



# Our Call to Conscience

## What the Bible has to say about war and peace a Church of the Brethren perspective

### The call today

As in the past, the Church of the Brethren seeks to live out its commitment to peacemaking in the context of today's world. Through its local, national, and international ministries, the church works to create a more peaceful and just society. When its young people are called to participate in the armed forces, the church in turn calls them to witness for peace by choosing alternative service or open, nonviolent noncooperation to make strong decisions of conscience. (Romans 12:17-21). All members of the denomination are likewise called to seek peace in the full range of their relationships.

The call of Jesus rings out as clearly today as it did in the first-century Palestine. His call is an invitation to join a new community—a community known for the love among its members and their love for all people. His call is a challenge for his followers—a challenge to turn away from the violence and self-centeredness of the world toward lifestyles of peace, service, and justice. His call is an opportunity to discover true life—the true life that comes to those who believe in him and follow him in peace, service and love for all humankind.

For additional copies of this brochure or for further information contact the Brethren Witness/Washington office,  
337 North Carolina Ave. SE, Washington, DC 20003; (202) 546-3202.

*“The only people on earth who do not see Christ and His teachings as nonviolent are Christians.” —Mohandas Gandhi*

### **The conflicting calls**

Your nation calls you to war—to fight the war, embrace the war, pay for the war.

Jesus calls you to peace—to pray for peace, work for peace, sacrifice for peace.

Throughout history these two calls have come into conflict, as both ask for a person’s utmost commitment and loyalty.

For some religious people, this conflict in loyalties does not pose a problem. Perhaps they believe that God blesses whatever their nation does. Perhaps they think the reasons behind a particular conflict are “right” and therefore justify the use of violence. They pay taxes without questions even when fueling a violent war time budget. Some people may find war repulsive, but feel they must do whatever their government calls them to do.

### **The biblical call to peacemaking**

In reading the Bible, the Church of the Brethren has that those who follow Christ are called to be peacemakers in our world. The church has rejected the use of violence as a means of solving either inter-personal or international conflict. Why have Brethren come to different conscious decisions than many other Christians have on the matter of going to war?

- ❖ Brethren take literally Jesus’ command to “love your enemies” (Matthew 5:38-48) and have accepted Jesus’ definition of those whom we should see as our “neighbors” (Luke 10:25-37). The church has refused to see these teachings as limited to certain relationships or situations, or as being too demanding for humans to live by them.
- ❖ Brethren see God as primarily a God of love. God loves the “world” (John 3:16-17); God is kind and merciful even to the “ungrateful and selfish” (Luke 6:35). In this same passage in Luke, those Christians who likewise show this unbounded love toward others are called “children of the Most High.”
- ❖ Brethren have not been persuaded by God’s seeming approval of the war in the Old Testament. While accepting the truth of the Old Testament, the church has always chosen to follow the New Testament when the Old and New Testaments present different views of God. In any event, the way in which God demanded that the ancient Israelites “fight,” relying on few soldiers (Judges 7) and refusing the weapons of their enemies (Joshua 11:6ff), could in no way be used to support modern warfare. Along with these texts, the Old Testament also contains passages that powerfully put forth a vision of *shalom*, a peace that encompasses every dimension of personal and community living (Isaiah 11:1-9; Zechariah 8:14-19; Micah 4:1-4).
- ❖ Brethren have sought to follow the example of Jesus. Jesus called for any who would follow him to “take” for the sake of the gospel (Mark 8:34-37). The church has understood this to mean that Christians may be called to make sacrifices for their faith and for the sake of others. When confronted by violence or the forces of evil, Christians are challenged to respond with the power of suffering love, as did Jesus himself (Philippians 2:5-11).
- ❖ Brethren have experienced a strong calling to be in ministry to and with others through programs of service and by working for justice in our world (Amos 5:12-14, 18-24; Jeremiah 7:1-11; Matthew 25:31-45). Members of the church were instrumental in beginning Heifer project International and Church World Service. The Decade to Overcome Violence, Brethren Volunteer Service, the SERRV program, and many different peace initiatives are current efforts to serve others and to work for peace and justice. Many Brethren have chosen to be war tax resisters and to advocate for an alternative peace tax fund.
- ❖ Brethren have insisted that when the call of the country conflicts with the church’s understanding of the Bible’s call to follow Jesus, the church has an obligation to give its first allegiance to Christ (Acts 5:29). It really is a matter of faith, a matter of conscience, when and how we respond to this call.