



November 8, 2019

To the members of the National Commission on Military, National and Public Service:
Greetings in the Name of Jesus.

Recently Mennonite Central Committee brought together representatives of various Christian denominations who share a common core conviction that followers of Jesus should not participate as combatants in the military.

The Mennonite Brethren Church was not represented at that gathering, but we have a shared history with those groups and agree with many of the convictions that they formulated in their letter to you. This letter is uniquely our response, though it quotes at length from the joint letter in places where we are in full agreement with them.

As Mennonite Brethren in the United States, we have published the following statement:

“In seeking to be devoted followers of Jesus, ... we are called to assume roles that seek to heal society rather than contribute to cycles of hostility and antagonism. Historically this has meant that we do not serve as combatants during times of war but choose alternative forms of service. Some Mennonites believe that certain carefully considered applications of violence are justified when they work redemptively to bring peace. In all cases, however, we agree that our actions in the midst of social conflict should make restoration of peace a top priority.”

As this quotation indicates, our denomination does not claim that all its members reach the same conclusion on the exact implications of our commitment to peace-making, in response to the mandate Jesus gave us. We ask our churches to teach and encourage our members to engage in careful, discerning and prayerful examination of the various Christian options. We are grateful that the United States government guarantees its citizens the freedom to live according to their conscience. We are also grateful that as one of the so-called “Historic Peace Churches” we as Mennonite Brethren have been invited into conversation around questions of national service, and specifically to respond to the recommendations of the *National Commission on Military, National and Public Service*.

We therefore sincerely share with you our convictions and our requests.

Following the teaching in Matthew 5 and in accordance with Jesus’ example, we are called to love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, pray for those who persecute us, refuse to violently resist the evildoer, and forgive as we have been forgiven. Conscientious objectors believe Jesus commands reverence for each human life, since every person is made in the image of God. In following Jesus, we serve in ways that build up, nurture, and encourage rather than destroy. We do so even in situations where “others” may be targeted as enemies of the state. Our opposition to war is not cowardice but an expression of Christ’s forgiving love as shown on the cross. We see ourselves as ambassadors of peace.

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As a denomination within the Anabaptist tradition we stand firmly with those Christians throughout history who by conscience were not able to participate in the military. One of the important reasons our spiritual ancestors migrated from Europe to America was for religious freedom, which included not participating in military service. In many cases those in our own religious tradition were targeted as enemies of the state, not because they have done anything to undermine or oppose the state but simply because they refused to pick up arms. They believed that the state should not coerce in matters of religious conviction. They understood Jesus' teaching to mean that his followers would not join or support armed resistance but would overcome evil with good. To that end, serving others is one of our core values. We encourage church members of all ages and abilities to find ways to bless others both within and outside the church.

As followers of Jesus Christ, many of us have a deep sense of mission from Christ himself to wage not a physical war but instead a spiritual war against the powers and principalities of this world that seek to destroy the image of God in the human soul. Our desire is to bring others to salvation, not to destruction. Additionally, we seek to bring wholeness to lives that are hurting and distressed. Many within our US Mennonite Brethren family find it impossibly repulsive to kill another human being, for if it is another follower of Christ we would be killing a brother or sister, and if it is not a follower of Christ we would find ourselves cutting this human being off from an opportunity to find grace and everlasting life. In our minds acts of killing do not demonstrate the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ that calls us to bring healing, wholeness and peace to a hurting and sin-sick world.

In light of these deeply held beliefs, we would like to respond to some of the Commission's interim recommendations:

- We are requesting that no law be enacted that would require universal obligation for men or women to serve in the military.
- As long as a government Selective Service System exists, we request that it continue to be civilian-led.
- We request that protections and alternative service programs be maintained for those who conscientiously object to military service.
- We respectfully request the inclusion of a provision to identify as a conscientious objector at the time of Selective Service registration.
- We ask that the government, at both federal and state levels, not penalize people who do not register for Selective Service as a matter of conscience.
- We recommend that women not be required to register for Selective Service. (For some of us, this grows out of our conviction that no one—man or woman—should be required to register for military service. For others of us, this grows out of our traditional understanding of women's roles.)
- We strongly value service but are concerned by the Commission's conflation of service to the community with military service.
- We do not support sharing information and cross-recruitment of volunteers in our Christian service programs with the military.

- We are concerned by the influence the military has on schools, including efforts to increase military recruitment within schools as well as to incorporate military elements into school curricula. We are also concerned by the disproportionate focus by military recruiters on low-income communities and communities of color.

We express thanks that in the United States our Christian convictions are respected. We are grateful for the Commission's work and commit to praying regularly for our government officials.


Thank you for hearing our views.
Sincerely,



Don Morris
National Director



David Hardt
Leadership Board



Tim Sullivan
Board of Faith and Life