

The Draft?

Eighteen year old males in the U.S. are required to register with the Selective Service System (SSS), which then classifies them as available to fight in a war if the government deems it necessary.

U.S. officials stress the need for sufficient troops to wage the continuing War on Terrorism. But it is becoming more difficult for recruiters to find new enlistees, and some are calling for the return of the Draft. Others say the Draft is a fairer way to find troops for war. Some propose drafting females, too.

If there were to be a Draft today, it would work differently than it did in Vietnam: Draftees would receive an induction notice to report for a physical in as little as 10 days. If draftees want to file for an exemption or re-classification (such as conscientious objection), they should be ready to indicate this almost immediately. Draftees should be ready soon after this to present their entire case.

IF A DRAFTEE WAITS UNTIL INDUCTION TO WRITE A STATEMENT OF CONSCIENCE, IT WILL APPEAR THAT THEY ARE MOTIVATED BY FEAR RATHER THAN CONSCIENCE. **Write it now.**

In the statement, draftees must show:

- 1) that they oppose participation in all war;
- 2) that their beliefs are sincerely held and rooted in religious, ethical, or moral beliefs;
- 3) the precise reasons for their objection to all war;
- 4) how they acquired these beliefs;
- 5) evidence their beliefs are exemplified in their lives.

Applicants should also have letters of support testifying to the sincerity of their beliefs from a cross-section of people: teachers, clergy, family, peers. Also helpful would be documents from peace groups and churches. But the first step now is to write and date a statement of conscience and file it with the Catholic Peace Fellowship.

Common Questions....

What if I don't register?

By law this is a felony, but it is not being punished now. Instead, the government makes it very hard not to register. By signing many common forms, such as for college aid, you are automatically registered.

Can I register as a conscientious objector?

The SSS does not include a box for this on their form, but you should still write somewhere, "I am opposed to war," before mailing. And mail a copy to yourself so you have dated evidence of your beliefs.

What if I am not a pacifist but I oppose current wars? U.S. law requires that you show

opposition to *all* war in order to qualify as a conscientious objector.

Would COs have to do alternative service? Yes, but they could choose their own work, religious or secular, for the required two year period.

Would college students be drafted? Yes. They would be allowed to finish the semester. Students preparing for ministry could receive a deferment.

Is there an exemption for being an only son? No, this is a myth.

What about other categories? The 4F deferment, for those deemed physically or mentally unfit, would be common. Exemptions for homosexuality or financial hardship would be more difficult.

THE TWO CATHOLIC TRADITIONS ON WAR

NONVIOLENCE

The oldest Church response to war is the refusal to participate in it. The earliest Christians based this response on the words and example of Jesus, who taught a nonviolent love of enemies, and who rebuked Peter: "Put away the sword" (Matt 26:52). Further, the nonviolence of the Church shows that Christ did fulfill the prophesy, "They will beat their swords into plowshares... and study war no more" (Is 2:4).

The Gospels and Epistles do present a metaphorical usage of "the sword" to symbolize spiritual battle. But nowhere in the New Testament is it suggested that Jesus endorsed killing. Early theologians saw the Church as "an army of peace." St. Clement of Alexandria wrote in the late 100's: "If you enroll as one of God's people, heaven is your country and God your lawgiver. And what are his laws? You shall not kill" (Protrepticus, 10).

Conscientious objection to all war is still fully endorsed as a legitimate Catholic practice. The Vatican II document *Gaudium et spes* (No. 78-79) and the U.S. Bishops *The Challenge of Peace* (No. 118-120) make this clear.

JUST WAR

At the end the fourth century, St. Augustine articulated what is now known as the "just war" tradition. In the thirteenth century, St. Thomas Aquinas elaborated it. Today, Just war tradition stresses a presumption *against* the use of violence. However, if certain strict conditions for war could be met - such as fought for a just cause, with the right intention, as a last resort, by a legitimate authority, with a probability of success, and without prospect of undue damage - participation in a war would be justifiable. Even if a war were just, two strict rules must guide those who fight in it: civilians must never be targeted and excess destruction must be avoided.

Some Catholics use just war criteria to conclude that all modern war is unjust, and thus seek recognition as full conscientious objectors (COs). In fact, Pope Benedict XVI, while still Cardinal Ratzinger, stated on May 2, 2003: "Given the new weapons that make possible destructions that go beyond the combatant groups, today we should be asking ourselves if it is still licit to admit the very existence of a 'just war'" (Zenit News).

WHAT IS CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION?

Conscientious Objection (CO) is a sincere conviction, motivated by conscience, that forbids someone from participation in any and all war. If refusal is limited to a particular war or even a particular aspect of a war, this is called Selective Conscientious Objection (SCO). While the Church supports both CO and SCO, current U.S. law only recognizes total conscientious objection.

The roots of CO reach back to the origin of the Church. The earliest Christians permitted no military service because it meant pledging allegiance to a pagan empire and violating the nonviolent teachings of Jesus. Often, conscientious objectors were martyred for their actions. From St. Marcellus to St. Maximilian, the resistance cry was "I will not be a soldier of this world, for I am a soldier of Christ."

In recent U.S. history, Catholic COs have played a small but growing role. Of the 2,000 granted CO status in WWI, 4 were Catholic. 135 Catholics refused to participate in World War II. During Vietnam, over 10,000 Catholics were among the 171,000 COs recognized by the Selective Service.

Today, Catholics continue the ancient tradition of conscientious objection to war...

WE GO ON RECORD...

Excerpts from statements of conscience

"Enemy love is the absolute heart and soul of Christianity, because Christ died for those who were enemies to God - *all of us*." -Joshua

"If I willingly participated in the killing of humans, I would never be able to forgive myself. I am on this planet to serve others, not to kill, or directly or indirectly support the action of doing so. [In the military], even administrative or cooking jobs contribute in the mission of killing..." -Lauren

THIS CONCERNS CATHOLICS

Parish Leaders: The Church has a sacred duty in the formation of conscience. The pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace*, n. 280, urges every parish and diocese to develop programs of education on war and peace.

Parents: Talk to your children about CO, especially as it relates to a potential Draft.

Teens and young adults: Write statements of conscience and post them with the Catholic Peace Fellowship. This will help to clarify your beliefs and may protect you from being sent to war.



For more information, contact:
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CATHOLICS AND WAR

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION & THE DRAFT



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