AMERICAN BAPTIST
RESOLUTION ON FAMILY VIOLENCE

Family violence is a personal, family, and community crisis that cries out for sustained attention by the community of Jesus Christ. Violence, which includes physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, can and does occur in families without regard for race, class, religious affiliation, or occupation. While family violence can be inflicted on any family member by any other family member, it most often is inflicted on the most vulnerable: the women, children and elderly.

Family violence is a complex problem for which there appears to be many causal factors. There are depersonalizing forces in our society and culture which foster stress, tension, frustration, despair, disillusionment, such as: 1) the high premium which is placed upon the use of power, force and violence to solve all types of disputes; 2) the exaltation of violence in our daily living, for example as portrayed in the media, motion pictures; 3) sexism; 4) economic deprivation: unemployment, poor housing conditions, inadequate standards of living. In addition, there are also personal factors: inherited patterns of violence and abuse, emotional distress, use of alcohol and drugs, and marital dysfunction.

The family should provide nurture, compassion, warmth, respect, and sensitivity. Since Cain killed Abel, for far too many, the family has become one of the most violent institutions in society. Victims of family violence find themselves prisoners in their own homes, dominated, exploited and abused by someone they know and love; and often they are afraid to speak to anyone about it. Violence in the family results in the destruction of relationships as well as persons.

Old Testament prophets speak of God's indignation over the violence of the Israelites (Amos 5:24, Micah 6:8). The justice called for by the Old Testament prophets is encompassed by Jesus' call for justice at a more personal level. Jesus' teaching calls us to do to others as we would have them do to us (Matthew 7:12). We are called to love one another just as Jesus loved us (John 15:12).

Therefore, the General Board of the American Baptist Churches USA:

1.   Urges appropriate denominational agencies, our churches and constituencies to place a priority on ministry to families, especially those who are experiencing violence in the family.

2.   Urges appropriate denominational agencies, our churches and constituencies to help individuals recognize the factors which may cause violence in themselves and others; to discover the systemic, societal and cultural roots of that violence; and to devise methods to reduce and prevent such violence.

3.   Urges appropriate denominational agencies, our churches and constituencies to use their resources and influence to advocate and to promote social change directed toward those societal factors which foster violence.

4.   Urges our denomination to provide resources and training so that pastors, chaplains, and lay persons may become better informed about family violence, and learn skills of intervention.

5.   Urges local churches to explore methods to establish shelters for abused persons, and programs related to family violence, and to advocate that governmental agencies fulfill funding obligations for

establishing shelters.

Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches - December 1982
140 For, 22 Against, 0 Abstentions
Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - September 1993
Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - September 1999
(General Board Reference # 8094:12/82)

POLICY BASE

American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights - December 1976

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

3.   The right to develop family structures, to build mutually satisfying human relationships and to nurture, train and educate children;

4.   The right to a secure and healthy environment...

9.   The right to human dignity, to be respected and treated as a person...