

7015:6/75

AMERICAN BAPTIST POLICY STATEMENT ON HUNGER

A world food crisis is upon us. It reaches far beyond temporary disasters and affects the destiny of tens of millions of people. While the most urgent problem faces the food scarce countries, there are also challenges of hunger and malnutrition even in the United States. This is a crisis which calls for a recognition of global interdependence and the limits of world resources.

We regard hunger, and especially the hunger of the low income countries, to be a major Christian and American concern. Historically Americans have played a major role in hunger relief. However, over the years the United States has reduced its food assistance and development aid to the point where, reflected as a percentage of its wealth, we are now one of the lowest contributors of any major donor nation. This trend away from urgent humanitarian world concerns must be reversed if we are to be true to our Christian teachings and national heritage.

The Christian Church approaches the problem of hunger as a community of faith, convinced of the link between the love of God and the love of neighbor, and the belief that Christian faith and ethical action go together. We believe that all life is sacred in the sight of God, that the earth is the Lord's and that humanity should not exploit or misuse it. The varied resources of this planet, while controlled by nations, organizations and individuals, belong to all peoples, present and future. The Church must affirm the oneness of humanity and call the organizations of society to stewardship of world resources for the benefit of all.

To propose numerous specific programs for our denomination or for our government to deal with world hunger would be beyond our scope in this policy statement. Rather we seek to establish criteria by which we as a Christian denomination may evaluate individual and collective efforts to resolve and eliminate the problem of hunger in the world. We therefore set out in this policy statement a set of principles which shall guide the formulation and evaluation of specific plans of action.

I - Root Causes of World Hunger

The major causes of the food crisis include natural disasters, rapid population growth, inequitable distribution of economic resources, political constraints, lack of incentives and the inability of individual nations to produce and distribute sufficient food for their peoples. The ultimate resolution of this problem requires nations and peoples working together to expand greatly the food production and distribution capabilities in both the developing and developed world. While temporary, grants of food are urgently needed for starving peoples, we should view these not as a solution to any problem but rather as a means of buying time to increase agricultural development in the food scarce regions of the world. Indeed, to approach the

food crisis only by sharing agricultural abundance could be counterproductive in the long run by depriving nations of the incentive to improve their own production.

POLICY - As American Baptists we shall support government programs which primarily attack the causes, rather than the results, of the food crisis. Within our mission outreach we shall plan, support and encourage programs of economic and agricultural development that are best suited to the food scarce nations.

II - Population Growth

This hunger policy statement cannot and should not examine each cause in detail. We do, however, recognize that the rate of population growth presently occurring in food scarce nations is outstripping the increase of food production. Thus, an effective attack on the problem of food shortages must simultaneously confront the population explosion. Without imposing our philosophy upon other nations, we must stand ready to provide technical assistance where people are receptive.

POLICY - As American Baptists we shall support efforts to develop programs which encourage family planning in an environment of free individual choice.

III - Our Sacrifice and Stewardship

Alleviating hunger will require individual and collective sacrifice. Indeed, without sacrifice, Christian love is meaningless. As Christians we ought to bear the burden of the suffering peoples of the world. Our United States per capita income is among the highest in the world. This has led to excessive consumption and waste. Recognizing the limitations of world economic resources, our Christian stewardship should encourage us to conserve more wisely the abundant resources given us in trust by God.

POLICY - As American Baptists we shall support and develop local church, regional, denominational and ecumenical programs which --

1. Raise the consciousness of people regarding world hunger;
2. Reexamine our excessive consumption and waste of resources, as individuals, families, churches, and as a denomination;
3. Challenge individuals and groups to act on public issues and policy regarding world hunger;
4. Lead to personal sacrifice and participation in projects for alleviating world hunger.

IV - Domestic Hunger

Even though we are a wealthy nation, we have many pockets of poverty and hunger. We recognize that optimum employment, together with adequate provision for persons of low income, for the aged and disabled are essential in dealing with problems of hunger and malnutrition in the United States. Also we must be acutely sensitive to the need to avoid developing tax structures that lay the heaviest burden on those least able to pay.

POLICY - A) As American Baptists we shall support programs to alleviate hunger and malnutrition within the United States.

B) We urge that as U.S. Government programs are formulated, either domestic or international, the cost of such programs be borne in such a way that the American poor do not bear an inequitable portion of the cost.

V - Stewardship of Land and Energies

American agriculture is one of the most productive segments of our economy and provides the technological basis and the foods for assisting in meeting world food shortages. Agriculture's success has been largely based on the unconstrained energies and genius of the American farmer, incentives to encourage his creativity, and an abundance of rich land and supporting resources. Our stewardship must treat this God-given agricultural talent and land resource as a trust not to be constrained or abused but to be preserved and enhanced. In the face of world starvation, we consider it a sin to use our trust of land and energies, and the products thereof, in less than their fullest capability, subject to good practices of the conservation of soil and energy.

POLICY - As American Baptists we shall support domestic programs which encourage maximum, efficient food production within the limits of good uses of energy and ecological practice. We shall also support programs which provide the incentives and security that promote full economic production. In principle we support government programs which unleash, not constrain, the energies of the American farmer.

VI - An International Approach

The problem of world hunger is beyond the capacity of Americans to resolve alone. The solution must be a joint effort of aid-giving and aid-receiving nations. It must be international in scope and emphasis. It must be divorced from power politics. It must emphasize the equality of all peoples in the sight of God.

POLICY - As American Baptists we shall give priority to support and development of programs which are administered by international private and governmental organizations, whose criteria of aid are divorced from the criteria of race, religion and politics. Food must not be used as a form of imperialism. Ours will be a commitment, under God, to all people rather than to those of our own particular preference.

VII - Initiatives of the Food Scarce Nations

Nations with chronic food scarcity must themselves be primarily responsible for resolving their problems of low agricultural production and distribution and excessive population growth. These nations, typically, will be maximizing the productivity of their endowments, will be engaging in sacrifices to resolve their problems, and will be guarding against wasteful use of their resources. These countries, typically, will have national programs of agricultural development, land reform, and incentives to encourage food production.

POLICY - A) As American Baptists we would support the concept that individual countries should determine their own priorities and destinies. Within this framework, we would encourage our Government to give assistance to programs in those countries which actively allocate their own resources and energies to solving their food problems and which are on the most needy nations list of the United Nations.

B) In keeping with our mission approach as American Baptist Churches, we shall give priority to work with those nations and peoples of greatest need who are often bypassed by governments as not being politically significant.

VIII - Emergency Aid

All countries face catastrophes and emergencies due to conditions beyond their control.

POLICY - As American Baptists we shall support denominational, ecumenical, voluntary and governmental programs which provide emergency food relief.

As Christians we recognize the complex nature of the world's organizational structures and the wide impact that changing systems have upon human beings around the globe. We are also aware of the tension that prevails between Christian ideals and concrete actions, yet we continue to seek God's justice and mercy for all peoples through gifts of love and sacrifice, which will result in programs of assistance and development.

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