

Note #1352 from DCHANDLER to AMERICAN BAPTIST NEWS SERVICE:

American Baptist News Service (Valley Forge, Pa. 12/2/04)--At their Regional Executive Ministers Council meeting Nov. 20 in Green Lake, Wis., American Baptist regional executive ministers voted (20 yes, 3 no, 3 abstentions) to issue a pastoral letter that addresses homosexuality and homosexual practice.

The document was distributed to the American Baptist Churches USA General Board during its meeting at Green Lake. The complete letter states:

"As people called by God and our regions to serve as Regional Executive Ministers, we have a responsibility to provide pastoral guidance, in accordance with the Statement of Purpose of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., which calls all American Baptists to: 'bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the world and to lead persons to Christ; to seek the mind of Christ on moral, spiritual, political, economic, social, denominational and ecumenical matters, and to express to the rest of society on behalf of American Baptists, their convictions as to the mind of Christ in these matters; to guide, unify, and assist American Baptists in their witness in the world, in preparing members for the work of ministry, and in serving both those within and outside the fellowship of Christ; and to promote closer relations among American Baptist churches and groups, within the whole Body of Christ and to promote understanding with other religious bodies.'

"The controversy over homosexuality has consumed our agenda, our discussion time, and our energy; yet the controversy still threatens to break us apart as American Baptists. The prevailing view among American Baptists is that "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching." Because American Baptist polity allows for respectful dissent, individuals and congregations who hold different viewpoints exist among us.

"This statement is offered out of a sincere desire both to preserve unity within our American Baptist fellowship and to promote faithfulness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is imperative that we 'speak the truth in love' (Ephesians 4:15) as we understand it, with an abiding sense of humility that we do not have all the answers. We further pledge to continue listening to those who hold differing viewpoints.

"For the sake of our American Baptist ministry and mission and out of a deep desire to move ahead, as Regional Executive Ministers:

1. We will voluntarily refrain from recommending or approving persons who are practicing homosexuals (gay and lesbian persons) for positions and ministries on the regional and national levels of denominational life.
2. We will voluntarily refrain from conducting or participating in marriage ceremonies for same-sex couples.
3. We will voluntarily refrain from making stereotypical statements about homosexuals, participating in homophobic behavior, making uninformed assumptions about

homosexuals, or from participating in public demonstrations advocating on either side of this issue.

4. We will voluntarily refrain from making threats of withdrawal of resources and threats of withdrawal of fellowship.

5. We will pray and work constructively to embrace our unity in Jesus Christ and promote our fidelity to his teachings.

6. We call on all American Baptists to embrace and live out items 1-5 in the same spirit and commitment that we are pledging.

7. We commit ourselves to prayerfully discerning a way through this controversy and plan to report on our progress to the General Secretary and General Board by June 2005."