

**AMERICAN BAPTIST
RESOLUTION ON CALL TO THE MINISTRY OF ALL BELIEVERS**

Theological-Biblical Rational

American Baptists believe that every person who confesses faith in Jesus Christ is called to discipleship and ministry. The New Testament concept of "laos," the people of God, declares that all Christians are called to ministry in every area of life. Believer's baptism not only signifies faith in Christ, but also a call to discover and use the gifts of the Holy Spirit for ministry in our daily lives. "Ministry" is a translation of the Greek word "diakonia" which means "service." Ministry of all believers describes works of service performed in response to the call of God in the church and in the larger society with a conscious understanding of Christ as Lord.

The church as a living organism and body is one of the primary images of the New Testament. Christ is the head of the body. There are many members, but none that dominate or that are mere appendages. The identification and deployment of individual gifts and ministries of every member actualizes Christ's body: "The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-12). Also see I Corinthians 12:8-11; 14-26, Romans 12:6-8.

Situational Analysis

The value system of American Baptists described in recent policy statements clearly indicates an equality of gifting and calling for those traditionally defined as laity and clergy, now to be partners in ministry. Structures of congregational and denominational life sometimes work against full empowerment of laity for ministry. Too often Sunday worship doesn't connect ministries to daily life. Denominational structures need to both provide support and opportunity for ordained ministry, and attend to the vision of a "baptized ministry". The emphasis on laity and their giftings for ministry has grown in the past forty years and presents a new pattern for the mission of the church based on gifts (charismata) rather than office. Charismata is a Greek word which the New Testament uses to describe spiritual gifts graciously given by God to all believers.

Baptized ministry includes not only our access to God through Jesus Christ, but also our call in Christ to be ministers to those around us.

Therefore, American Baptists are called to:

- be ministers of Christ in response to the call of God;
- make special efforts within their congregations to encourage each person to identify, claim and use his or her God-given gifts for ministry in all areas of life;
- eliminate or modify existing structures which are not compatible with the ministry of all believers;
- develop new methods, create structures, and be open to opportunities which focus on equipping laity to do ministry within our families, our communities, our workplaces and our churches;
- explore new ways of communicating the ministry of all believers;
- employ inclusive patterns and work styles when developing mission

tasks;

- encourage and support our denominational agencies and educational institutions to assist all American Baptists to fulfill our varied calls to ministry.

Adopted by the General Board of American Baptist Churches - June 1994

171 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstentions

Revised by the Executive Committee of the General Board - September 1995

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

Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - September 2003

(General Board Reference #:8203:11/93)

Policy Base

American Baptist Policy Statement on Evangelism

American Baptist Policy Statement on Ordained Ministry

Supporting Document

1987 Statement of Concern - The Ministry of the Whole People of God: Living our Faith Where We Are