

American Baptists and the Legacy of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

1986 was the first year in which Dr. King's birthday was recognized as a national holiday. Because of his identification with American Baptists, our denomination continues to have a unique opportunity and responsibility to keep before ourselves and the rest of the nation the deep roots of the Christian faith which were the foundation and inspiration of his philosophy and action.

Dr. King was a committed Christian and a Baptist. He graduated from Crozier Theological Seminary. His teachings and actions were based on biblical ideas as interpreted by Baptist tradition. His life reminds us of the struggles for freedom in our heritage.

The theme of justice was foundational to Dr. King's actions and was based on the concept that all persons are valued and are precious to God.

Through the years, American Baptists have been committed to justice as they have worked with people who have been hurt by the injustices in our society and around the world. Today that theme continues to be a priority in American Baptist programming.

In recognition of and gratitude for the life and leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in awareness that it is important to keep his ideas before us and our nation and in recognition that he was an American Baptist minister, the General Board of the American Baptist Churches USA:

1. Calls upon all American Baptists to celebrate annually Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day by:
 - a. thanking God for the life and witness of Dr. King.
 - b. participating in biblical study, reflection/action about the love ethic as exemplified in Dr. King's writing and actions.
 - c. retelling and keeping alive the story of Dr. King's faithful courage and struggles for freedom as a challenge to our ongoing ministries.
 - d. witnessing in the midst of the secular community, as American Baptists or in concert with other people of faith, to the biblical principles of Dr. King's message so that these will be highlighted as the broader community celebrates Dr. King's birthday.
2. Calls upon the national boards, the regions, and the churches of the American Baptist Churches USA to provide appropriate events and resources to support and challenge American Baptists as they recognize and celebrate the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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156 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstentions
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POLICY BASE

American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights

Resolutions by the American Baptist Churches over the years have particularly sought to reflect the denomination's basic principles of freedom of thought and belief, the right to dissent, the responsibility to speak prophetically to church and society and support for human dignity and social justice.

Therefore, 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

Racial justice is recognizing our oneness in Christ, confessing that we have not become what God wants us to be, and committing ourselves to pressing on to that mark of high calling by which we can become a liberating symbol to our nation and world of what it means to be the people of God.

Therefore, as American Baptists:

1. We affirm the diversity of races and cultures as distinctive aspects of our denomination. We accept each person as a full participant and each race and each culture as a valid expression within the life and witness of the ABC family.
2. We will establish those education processes and lines of communication which will enable us to learn from each other and to share in the rich racial textures that characterize our communities of faith.

5. We recognize that racism is an acquired attitude expressed throughout the world. In our relationships with other nations and cultures through our national and international mission we will continually examine our own roles and attitudes to eliminate any vestiges of racism and we will work to witness for racial justice which is implicit in the Christian faith.
