



1775 to Today

Brethren have recorded their commitment to peace and justice at various times in statements at Annual Conference, beginning as early as 1785. Here are some quotations from several statements and other publications.

1775 Mennonite and Brethren petition to the Pennsylvania General Assembly:

"We have dedicated ourselves to serve all Men in every Thing that can be helpful to the Preservation of Men's Lives, but we find no Freedom in giving, or doing, or assisting in any Thing by which Men's Lives are destroyed or hurt. We beg the Patience of all those who believe we err in this Point."

Annual Meeting, 1785:

"We see further that our loving Savior, though innocent, was attacked in a murderous manner by just such men as Brother P[owers] has mentioned in his letter; but the Savior stood fast in the covenant of faithfulness. ... In a murderous manner he was attacked, and Peter was quick and ready to draw his sword according to the legal justice of God, and struck a servant and smote off his ear. But what says the Savior: 'Put up again thy sword into his place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the Sword' (Mt. 26:52). Here indeed, was the greatest necessity (for self defense), but all this time the Savior resisted not; but he suffered patiently, and even healed the one whose ear was smote off. ... So we hope the dear Brethren will not take it amiss when we, from all these passages of Scripture, and especially from the words of Peter, can not see or find any liberty to use any carnal sword, but only the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, by which we cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, as Paul (2 Cor. 10:5) says."

Annual Meeting, 1817:

No member could go to the muster ground or permit a child still under parental authority to do so.

Annual Meeting, 1822:

No brother should "take the liberty to go on the musterground or take part in the festivities of Independence Day."

Annual Meeting, 1855:

No brother has "a right to defend himself with a deadly weapon at the appearance of being in danger."

1848:

Each applicant for membership in the church was required to indicate acceptance of the nonresistant position.

Civil War:

In the North, the Lincoln administration allowed conscientious objectors to be exempt from bearing arms but required conscientious objectors to provide a substitute or pay a tax of \$200 or \$300. The church opposed hiring substitutes. In the South, a similar option was available, but Brethren who exercised this option were suspected of being anti-war and therefore pro-Union and were severely mistreated.

1911:

The Peace Committee's duties were "To propagate and aid in the distribution of such literature as may be helpful to the better understanding as to the sinfulness and folly of resorting to arms in the settlement of differences; Second: To use every lawful gospel means in bringing about peaceful settlements of difficulties when such may arise between governments or societies. ..."

1915:

The Brethren commend the Religious Educational Association of America for their resolution "to get away from pagan nationalism, to Christian internationalism."

The Goshen Conference, 1918:

"I. We believe that war or any participation in war is wrong and entirely incompatible with the spirit, example, and teachings of Jesus Christ. II. That we cannot conscientiously engage in any



activity or perform any function contributing to the destruction of human life. ... We further urge our brethren not to enlist in any service which would, in any way, compromise our time-honored position in relation to war; also that they refrain from wearing the military uniform. The tenets of the church forbid military drilling, or learning the art or arts of war, or doing anything which contributes to the destruction of human life or property."

Annual Conference, 1922:

"Members should not affiliate themselves with the American Legion or kindred ex-service organizations."

Annual Conference, 1934:

"It is our conviction as humble followers of Christ, that all war is sin. We cannot therefore encourage, engage in, or willingly profit from armed conflict at home or abroad. We cannot, in the event of war, accept military service or support the military machine in any capacity."

Annual Conference, 1935:

"We believe that war is not inevitable. Those beliefs are not based upon a peculiar peace doctrine of our own; they arise from our application of Christian standards to all human relations, whether individual, group, class, or national. To settle conflicts in any of these relationships by war is not efficient, not constructive, not permanent, and certainly not Christian. We believe that nonviolence, motivated by goodwill, is more powerful than the sword, making possible the survival of both parties, while warfare insures the ultimate destruction of both."

Annual Conference, 1958:

"We unceasingly urge our government leaders to promote and use nonviolent methods and institutions such as the United Nations which are available for settling international tensions."

Annual Conference, 1967:

"When he (a Christian) is profoundly convinced that God forbids what the state demands, it is his responsibility to express his convictions. Such expression may include disobedience of the state."

Annual Conference, 1970:

"The church pledges its support to the draft-age member facing conscription who chooses open noncooperation with the system of conscription as a conscientious objector. ... All members of the church who take the position of noncooperation should seek to exhibit a spirit of humility, good-will, and sincerity in making this type of courageous witness most effective, nonviolent, and Christian."

Annual Conference, 1977:

"God calls the church to work at restoring justice by a responsible use of its power. We must use means that are compassionate because violence is sin, an abuse of the solidarity of humankind."

Annual Conference, 1977:

"We must face the risks and vigorously implement the love of God in our political, economic, and social relations. The consequences of our decisions and actions may be as costly as when Jesus was accused of political subversion and was executed. We need faith, moral courage, and love as revealed in Jesus Christ and lived out in the faith community."

Annual Conference, 1988:

"The Church of the Brethren Annual Conference reaffirms the belief and practice of the church in renouncing all war. The Annual Conference is especially concerned at this time about covert war and calls upon other people of faith to renounce covert war and to refuse to participate in it. The Annual Conference calls upon our government and the governments of the world to renounce covert warfare. In such renunciation is the possibility for integrity, improved international relations, and an improvement in our national character."

Annual Conference, 1991:

"It has been the case most often, however, that the church's statements on these matters have been in reaction and opposition to events in our world. The church now wishes to set forth a comprehensive statement on the denomination's commitment to Christian peacemaking as a way of life."

Annual Conference, 2003:

"We resolve to follow Jesus in seeking together an active Christian peace witness in our congregations and districts."

Annual Conference, 2004:

"As we commit ourselves to love God and the people created by God's hands, and in prayerful consideration of all things of war and violence, we . . . call for members and congregations across our denomination to join in being a constant witness to Christ as a living peace church of today against all war and the violence of its nature."

Annual Conference, 2011:

Annual Conference "calls on churches and individuals to pray for and pursue a world of just peace."

