

7032:3/89

**AMERICAN BAPTIST  
POLICY STATEMENT ON RACIAL JUSTICE**

We, as American Baptists, believe that all people are made in the image of God and that the right to human dignity, to be respected and treated as a person without regard to race, is foundational to our faith.

Racism is the belief that one race is innately superior to all other races. It is the devaluing of persons in terms of their intelligence and potential for contributions to a given society because of their race by one or more racial groups who have an economic, social and political position of power in that society. The organization of formal and informal systemic structures that keep specific racial minority groups disadvantaged and disenfranchised, whether intentional or unintentional is called institutional racism. Racism, whether individual or corporate, is a sin against God. With grief we find racism to be one of the most pervasive examples of sin in our country.

Scripture affirms that we, as people of God with new life in Christ, are a people among whom all distinctions are affirmed and respected. However, in our humanity we have been unable to realize fully what we have been called to be by God. While societies may have good intention of building values and operating structures designed to achieve visions of good ends, the reality is that they usually end up serving the few rather than the many. We recognize and affirm efforts underway by some to accept racial and ethnic diversity and call the church to model within society those values and structures that open the doors of opportunity for all people.

American Baptists represent the coming together of many racial and ethnic streams within American life and within the life of our world. However, by the very nature of our humanity and the institutional church structures that have emerged, some individuals and churches become privileged over others. 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. In so doing, we can challenge our nation to live up to its high purposes. We can challenge all the nations to take seriously the struggle for the freedom and peace of all humankind.

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 valid expressions 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.

3. We will advocate for racial justice within our American Baptist fellowship and we will engage tenaciously in the elimination of racism at all levels (national, regional, local congregations and affiliated organizations and institutions) and in all arenas including communication, participation and staffing.

4. We recognize that each race and each culture must be full participants in the American Baptist family with access to the full range of American Baptist services without sacrificing its unique and enriching racial and cultural insights and patterns of work and worship.

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.

6. We recognize that concern for racial justice is not confined to American Baptist churches. We will work with other religious, ecumenical and secular groups with similar concerns to secure racial justice.

Based on the mandate of our Christian faith and our belief that a nation cannot be secured unless it is founded on justice and opportunity for all, we believe that Christians must work for racial justice within their own societies and within the world.

Therefore, as American Baptists:

1. We recognize that people of European ancestry have taken the responsibility and obligation to govern others, based on their understanding of God's predestined role for Christians in world history. This concept, called Manifest Destiny, is implicitly racist and has permeated both our national

history and our American Christian life. It is a form of white racism which has affected the way the United States views its role in the world and views immigrants to this country. As American Baptists, we will seek to create a new image for this nation in which the cultures, the contributions, the insights and the abilities of all racial groups are valued.

2. We recognize that the formal and informal structures within our society have been used to institutionalize our racist actions and enable us to avoid personal responsibility. We recognize our individual and corporate responsibility to work for racial justice and will initiate and support actions toward the elimination of institutional racism.

3. We recognize the responsibility to protect the rights of and support opportunities and equity for racial minorities in the political, economic, social, educational and judicial systems in this country. We will initiate and support actions to enable persons of all racial backgrounds to become full participants in and beneficiaries of the life of this country.

4. We recognize that racism in public and private education has been a major factor in the perpetuation of racial injustice. We oppose racism in public and private education and will support and initiate efforts for quality education for all.

5. We recognize that our economic system has exploited racial minorities. We will continue to examine our economic system and to engage in actions by which racial minorities may participate fully in the decision making and control of the economic system fully benefiting from its productive processes.

6. We recognize that racial minorities have suffered disproportionately from poor health and a lack of basic health care. We will support and initiate efforts for the provision of basic health care for all persons.

7. We recognize that although the United States is a nation of immigrants, with the exception of Native Americans and Hispanics who were here before the 1600's, our immigration policy and practice has often been discriminatory against persons of color. We will oppose the imposition of quotas, the incarceration of immigrants or the extradition of persons based on color.

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 the tool which gives expression to the hatred of one racial group for another.

9. We recognize that racial minority women and children are among the most vulnerable in our society and that racism has resulted in public policies and practices that have fractured many families. We will support public policies that strengthen and undergird families.

10. We recognize that racist decisions (individual, corporate and political) result in policies which adversely affect racial minorities and ethnic groups in areas which include housing, mental health, criminal justice and employment. We will initiate and support efforts to correct such policies.

11. We recognize that racism is involved in relations between nations as well as within nations. We will challenge our nation and support international efforts to overcome racism and the effects of racism in every sphere.

Finally, as American Baptists, we will make it our policy to realize the deepest meaning of Christ's love for all of us. We will seek to move as one body under the Lord toward that high promise of liberation, peace and justice for which Christ died and was raised and lives forevermore.

Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches - June 1983

153 For, 15 Against, 4 Abstentions

Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - March 1989

Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - September 1994

(General Board Reference # - 7032:3/89)

---