

Thoughts for Young Men Who Would Be Conscientious Objectors If the Draft Returns

No one knows whether inductions will resume.

We do know they could come on very short notice, if the Iraq War continues. Time to claim conscientious objection could be extremely limited.

We do know there is presently no way to register conscientious objection with the government.

We do know that contrary to many comments heard, the *present* legal situation in Canada is unlikely to permit draft resisters to find refuge there.

We don't know just what procedures will be in place if inductions resume. But, based upon past practice, and observations of the current political scene, we offer these suggestions to all men and boys whose consciences would not allow military service. (In pure theory, a new draft could include women but that seems most unlikely to occur.)

These suggestions will not guarantee by any means that a conscientious objector claim will be recognized. U.S. provisions are fairly liberal on paper, but depend upon the somewhat nebulous factor of a volunteer draft board, likely composed of more militarists than pacifists, attempting to judge whether or not an applicant is "sincere." To some degree an appeals process can correct gross errors, but even this is very far from infallible.

So, our suggestions for you right now:

Speak up. Fairly or not, draft boards and appeal boards have looked for "public witness" to one's beliefs. Probably unfairly, they tend to suspect beliefs that only seem to take shape when induction is imminent. So talk about your thoughts on war and killing in groups, classes, congregations, and with individuals. Jot down, for your own records, when you have done so.

Hunt up people who could be witnesses/references for you if needed. They need not agree with you, but should be willing and able to show strong respect for your sincerity, integrity, and general worth. They need not do anything immediately, but should be unequivocally ready to give you a strong letter (read it before using it) and even to accompany you to a twenty-minute hearing before the board if that should come to pass. If one of these is a spiritual leader, so much the better. Likewise, for known leaders of the community.

Look up the official statement on war and conscientious objection of your religious body, if you are affiliated with

an entity of organized religion. Virtually every such body has one, available on request from its headquarters.

Write it up. Make your own file of 'evidence' of your sincerity. It's not the place to be unduly humble. Include your public or semi-public statements, your list of potential references, and general signs of taking your faith and its values seriously. Service to community, congregation, people in need. If you have not yet registered for the draft, and are going to do so, write across the registration form "I am a conscientious objector." The government won't read that or file it; the form is destroyed after the information they want is computerized. But make a copy of it, date it, and sign a notarized statement that you had written that on your registration, and when. Keep all this in a convenient folder or envelope that will be available on short notice if you ever need it.

Don't act up. Be kind to your neighbors, school, and community. In the past, the appeals phase generally brought an FBI agent asking questions of your neighbors and associates. Sometimes petty or irrelevant gossip was picked up and used against you. As you reasonably can, build a favorable reputation.

Join up. If you are a conscientious objector, you doubtless 'belong' already to the Fellowship of Reconciliation and its vision. Among the many reasons to make it official is that you will receive a dated membership card to an organization that requires a conscientious pledge not to participate in any war. It's not an absolute guarantee—but it does show somewhat clearly that this was your conviction. If you don't have a Membership Form, call (845) 358-4601 and request one.

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