

Each local church, according to historic Baptist practices, interprets the Biblical principles and determines its own policies on these matters. The Church as a loving and healing community should nurture and teach individuals and families in the Biblical ideals of marriage and the Christian home. Churches should deal with people involved in divorce and remarriage with firmness, love forgiveness, patience and prayer (Galatians 5:1-2; II Timothy 2:24-26; Colossians 3:16) Social Action

#### **Racial Reconciliation – Adopted 1996**

Whereas faith in Jesus as our only Lord and Savior relates us to other believers as brothers and sisters through His reconciling death, and binds us together as different members of His Body in service to Him as our common Head and Leader; and Whereas as members of His Body joined together by His Spirit, when one hurts, we all share in the pain; and

Whereas a Promised Day is coming when believers of all tribes, races, nations, and cultures will worship Him together as our Eternal Father, loving Sacrifice, and Conqueror of all barriers; and

Whereas we desire to demonstrate to an unbelieving world that His love is indeed transformational across distinctives of race, nationality, culture, and ethnicity, and; Whereas there is a growing intensity of attacks on places set aside for sacred worship of Jesus by the traditionally marginalized and minority peoples in America, especially African American and multi-cultural congregations; and

Whereas our origins as an emerging denomination reflect common experiences of marginalization, violence, prejudice, rejection, intimidation, and assignment to minority status; Therefore, be it resolved that we recommit ourselves to the task of reconciliation through the atoning death of Jesus Christ as our common Lord and personal Savior; and

Be it resolved that we demonstrate our obedience to our Lord's Great Commandment and Great Commission by recommitting ourselves to participatory community reconciliation through action such as:

1. fraternal and adoptive relationships with sister Christian congregations of different ethnic, racial, or cultural demographics;
2. regularly scheduled pulpit and worship team exchanges with such congregations;
3. designated financial support for congregations whose facilities have been damaged by racial, ethnic, or religious violence or arson (e.g., to help rebuild facilities or pay insurance premiums); and
4. offering physical labor, materials, and skills to help such congregations rebuild their damaged facilities; and

Be it further resolved that we oppose with loving firmness and Christian vigor all expressions of racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious prejudice and ignorance at all personal and structural levels,

acknowledging the centrality of the gospel of Jesus as the supreme basis for true personal and community reconciliation.

#### **Political Involvement – Adopted 1987**

Whereas the moral decline of our country has resulted in part because its leaders have not heard a strong Christian voice, and whereas the American form of government is designed for the active participation of all of its citizens, and whereas the Bible does not prohibit Christians from involvement in political activities, but rather commands us to oppose injustice and oppression and to protect life and to stand for what is right and good, therefore we the delegates of the 1987 annual meeting of the Baptist General Conference encourage Christians everywhere, and especially other members of the Baptist General Conference, as they are led by God, to exercise their rights, duties, and privileges as citizens by:

1. praying for those in authority;
2. seeking God's will in His Word;
3. encouraging those in public office who stand for godly principles;
4. preparing to serve, as led by God, in roles of leadership in organizations, in political parties, or in public office;
5. writing letters to express our concerns to politicians, to advertisers, to school boards, to newspapers and other media;
6. voting in national and local elections.

#### **A Call to righteous and responsible action – Adopted 1985**

In 1965 and 1973 the Baptist General Conference adopted resolutions urging the members of the Conference, both as individuals and congregations, to take a stand against social evils such as the publication and sale of indecent literature. Now it is time for the Baptist General Conference, its various districts, churches and individual members to do more than adopt another resolution.

Righteous and responsible action is needed, because:

- Pastors, counselors, social agencies and law officials are increasingly seeing families broken and lives adversely affected, as well as persons of both sexes and of all ages victimized by pornography, obscenity and indecency.
- The illegal sex industry is now out of control in the United States, becoming an \$8- billion industry which invades every segment of society. It has already reached the American home. It is now downstairs, not just downtown.
- If this pornographic traffic is permitted to continue unabated, many fear the country will reach total decadence by the end of the century.
- Many of the life-styles and ideals which are modeled in the programs of the mass media work against society's traditional community values and are in direct contradiction to those life-style ideals which are modeled and proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the commands of holy living as taught in the Scriptures.

- This situation exists in part because churches and Christians have often been silent, failing to rebuke people for their sins, and have faltered in prophetically proclaiming God's judgment upon the obscenity, pornography and indecency which saturate so much of the modern media.

