

A Congregational Peace Pledge

A call to intentionally encounter the realities of war

Goal:

To invite congregations and conferences to commit to the actions delineated in the proposal

Rationale [written for Mennonite audience]:

To follow the path of Jesus and to have a credible peace witness that offers Good News to a world with many wars, Mennonites need to engage the violence that exists outside the bubble that limits most of our experiences.

When we have personal contact with those who suffer, compassion is planted, and out of this compassion comes our responses. Encountering the hungry in a soup kitchen, the homeless in a tornado's wake, or the prisoners in a jail leads us to respond as vessels of God's love. Warfare, on the other hand, causes hurt in ways that Mennonites don't have to confront anymore.

Historically, war was an inescapable reality forcing hard choices on U.S. Mennonites. During the Civil War men had to choose whether they would fight, hire substitutes to fight in their place, pay commutation fees, or face punishments. In World War I Mennonites drafted into the military could refuse to carry guns, sometimes becoming stretcher-bearers for the army, but there was no possibility of alternative service or not wearing a uniform. Some were court-martialed, imprisoned, and suffered mistreatment. In World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War young Mennonites could claim conscientious objector status and engage in alternative service if they could defend their convictions convincingly. More recently, the draft has been discontinued, and the government ignores pacifists completely.

While men and women around us volunteer to fight multiple wars simultaneously, Mennonites can avoid scenes of violent conflict, demands to bear arms, or having to justify their pacifism. Can we continue to be a peace church if we remain insulated from the reality of war?

The proposal:

Mennonite congregations who want to be intentional about knowing the reality of war, its victims, and the hard questions it asks of nonviolent followers of Jesus will commit themselves to the following actions each year:

- For each 100 members in the congregation, send one member on a delegation to conflictive zones with Christian Peacemaker Teams, Witness for Peace, Fellowship of Reconciliation, or other organizations dedicated to providing nonviolent presences. The congregation will pay partial funding for the trip and support the member's efforts to raise the remaining funds. Congregations with less than 100 members can pool resources into a common fund to support one of their members. After the trip the congregation will help the member share his/her experiences with the congregation and other local audiences.
- Sponsor at least one event each year that asks youth to question participation in warfare. Examples can include education of the congregation's youth group, counter-recruitment efforts in local schools, and/or a counter-presence when military recruiters visit local schools.
- Bring at least one speaker to the congregation each year who has worked with victims of war, is a former combatant who suffers from the experience of having inflicted harm on others, or did alternative service during a previous war. The Oasis of Hope community in Newport News (757-775-8101) or the TWOW (Transforming the Wounds of War) program at EMU's Center for Justice and Peacebuilding (<http://www.emu.edu/cjp/pti/twow>) are possible sources of speakers.

Share feedback to this proposal with Doug Schirch <dougms@goshen.edu>
of the Assembly Mennonite Church Peace & Justice Ministry Team by Jan. 31, 2012