

Dear Central Plains Youth,

As a teenager in a Mennonite congregation, you have been taught that reconciliation and peace are central to the Gospel. What you hear from government leaders, television, teachers and peers may be quite different!

As you move toward adulthood, you will decide for yourself whether following Jesus requires a commitment to non-violence. Do Jesus' disciples participate in war? If not, then why not?

As a historic peace church, Mennonites have a long tradition of conscientious objection to military service. Before World War II, leaders of peace churches in the United States secured legal exemption from military service for anyone who, "by reason of religious training and belief is conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form." Those who were opposed to participation in war became known as "CO's" (conscientious objectors).

Eighteen is the age our government considers you eligible to participate in war. Even now, all young men must register with the Selective Service within 30 days of their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. If you, like many Mennonite men and women in history, are a conscientious objector (CO), you should begin to document your beliefs now by creating a CO file.

The purpose of keeping a CO file is to document your beliefs in case the draft is reinstated. This file would be evidence that your beliefs are long-held and sincere, not just a ploy to avoid military service. Young women should also make a file, since it is likely that women would be included in the draft should it be reinstated.

If the draft were to be reinstated, it is quite possible that conscientious objectors would have two weeks or less from the time they are drafted to document their position and apply for CO status. This is why it is so very important to begin to document your beliefs now. Sound intimidating? Actually, putting a CO file together is no more work than most projects you do for school!

You can find instructions at [www.centralplainsmc.org/co-resources.html](http://www.centralplainsmc.org/co-resources.html). There you will find the document *How to Create a CO file*. You'll also find other helpful stuff on the CO Resource page too.

I bet you are wondering how likely a reinstatement of the draft really is. A lot of people are! This question has been debated since the beginning of the war in Iraq. Some people think it's likely, others do not. The fact is that we simply do not know. Only one thing is certain: If there is a draft, conscientious objectors who have completed a CO file will be in a better position than those who have not.

Finally, please remember that there is no need to be afraid of the draft! God is faithful to walk with you and guide you in all things. Look to your parents, pastor and congregation for support and encouragement.

May the peace of God be with you as you explore your faith and find God's guidance.

-Amanda Bleichty  
Conference Minister for Christian Formation