

# ***It Really is a Matter of Conscience***

## **Eight Session Study Guide** *for individuals, youth groups, and congregational use*



### **Session 1 - *Just Following Orders... or "Blame it on Jesus"***

1. What evidence do you see that Brethren base their peace position on Jesus' words? How often are Jesus' words cited in pronouncements and position papers regarding war and peace issues? Examine the 1970 Statement on War (resource item #3) and determine how much of the rationale for the position is based on the words of Jesus.
2. Do you think if Annual Conference re-thought the Church of the Brethren position on war that it would reiterate the position that all war is sin? Or do you think some softening of the church's stand on participating in war might be adopted? Consider what would happen if your own congregation had the responsibility to formulate a statement on participation in war. Would your own congregation vote that all war is sin?
3. What sense does it make to formulate a position against war and then not enforce it in any way? What were the advantages of making a statement against using force a test of membership, as the early Brethren used to do. What would be the impact on the membership of the Church of the Brethren if we returned to the day when you had to agree to not take up arms in order to be a member of the Church of the Brethren? How is the church better served by its current practice of not forcing a member to believe a certain way? Or is it?
4. How do you respond to the different perspectives reflected by the comments of Dale Brown and Vernard Eller, regarding whether Brethren should try to influence government policies. (Consider resource #6, *Our Call to Conscience*) Does Eller's favoring a more person to person peacemaking approach make sense? Or is there a place for witnessing to the powers that be in Washington, D.C. and other places?
5. Tony Campolo's anecdote about his draft board experience raises the question of whether we are to imitate Jesus. Is that practical in today's world? Should we ask, 'What would Jesus do?' and what do you tell your friends who argue with you that Jesus WOULD drop bombs? What Biblical evidence is there to make the case that Jesus would not drop bombs on enemy villages? (Visit resource #5, *Biblical Peacemaking*) What sound bites from Jesus words in the New Testament would you cite?
6. How well have Brethren peace proponents argued their case through the years? What points that Brethren sometimes make in advocating for peace actually been counter productive? If Brethren really do believe in peace, what other things should we be promoting or advocating? What actions hurt our cause?

## **Session 2 - *Conscientious Objection***

1. What do Brethren owe the U.S. Government in exchange for their having allowed them to do alternative service? Is alternative service something that we have a right to expect, or is it a concession from the government for which we should be grateful? And if so, how should we demonstrate our gratitude? How far are you willing to go to cooperate with the government?
2. How do you feel about participating in the military organization but not actually carrying a gun? Is a non-combatant position consistent with the church's position that all war is sin? Can you cooperate with the military without participating in killing people?
3. Clarence Quay says the government's enemies are not HIS enemies. If that's the case, who ARE our enemies, and how do we fight against them in the spirit of Jesus Christ? Is it treason to not consider your country's enemies your enemies as well? Is committing treason something Christians should try refrain from or is it an acceptable practice for Christians, or at least Brethren who are living "not of this world"?
4. Does Enten Eller's argument against even cooperating with the selective service system make sense to you? What are the ways in which you may consider that counter productive? What are the ways in which you see that as being faithful to the call of Christ? Consider discussing whether being faithful is inherently more important than being effective, not only in peacemaking but in other elements of the Christian life. You may feel this may or may not relate to Enten's decision to not cooperate with the selective service system.

## **Session 3 - *How to Declare Yourself a Conscientious Objector or: "Developing Your Very Own CO File"***

1. If being a conscientious objector were illegal, would there be enough evidence to convict you? What steps have you taken to document your commitment to peace? (See resource #9)

## **Session 4 - *Mock Draft Board Hearing***

1. How prepared are you to defend your views on war and killing? What Biblical texts would you cite? Is the history of war and the United States use of it as a component of foreign policy something you think would enhance your argument against your participation in war?
2. Do you make a distinction between participating in some wars and participating in all wars? Can you make a case for a just war? Are there some circumstances where you feel war is the least worst alternative? If so, is that something you would share with a draft board? What should be the implications of admitting that to a draft board?
3. Research the conditions by which St. Augustine could justify war under the "just war theory". How often have they been met by modern governments?
4. Does believing in a "Just war theory" allow you to also create a "Just stealing theory", or a "Just Adultery Theory"? How far can you go in creating exceptions to scriptural principles? What other Biblical principles are there for which we make exceptions? Warning, this could be a long discussion...

