

Human Worth

A call to a biblical view of ministry – Adopted 1978

The Bible clearly challenges the church and individual Christians to minister to the whole spectrum of human needs. They are to follow the example of Jesus, who saw it as His goal not only to preach the gospel, but also to meet the needs of the poor, those in prison, the blind and oppressed (Luke 4:18). He encouraged His followers to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and visit the sick (Matt. 25:34-36). For them not to meet such needs was seen as hypocrisy (James 2:14-17).

However, during the last century of church history many evangelical Christians have turned away from ministering to the non-spiritual needs of human beings. The cause for this change has been the theological polarization of those who call themselves Christians into modernists and fundamentalists. The trustworthiness and authority of the Bible was questioned by an increasing number of theologians toward the end of the nineteenth century. The debate surrounding this issue culminated in the modernist/fundamentalist cleavage of the early twentieth century. The theological antagonism resulted in an increasing difference in the way Christian ministry was viewed. Modernists tended to see their ministry solely in terms of social action, ignoring the proclamation of the gospel. Unfortunately, many fundamentalists moved to the other pole, often emphasizing evangelism only and developing an increasing distrust of social ministry.

The Baptist General Conference has a strong heritage of commitment to the whole spectrum of ministries to human needs. However, it has been theologically close to the fundamentalist movement. As a result, its original breadth of ministry has become somewhat limited. Some members of Conference churches fear that involvement in any ministry other than direct evangelism amounts to an embracing of the “social gospel” of modernism. Because of this, some Conference churches have come to view this part of Christian ministry with suspicion and engage in it only tentatively and halfheartedly.

The challenges presented by American and Canadian society in 1978 make it imperative that the Conference take steps to broaden its concern for human needs. This is a time of social change, and the church ought to speak a prophetic word based on Scripture about the direction the changes should take. Attitudes about racial differences are being radically altered. The gulf between rich and poor is widening. The traditional family unit is encountering great stress. Single and divorced persons are in need of special consideration by the church. Life expectancy has increased, and ministry to older persons has consequently taken on a new urgency. The pressures of a fast-moving pattern of life threaten individuals and couples in their prime years. The increase of juvenile crime is just one more signal that it is time for evangelical churches to enter the arena of social concern with renewed vigor.

In its Double in a Decade thrust, the Baptist General Conference has designated “ministry” as the emphasis for 1978. In the light of this emphasis and in view of all the above factors, be it resolved:

1. That ministry be defined in the Conference in a way that expresses the whole spectrum of concerns for lost humanity that are found in Scripture: Ministry is the spiritual offering of all Christians lovingly expressed in actions-upward to God in a service of worship as a redeemed community; inward to the body in a service of sustaining and nurturing fellowship; outward to the community in a service of redemptive ministry (Romans 12:1-18; I John 3:11-18; Galatians 6:1-10).
2. That the Baptist General Conference commit itself as an association of churches to encourage the above view of ministry in every way possible. That the Conference office become a clearinghouse for the awareness of needs, using The Standard for interchange of ideas and mutual encouragement among churches in the development of broader and more effective kinds of ministry. That the Social Ministries Committee become a more active and integral part of the Board of Home Missions, having its own full time executive. That evangelism and social ministry be seen as accompanying aspects of every outreach effort of the Conference.
3. That each church in the Baptist General Conference be encouraged during this year of ministry to re-examine its way of applying the gospel to human lives. That each be encouraged to develop at least one particular corporate ministry that meets a genuine need in its community, as a symbol of its desire to bring the whole gospel to the whole person. That each church also emphasize the biblical gifts of ministry present in its membership, such as serving, financial aid, acts of mercy, helping, healing, organizing (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:27-30).
4. That every individual member of a Conference church review his or her Christian service in the light of the example set by Jesus. That we seek to balance as He did the word of loving witness and the work of loving action, seeing them both as essential elements of biblical evangelism. That each person seek to discover his or her ministry gift and then to use that gift to meet the specific human needs of brothers and sisters in the church, of neighbors, of members of the broader community. That all such ministry be seen as an expression of the compassion of Jesus and of His desire to draw all men unto Himself (John 12:32).
5. Man is created in God’s image and is essentially a spiritual rather than a physical being. All ministry, then, ought to be spiritual in its source and in its final goal. The touch of love is to be given in the name and spirit of Christ. The believer who ministers should care beyond a person’s immediate need to his eternal need for redemption.
6. The motivation for Christian ministry comes, not from a sentimental response to the suffering of humanity, but from the fact that Jesus sends the believer to do His work in His place: “As the Father has sent me, So send I you” (John 20:21; 21:15ff.).

Human Relations – Adopted 1965

We believe that:

God created one human family and that all men everywhere, whatever their color, culture, class or caste, are inseparably related and bound together as members of that one human family.

All men are created in the image of God and are equally precious in His sight.

Jesus Christ, Himself the God-man, by His redemptive act lives now as the Savior and Lord of men everywhere, whatever their color, culture, class or caste.

All men are by nature selfish and in rebellion against God; and that only through God's reconciling grace can they be set free from the dominion of sin to live as one in Christ.

Through the Word, the Holy Spirit establishes the fellowship of believers to which men are called for corporate worship, compassionate concern and evangelistic outreach.

Since the Church is created by God, the decisive factor in controlling its mission is not based primarily upon the variable cultural patterns in the world but upon the revelatory principles of the Word of God.

Therefore, the mandate of Jesus Christ, to bring salvation to all men, makes it obligatory for the Church to communicate the Gospel to all men without discrimination or distinction.

Further, we maintain that to exclude from worship or membership in the local congregation any person on the basis of color, culture, class or caste is to sin against God and man.

Furthermore, Christians ought to exercise their God-given responsibility by acting to remove whatever injustices exist in the community and to insure for all persons, without discrimination, just and equal opportunities, especially in housing, employment, education and full rights of citizenship including equitable voting privileges.