We are called to the ministry of the poor and in the midst of our good work we will tell the Good News of Jesus Christ and the hope of eternal life that comes from him alone. Our unique history in addressing this urgent priority is underscored in the words of Jesus, “Blessed are the poor.”

To be civilized is to eliminate poverty.

Team Quote with inspiration from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Poverty Team Contacts

- 1) Lynne Punnett
- 2) Shawna Simmons
- 3) Roy Medley
- 4) Alan Newton
- 5) Marilyn Turner
- 6) Eugene Downing, Jr.
- 7) Yvonne Carter
- 8) Liliana Davalle

9) Brunilda Rodriguez

10) Louis Barbarin

11) Earl Johnson

12) Ken Marsenburg

13) Edgar Palacios