Therefore, the delegates to the 1985 annual meeting request that the following action steps be taken:

1. The general secretary should write to the President of the United States commending him for his public statements in support of morality and traditional community values and informing him that it is the desire of the Baptist General Conference to have the laws related to obscenity such as the RICO (Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) Statutes enforced by the U.S. attorney general, the U.S. attorneys, the U.S. Postal Service, the Commerce Department and Customs Department.
2. The board of educational ministries should provide a list of materials and resources to aid the churches of the Conference in developing an awareness of the depth of the problem and how they can combat the growth of obscenity, pornography and indecency.
3. The board of trustees should consider how the Baptist General Conference can work and relate to other denominations, organizations, and leaders who are taking responsible action against this problem.
4. The STANDARD should include appropriate articles and editorials which can raise the level of awareness of the people of the Conference to the depth of this problem and educate them to what can be done on every level. Articles reporting what is already being done should also be included as a way of encouraging every Conference Baptist and agency to remain faithful in its opposition to this evil.
5. Districts can encourage churches and individuals to act as faithful witnesses in their stand against this social evil.
6. The churches of the Conference can annually observe Pornography Awareness Week (October 27 - November 3 in 1985).
7. Every Conference Baptist can become aware of the depth of the problem and its insidious, addictive nature; take any possible action which will be effective in his or her area of influence and be faithful in prayer, asking the Lord to remove this evil from the country.

#### **Suggested Action Steps for Districts**

1. District newsletters can be used to raise the level of awareness of what churches and individuals are doing as a means of encouraging responsible action on the part of the churches and members of the districts.
2. Resources can be provided by district resource centers.
3. Youth, education and camp committees can include programs to educate young people about the seriousness of obscenity, pornography and indecency and what they can do to be faithful witnesses in opposing this evil.

4. Pastors can meet to pray and develop cooperative strategies for their churches to use on the district and area levels
5. District leadership can participate in state and regional organizations which are combating obscenity, pornography and indecency.
6. The strict enforcement of existing laws related to pornography, obscenity and indecency at the state and local level can be encouraged.

### **For Churches**

1. Churches can minister to both those who have become victimizers and victims of violence, pornography and sexual abuse, affirming that the love of God and new life in Jesus Christ is available for everyone.
2. Pastors can raise the level of awareness of the depth of this problem by including sermons and lessons on it in their preaching and teaching plan each year.
3. Committees on community values can be formed in each church to provide leadership for the churches in combating obscenity, pornography and indecency on the local level.
4. Resources can be provided and made available for individual church members to use in a faithful witness against this evil.
5. Classes, seminars and workshops can be held for instruction in the depths of the problem and responsible ways to combat this problem.
6. Church libraries can acquire appropriate books to help educate and train church members.
7. Regular and consistent prayer on the part of every Conference Baptist can be encouraged.
8. Churches can consider supporting organizations both nationally and locally that are providing responsible leadership in combating the spread of this evil.
9. The young people of the churches can be instructed not only in the depth of the problem but also what they can do to be faithful and vigilant witnesses.

### **For Individuals**

1. Individuals can develop an awareness of the insidious, addictive nature of obscenity, pornography and indecency and its implications in the lives of individuals, churches and the world.
2. Consistent prayer can be offered to the Lord asking him to remove this evil from the nation.
3. The strict enforcement of existing laws related to pornography, obscenity and indecency at the state and local level can be encouraged and requested by each individual.
4. An active, supportive role in one of the organizations working to combat this evil in responsible ways can be taken.

5. Individuals can refrain from using and supporting all motion pictures, books, magazines, television programs, newspapers, etc. which are offensive to their personal moral convictions.
6. Objectives can lovingly but yet firmly be expressed to those businesses which individuals personally feel contribute to the moral decay of people and families by their sale or sponsorship of pornographic material.
7. Individuals can refrain from patronizing companies that sponsor programs or advertise in media that are offensive to their personal moral convictions.

