

## AMERICAN BAPTISTS FOR HEALTH CARE REFORM

### Background

In June 1991, the General Board approved a Policy Statement on Health, Healing, and Wholeness that included a “Situational Analysis,” a “Theoretical Analysis,” and a “Biblical/Theological Review” (providing an understanding of health, healing, and wholeness in the Old Testament, New Testament, and Christian doctrine) all of which served as a foundation for calling American Baptists congregations and clergy, regions and associations, and program boards, educational institutions, and related organizations to action.

The denomination-wide actions were to focus on educating, encouraging, and empowering American Baptists to live out for themselves this Christian understanding of health, healing, and wholeness, to let it inform their service to others, and to be the base for their advocacy of public policies that made quality health care available and accessible to and affordable for all persons.

The vote was 160 for, 0 against, and no abstentions.

In June 1992, the General Board adopted (by a vote of 167 For, 0 Against, 4 Abstentions) a Resolution on “Health Care for All,” citing the Policy Statement it had approved the previous year and noting that the policy statement called American Baptists to “advocate for the availability of, access to, and the funding for quality health care for all persons” through “legislative health care measures.”

It stated: “Today in the United States we have a health care system that is in crisis.” And the resolution then presented statistics that “tell an ugly story” about health care in America and the inadequacy of the major policy alternatives for addressing the crisis. It concluded:

Therefore, as American Baptists, we urge the President and the Congress to work together expeditiously to enact a major program of health care reform which will extend health care coverage to every person in the United States.

We seek a national health care system that:

- serves everyone in the United States
- provides comprehensive access, care, and services
- is sensitive to the needs and rights of health care workers, patients, and their cultures
- promotes health awareness, disease prevention, nutrition, fitness, and safety
- slows the upward spiral of costs
- draws financial support from the broad base of the entire nation
- reduces unnecessary administrative costs
- reduces inappropriate medical procedures.

For nearly two decades American Baptists have drawn on this 1991 Policy Statement and this 1992 Resolution to work, *unsuccessfully*, for health care justice. For a variety of reasons, there has never been the political climate in the nation to achieve the necessary reforms.

Until now. Until the summer of 2009. Until this moment when both major political parties express their commitment to reform the health care system, albeit in different ways.

This presents American Baptists an unprecedented—and probably one-time—opportunity to work effectively for the enactment of a public policy consistent with our longstanding biblical, theological, and ministerial mission and principles.

“Effectively,” clearly, is the key word. And “quickly” should be added.

### Sense of the Meeting

In light of our historic American Baptist stance on the need for and the character of health care reform in the United States, and given the unusual opportunity to advocate for national health care reform in this moment, we urge that the Office of the General Secretary, the Board of National Ministries, and the Regions, in conjunction with the Ministers Council, American Baptist Women’s Ministries and other Associated Ministry Organizations, and the Caucuses, to *inform, prepare, and mobilize*, through publications, websites, and any other appropriate means, the ABCUSA constituencies as individuals, as members of congregations and congregational organizations, as lay and professional organizations, and as ABCUSA-related interest groups, to:

- pray for God’s leading and empowerment for participation as Christian citizens in the political process on health care reform;
- write national congresspersons (senators and representatives) to share and explain the ABC policy statement and resolution on health care reform, and to urge these elected officials to support and vote for legislation that embodies the ABC principles;
- meet face-to-face with elected officials in their offices for these same purposes;
- give voice to our concern about and commitment to health care reform in religious, commercial, and public media and
- join with other denominational, ecumenical, interfaith, and civic organizations in advocacy for the adoption of national health care policies that embody the ABCUSA principles.