

8066:6/81

**AMERICAN BAPTIST RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF
AMERICAN INDIAN RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

Prior to the settlement of this country by Europeans, Indian people¹ lived and roamed in many areas of this continent. Some, more sedentary, became skilled farmers; some, living in areas of bountiful lakes and streams, became fishermen or harvesters of wild rice, while others lived by following the buffalo. All their sources of food and clothing were often symbols of the Creator's gift to people to meet their major needs.

Because American Indians depended upon the earth and its creatures to give them life, a deep respect and reverence developed between people and their environment. There was the clear recognition that everything was made by the Creator, held a special place unique in its own way, and was an integral part of the whole.

The Indian peoples developed and nurtured a spirituality that pervaded all aspects of Indian life. The earth, the land, became of special and lasting significance to Indian people. Although Indian nations occupied certain territories whose boundaries were subject to change from time to time, the earth, the land, belong to the Creator and Indian peoples perceived themselves as caretakers of this creation.

Many Indian people continue to view the land as a spiritual part of their entire life and, therefore, maintain a special concern and reverence for it. Regrettably, many Indian religious customs have been denied or suppressed by the dominant white European culture. Land which has included places sacred to Indians and where they had traditionally worshipped was taken from them and access denied to them.

Baptist history is rooted in concern for conscience and freedom for persons to seek God according to their deepest understanding of their faith. Over the years American Baptists have reflected the denomination's basic principles of freedom of thought and belief. This tradition is continued in the American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights which places the right to religious freedom as the first human right.

In order to guarantee religious freedom to Indians, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act was passed by Congress. Included in its provisions is the right of access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects and the freedom to worship through ceremonials and traditional rites.

In accordance with American Baptist commitment to religious freedom and our policy on Human Rights; therefore, be it resolved that the American Baptist Churches/USA support and seek to assist the efforts of American Indians seeking to establish their rights under the Indian Religious Freedom Act.²

1. As well as native Alaskans and Hawaiians - Public Law 95-

341

2. Public Law 95-341.

Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches - June 1981

126 For, 19 Against, 4 Abstentions.

Modified by the General Board Executive Committee - September 1994

(General Board Reference - #8066:6/81)

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:

1. The right of every person to choose a religion freely, to maintain religious belief or unbelief without coercion; the right for communities of faith to meet together to engage in public worship, to witness publicly to others, to speak prophetically from religious conviction to government and society, to live out religious beliefs, and to be free from government intrusion, coercion, and control in the free exercise of conscience and religion;

10. The right of ethnic or racial groups to maintain their cultural identity and to develop institutions and structures through which that identity can be maintained;

American Baptist Policy Statement on Native Americans

We must promote passage and implementation of legislation that enables Indian self-determination and self-development and that maintains Indian rights.
