

8082:9/82

## **AMERICAN BAPTIST**

### **RESOLUTION ON POWER**

Biblically speaking, "all power belongs to God" and must be exercised responsibly. All persons and institutions have power. They can use it, abuse it, or abdicate it, but the failure to use power can be a misuse of power.

Power is not to be (or need to be) equated with violence or domination. The proper use of power involves responsible participation in the decisions of persons and structures which affect our lives, the lives of our families and the policies of our nation. The right and responsibility of each citizen to use his or her power either individually or in concert with others has been a cornerstone of our democracy.

If power is sought merely as an end in itself, it tends to turn upon those who seek it. People must develop the power that they have in order to work effectively with others in the nation to meet the needs and problems of this nation and to help this nation to take its full responsibility in meeting the needs of the world.

Since the power of most individuals is limited, they must unite with others who have similar objectives if they are to be effective. This is particularly important for those who have been outside the usual power structures.

In our nation's history the exercise of power has been manifest as people have formed groups to protect their rights and achieve their own purposes. As successive waves of immigrants came to this country, they sought to overcome discrimination against themselves by organizing power groups and uniting with others to achieve their mutual goals. When racial, ethnic or other minority groups find the need to organize and unite with others to redress grievances against them, they are doing precisely what every other group has done - and in fact is still doing. Full human dignity cannot be achieved when the opportunity to use power is denied.

The cry of "black power," with its varied and conflicting

meanings served to call attention to the hidden as well as open, the subtle as well as violent ways by which "white power" has been used to keep Blacks and other minority groups powerless in our nation's major political, economic, social and religious structures, with the resultant indignities to groups in our population. Our faith impels us to reject the double standard which makes it a virtue for white people to use power, but makes it a vice for Blacks or other American minority groups to advocate the use of that same power.

Recognizing that American Baptists as individuals and as groups organized in local churches, associations and conventions are stewards of the power entrusted to us and in the spirit of Christ who care to preach good news to the poor, release to the captives and to set at liberty those who are oppressed, we call upon our churches and church members to:

(a) recognize the legitimate need for disadvantaged groups within our society to organize, and to support them in their responsible organized efforts, in order that needs may be voiced effectively and needed changes achieved in our society;

(b) support and initiate both public and private programs at national, state, and local levels that are designated to overcome the effects of discrimination and poverty;

(c) reaffirm our belief in open occupancy housing and urge our churches to give vigorous leadership in establishing and implementing open occupancy policies in their neighborhoods and communities and in supporting open occupancy laws;

(d) work against the subtle but effective discriminatory practices that close doors of opportunity to non-whites and other minority groups in all areas of our society;

(e) protest the subtle and open retreat from the enforcement of present civil right legislation and plead for the continued recognition of and emphasis upon the objectives this legislation was meant to achieve. We call for vigorous enforcement of current legislation and strong administrative policies to implement these laws;

(f) insist that our churches and our agencies improve their practices of recruitment, development and placement to the end that more staff and ministerial positions become filled by qualified persons with no limitations as to race, sex, or national origin.

Adopted by the American Baptist Convention - 1967  
Affirmed as an American Baptist Churches Resolution - March 1981  
Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - September 1982  
Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - March 1993  
(General Board Reference # - 8082:9/82)

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## **POLICY BASE**

### **American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights**

As American Baptists we declare the following rights to be basic human rights, and we will support programs and measures to assure these rights:

8. The right to develop skills and abilities, to utilize these in economic, political, social, intellectual and religious institutions, and to receive a just return for one's labor;
  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 conditions in society;
  12. The right to organize into groups to bargain with structures or powerful persons, to seek redress of grievances or to promote particular concerns;
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