### **An affluent church in a hungry world – Adopted 1979**

- I. WHEREAS, we are living in a world that is crying out in its need as evidenced by the facts:
  - A. One out of every seven people in the world is suffering from hunger and malnutrition, and
  - B. Approximately 14,000 people die daily from starvation and related diseases; and WHEREAS, such statistics are beyond our comprehension, they nevertheless show a great and pressing need of our world. Now, as at no other time in the history of mankind, we are painfully aware of the great need of a hungry world, and in an affluent and informed society, we can no longer ignore the need of the world. No longer can we remain silent or uninvolved citizens of a country that can produce more food than it needs, but will not in order to control our own economy and maintain an affluent lifestyle for her citizens. Hunger, retardation, famine and death are the grim realities of much of the underdeveloped nations of our world. Even within our own communities, hunger is a reality to many poor, elderly and unemployed.
- II. WHEREAS the Word of God is explicit in its instruction to Christians regarding their responsibility to the poor and hungry, as evidenced by:
  - A. The Old Testament Scriptures Deuteronomy 15:10 promises: "...the Lord will bless you in all your work and in all you undertake" when we care for the poor and do not begrudge the needy or harden our hearts and shut the hand against the poor.
    1. Proverbs 19:17 tells us: "He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his deeds."
    2. Ezekiel 16:49 tells us: "Behold this was the guilt of your sister Sodom; she and her daughters had pride, surfeit of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy."
    3. Isaiah 58:10,11 promises rich blessings for those who care for the needy.
  - B. The New Testament Scriptures Mark 6:37 reminds us that our Savior not only fed the hungry but instructed His disciples to do so.

4. Galatians 2:10 shows it was the example of the early church to “remember the poor” and was the eager desire of the Apostle Paul.
5. Matthew 25:40 shows Jesus’ concern for the whole man, and that as we minister unto even the least of these His brethren, we have done it unto Him.
6. 1 John 3:17, 18 exhorts us to love not only in word and speech, but in deed and in truth. If we see our brother in need, and close our hearts against him, we cannot say that God’s love abides in us.

III. WHEREAS, the Baptist General Conference has been known down through its history as being concerned about the need of the whole man, as seen by our concern for children’s and retirement homes, military and institutional chaplaincies and medical work abroad, we must confess that we have not done as much as we could, nor as much as we should. For example, as Conference churches, benevolent giving has averaged approximately 3/4 of 1% of our giving, and that primarily for local needs. Conference giving to world relief, until this past year, has been on a downward trend, and has been primarily in response to world emergencies. For example:

1974-75	\$ 135,632
1975-76	\$ 117,950
1976-77	\$ 71,463
1977-78	\$ 86,690

IV. WHEREAS, we are “An Affluent Church in a Hungry World,” in obedience to God, we must respond to the cry of a hungry world, and seek to meet the need of the world around us and abroad. While there are no cheap, easy answers to solve a very complex social, economic, political and agricultural problem, we must do what we can, while we can, and where we can.

V. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:

- A. That as INDIVIDUALS, and members of the family of God, we, the members of the Baptist General Conference, will seek to develop a lifestyle that will enable us to give an increasing flow of resources to help the poor, suffering, and afflicted in all the world, including our own communities, by:
1. Becoming more informed on the need of the world through reading, listening, and discussing.
  2. Praying for the needs and situations of which we are made aware, and asking the Lord to burden our hearts with the need of afflicted people.

3. Giving careful study to the Word of God on portions that pertain to Christian lifestyle, and that these studies be made privately, in our family and church studies.
  4. Making sacrificial downward adjustments in our annual expenditures for vacations, food, clothing, entertainment and recreation, and in the quality of our housing and transportation.
- B. That as LOCAL CHURCHES, and members of the Body of Christ, we adopt a mission which includes in a biblically directed manner, the alleviation of the hunger needs of the world, by:
1. Encouraging our pastors to preach sermon series that deal with the subject of Christian lifestyle and caring for the poor.
  2. Encouraging the local churches to give a minimum of one percent of their total budget to world relief through the Baptist General Conference.
  3. Continuing to show concern for local needs through expanded giving and service to minister to the whole person in our communities.
- C. That the BAPTIST GENERAL CONFERENCE develop a method of operation which demonstrates to the world that we are concerned about the hunger and suffering of the world, by:
1. Endorsing through specific action, that Christian living calls for Christian caring, and that our dual citizenship obligates us to care for physical as well as spiritual deprivation, as stated in principle in 1978 Resolution. As a Conference we should seek to modify our concern and response from reacting to periodic disaster relief calls, and recognize hunger and starvation as a continuing world disaster.
  2. Directing the Board of Trustees to establish a line item in the UMC budget for World Relief in conjunction with local church giving to the Conference.
  3. The Board of Trustees shall direct the World Relief Committee to annually study the need of world relief and submit a proposed budget. The World Relief Committee shall also be directed to seek creative ways to promote a greater awareness of world relief needs throughout our constituency.
  - 4.

#### **Christian Lifestyle – Adopted 1973**

Be it resolved that we affirm that God's people are to behave as God's people and while a general description of Christian behavior has already been accepted by our Conference in Article 8 of our Affirmation of Faith, we further affirm that a Christian lifestyle is:

- A. Revealed and commanded in the Word of God.
- B. The natural outgrowth of an individual submitting to Christ as the Lord of his life.
- C. Made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives changing our nature, attitudes and sensitivities.