## **Session 5 - *War Tax Resistance***

1. How do you react to the principle that if you don't believe in war, you shouldn't pay for it? Does this make sense?

2. What difference does it make if your tax obligation is paid to non-military purposes? What impact would it have on you psychologically? Does it make enough difference to suffer the consequences of war tax resistance?
3. Reflect on the Rieman's practice of telling the IRS regularly what they are doing through a letter? Why is that a good practice? Or do you feel it's counter productive?
4. How would you interpret Jesus' words to "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's?" Is this a relevant Biblical text for this issue? Why or why not? Is war tax resistance an issue of rendering our money to the proper place?

## **Session 6 - *Encountering Military Recruitment***

1. What are your experiences with military recruitment? (Consult resource #12 for this session.) How active are military recruiters in your area schools? Share your observations about their tactics and strategies? Are they effective with high school age youth?
2. What do you know about the deceptions that military recruiters use to gain recruits? Consult the American Friends Service Committee web site for a list of statistics that counter the promises made by military recruiters.
3. Why do you feel schools allow military recruiters the kind of access they have? Evaluate the level of reverence, respect and importance your school places on the military. What impact does that have on the access military recruiters have to youth and their classmates? Would a company like Microsoft or a program like BVS have the same level of access to students?
4. How far would you go in countering the information provided by military recruiters? Do you think shadowing them and countering their arguments is an effective use of time and a faithful Christian response? What would be the impact among high school peers if that occurred?
5. What would be the impact of a decline in effectiveness of military recruiters? If they fail to meet their recruitment quotas, do you think that would hasten the return of the draft? Or would it make it harder for the U.S. Government to use force to implement foreign policy initiatives that include violence and war?



## **Session 7 - *Civil Disobedience, or Taking it to the Next Level***

1. What are the circumstances where you could justify civil disobedience? Does it require the assurance of making a difference or changing policy or some kind? Or is simply making a statement worth the cost?
2. How much does the Biblical instruction by the Apostle Paul to obey government play in your view on civil disobedience? Consider the context of that instruction. What were the circumstances in which that admonition was given?
3. How would you balance the scriptural advise that governments were instituted by God with the explanation provided by Peter and the apostles in the book of Acts (5:29) by the words "I must obey God rather than men." Is civil disobedience ever a case of obeying God rather than "men?"

4. What role do you understand civil disobedience played in America's civil rights movement? Considering what you know about that era, did it speed up or slow down the struggle of African - Americans to gain civil rights? Was it justified in that case?
5. What core issues are so important to Brethren that we might be called to such "civil disobedience?" What conditions would justify civil disobedience for you? Does it have to involve a life or death decision?
6. Do you think the church today could pass a position paper that included civil disobedience as a legitimate form of Christian witness? Would your congregation approve such a paper? How much support would there be for civil disobedience in your community?
7. What do you see as the disadvantages of civil disobedience? How could it be counter productive?
8. What then, would be the advantages? Does it inspire like minded Christians who agree that some sort of action is necessary?

### **Session 8 *Present Day Alternatives, Or: When is it time for Brethren Volunteer Service?***

1. 2005 Annual Conference Moderator Jim Hardenbrook described his Mormon friends talking with six year olds about participation in a church service program. Why do you suppose Brethren don't begin that early talking about BVS or other service opportunities?
2. What ways can you think of to stimulate more interest in service and peace related careers?
3. What do you think is the impact of faith expeditions to cultures across the world? How would that change the way you see the world's problems and conflicts? Consult with someone who has experienced another culture- through a faith expedition or a study time abroad or a mission trip, and have him or her explain what changes result in seeing the world from the perspective of another culture.
4. What do you see as the benefits of a term of Brethren Volunteer Service before someone attends college? What are the benefits of waiting until after college? What about replacing college with a term or multiple terms in BVS or some other mission or service experience?