

January 2005

Dear Pastor and Youth Leader:

Teenagers in our Mennonite congregations have been taught that reconciliation and peace are central to the Gospel. What they hear from government leaders, television, teachers, and peers may be quite different!

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

Eighteen is the age our government considers them eligible to participate in war. Even now, all young men must register with the Selective Service near their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. If they are a conscientious objector (CO), they should begin to document their beliefs now.

Currently, young men and women are not being drafted into the military, but the U.S. government reserves the right to reinstate the draft at any time. In fact, some members of Congress have said that they would like to do that, so as church leaders we need to pay close attention to this issue. For now, we cannot predict whether a draft will happen—but *we can help prepare youth and young adults!*

The purpose of this packet is to **help them start their CO file**—if they decide they are a conscientious objector. You will find information enclosed that tells them what to put in the file.

**The purpose of keeping a CO file** is to document their beliefs in case the draft is reinstated. This file would be their evidence to a draft board that their 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 a draft.

As people charged with responsibility to work with youth, let's remember that teaching themes of peace and reconciliation needs to be woven into all areas of ministry. Let's also remember that peace is a theme for all ages including parents. And, finally let's remember peace does not relate only to war, but to all forms of brokenness and violence in our world, including relationships in the church, families, and neighborhoods. We need to continue to weave themes of peace into all areas of teaching for all age groups. You will find many helpful resources included in this packet.

It is our hope that youth and young adults would be prepared in the event of war or a military draft. While we do not want to create fear about the draft, we do want to be diligent and do our part in preparing for such an eventuality. This packet provides many helpful resources you might find useful in your leadership on this topic. We pray God will guide you in your leadership on this important theme.

Peace be with you!

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