- D. Characterized by the following principles:
1. Timelessness. The teachings of the Scripture relating to Christian lifestyle are a concern for all ages and all cultures.
  2. Flexibility. Changing times and changing place new demands upon us, calling us to constant examination and application of biblical principles to Christian living.
  3. Sensitivity. Our concern is to live to the glory of God, not offending in our behavior by either unnecessary rigidity and censoriousness, nor by permissiveness and libertinism.
  4. Witness. We are the light of the world, and the example of our Christian lifestyle is a witness to our world of God's call to holy and righteous living.
  5. Responsibility. We acknowledge a stewardship before God for the lives we lead. Our standard for this stewardship is that all we do and say shall be done to the honor and glory of our Lord.

Therefore, be it also resolved that these principles of Christian lifestyle must be exercised in the world in the decade of the seventies in relation to the many critical issues that presently confront us. Thus we call on Conference Baptists to wrestle before God with Christian lifestyle as it relates to such issues as:

- A. Forgiveness and justice: amnesty.
- B. Providing for my family and the needs of the world: materialism.
- C. Social concern and individual responsibility: welfare.
- D. The right to live and the right to direct one's own life: abortion.
- E. Disapproval of society and color blindness to the Christian: interracial marriage.
- F. The will of the majority and the influence of Christian standards: legalized gambling.
- G. The nature of God's forgiveness and God's teaching on the permanence of marriage: divorce and remarriage.
- H. Freedom of expression in the media and concern about many adverse influences upon our lives and our world: television and media standards.

### **Obscenity – Adopted 1973**

In the light of the recent United States Supreme Court decision on obscenity whereby states and local communities have been given greater authority to set their own standards on obscenity and mindful of the serious nature of this problem in the United States today, BE IT RESOLVED:

1. That we commend the United States Supreme Court for its decision reversing a trend of recent decisions on obscenity.
2. That we urge our Conference churches, pastors and members to contact local authorities, state officials and judicial authorities, making known our serious concern on this problem and requesting prompt action to control or eliminate this evil practice in our nation.

### **Social Ministries – Adopted 1966**

We believe that:

God created both material and spiritual and that he has a concern for the whole man.

The Scriptures explicitly admonish us to a ministry of compassion; “But if anyone has this world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and truth.” (1 John 3:17, 18)

Consistent with the example of Christ, the Church fulfills its ministry when it expresses the redemptive love of God for man in his total life situation, both spiritual and social.

It is the Christian’s duty to visit orphans and widows and to feed the hungry, give the thirsty drink, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked and visit the sick and imprisoned. The Baptist General Conference and its members should support and perform services directed toward the well-being of their fellow men as a natural result of their faith in God and their Christian love for their fellow human beings.

Therefore, we urge our membership, both as individuals and congregations, to develop a critical awareness of social needs and to develop relevant programs to relieve stress, to improve the well-being of the community, and to work toward an environment favorable to the fullest development of individual human capacities.

Further, we believe that our Conference should seek ways to quicken the social consciousness of our people by:

1. educating our membership to the relationship between social responsibilities and the mandate of the Gospel:
2. expressing corporate opinions on social issues through stated resolutions and through the development of such programs that validate social concern:
3. promoting and sustaining social ministries commensurate with its resources and skills.

### **Social Evil – Adopted 1965**

We are sadly conscious of the fact that we live in a day which may be characterized by the Scriptural statement, “as it was in the days of Noah.”

We view with great alarm the corrupting forces of evil so strongly entrenched in the life of our society. Of these evils we make particular note:

1. the ever increasing production and consumption of alcoholic beverages
2. the similar production and use of tobacco
3. the illegal traffic in and use of narcotics
4. the publication and sale of indecent literature
5. the offensive dramatization in movies and on television which exploits murder and sex

6. the increasing participation of our population in the nefarious forms of gambling and lottery.

We look upon these evils without compromise, as a serious danger to the physical health and well-being of participants, to the lives of others and of unborn generations. We therefore protest against these degrading practices and against those whom we hold responsible for this curse, those who so shamefully and without respect for decency and the common good of all society, and of our youth in particular, propagandize and exploit only for their own personal gain.

We therefore earnestly urge upon the members of our churches to take a definite stand against these evils; that members cooperate in such non-radical movements and organizations which have as their objective to combat and suppress these aforementioned evils and to enlighten the public of their dangers as a threat to the very life of our nation; that we deal with these problems, not by a negative approach alone, but by a positive educational program and by setting an example of godly living to counteract all these evils. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Philippians 4:8