

Greetings Central Plains Pastors and Youth Sponsors,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus.

I'm writing to you as the new Conference Minister for Christian Formation in Central Plains. Part of that role is to coordinate/resource conscientious objection education in this conference.

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."

Though conscientious objection seems to have "fallen out of style" in the years since the draft was last instated, I believe that teaching and helping students reflect on and clarify their position on peace is an important part of youth work in the Mennonite Church, even today. Mennonite youth need to be invited to think critically about the historic peace witness that they are a part of, and provided with opportunities to think through their commitments and convictions alongside trusted adults in the congregation.

As such, I suggest that each congregation offer their youth a study of conscientious objection once every two years. This study should culminate in an invitation to become an official conscientious objector. Let us not wait until we are faced with the possibility of a draft before we take seriously this important formational task for Mennonite youth.

Our Central Plains web site (www.centralplainsmc.org/co-resources.html) offers a collection of resources to use in teaching this material and in creating CO files for interested youth. On the web page, you'll find two columns. The list on the left are things for you to print and give to your students. There are three items for each youth: a letter from me, the Christian Peacemaker Registration Form and "How to Create a CO File."

On the right, you'll find resources for youth leaders or teachers. *Ben's Story* is a 6-session resource from MCC about Ben Peters, a man who enlisted in the Marines in the aftermath of September 11. *Decide for Peace* is an excellent Bible study on this topic, and can be ordered from MennoMedia. The video, *The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It* can be shown and discussed. Both *Decide for Peace* and *The Good War* are available to be borrowed from the Formation Resource Library in Kalona. The list of resources also includes several links to websites that give good background information for a study leader.

Thank you for investing your time to provide this important education for our youth. Please let me know if you have any questions. I'm happy to help in any way that I can.

Sincerely,
Amanda Bleichty
Conference Minister for Christian Formation