

In response to these fundamental beliefs that we brought the Call for a Living Peace Church to Annual Conference. Now that it has been adopted, what will this mean for the church?

- Taken from *On Earth Peace*, Fall 2003, Bob Gross

A Matter of Conscience: Draft Legislation in 2003 & 2004

We, as the Church of the Brethren, are known as an historic Peace Church. To help us understand and be informed about legislation, I have reprinted an excerpt from the *Witness to Washington*, January/February, 2004.



The threat of a military draft looms like a specter on the horizon. As members of an historic Peace Church, many Brethren remain concerned about forced conscription. Sadly, such fears are not unfounded, and the past year has seen an increased focus on this frightening subject. In January of 2003 – before the most recent invasion of Iraq – Representative Charles Rangel (D-NY, 15th) introduced a bill into Congress that would effectively reinstitute the military draft in the United States. Although Rep. Rangel made it clear that he did not necessarily support forced conscription per se, his motivation behind this effort was to show that the military – and specifically those fighting on the front lines – consisted of a disproportionate and unfair percentage of minorities. Rangel intended this new draft bill (**HR 163**) to be a sort of “wake-up call,” the theory behind it being that Congress would be less likely to commit the US to a costly war if THEIR sons and daughters faced the threat of conscription. Backed by Senator Ernest Hollings (D-SC) through a companion bill in the Senate (**S 89**), the potential for a military draft quickly reappeared as a point of serious concern in the public mind.

In recent weeks, concern over a potential draft has returned to the national conscience. Stating that the war in Iraq has unfairly affected those individuals voluntarily serving in the National Guard and Reserves, Rep. Rangel is again pushing for a military draft. Moreover, both **HR 163** and **S 89** – the two bills supporting a draft – are still viable and are currently being considered in committee. Specifically, they call for the induction of both male and female citizens, age 18 to 26, without exemption to those in college. With the US military stretched to capacity in both Afghanistan and Iraq, the threat of a draft is indeed a serious matter, and one that requires immediate attention.

With a profound and historic belief in peace, the Church of the Brethren takes the prospect of a draft with the utmost seriousness. It is a dangerous misconception to believe that forced conscription can be either a deterrent to war or a tool to increase diversity in the armed forces. A steady supply of troops would NOT be an obstacle to war, and past drafts have proven ineffective at creating a diverse military. In addition, neither bill allows adequate provisions for conscientious objectors, those individuals who cannot – through faith and/or good conscience – fight in the military. Currently, these bills only allow non-combatant status for CO's, meaning they would still have to actively serve in the armed forces. Civilian service would only be allowed through the direct action of the President, an especially difficult requirement. As a result, it is important to take action regarding this dangerous legislation. The draft is NOT unstoppable. We encourage you to consider YOUR conscience in this matter. Make your voice heard! Take action!

What does YOUR conscience say about war? Visit the Brethren Witness/Washington Office web page at www.brethren.org to learn more about being a conscientious objector. Consider the steps on the next page and make YOUR conscience known to the world!

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