

Resources for thinking about Conscientious Objection

Current military policy has defined conscientious objection as the following: “A firm, fixed, and sincere objection to participation in war in any form or the bearing of arms, by reason of religious training and/or belief.”

GI Rights Hotline: 1-877-447-4487 / <http://girightshotline.org/>

The Center on Conscience & War, 1-800-379-2679 <http://centeronconscience.org>

CCW is a non-profit organization that advocates for the rights of conscience, opposes military conscription, and serves all conscientious objectors to war.

Handbook for Conscientious Objectors, (newer editions titled *Choosing Peace*) by Robert A. Seeley
Out of print, but available in the Multnomah Friends Meeting Library and from used book sources.

- (Some of the details of the legalities are out of date)
- Good overview of the Selective Service laws as last implemented
- An overview of the process of gaining conscientious objection status
- A discussion of the issues facing a person contemplating conscientious objection

Thinking about War and Participation in War , Website (by David Chandler)

<http://quaker.org/co> or <http://co.quaker.org>.

- Articles focused on the moral issues surrounding questions of war and peace and participation in war
- First person accounts from people who have grappled with these issues
- Links to other resources relating to war, militarism, and conscientious objection

Quaker House <https://www.quakerhouse.org/> This is a Quaker project, located near Fort Bragg, NC, that works at a very practical level with military resisters, as well as other aspects of militarism, conscience, and resistance.

- GI Rights Counseling and Support
- Military Related Domestic Violence Victims' Support
- Alternatives to Violence Project Training
- Soul Repair (Moral Injury) Information

Questions to ask and answer for yourself:

- Traditional Christian doctrine (based on the writings of St. Augustine) allows for the possibility of a “just war.” Howard Zinn (in an excellent essay available at <http://co.quaker.org>) makes a distinction between a “just cause” and a “just war.” Is there such a thing as a “just war.”
- When you join the military you don’t get to choose which wars to fight. How does “Just War” doctrine apply to joining the military? Would you consent to being required to fight in an unjust war? Are you prepared to kill whoever you are told to kill.
- In the hospital, consent is a voluntary act of a competent adult, with full disclosure and comprehension of risks and alternatives, and with professional advice. Consent can be withdrawn at any time. How does this compare with volunteering at a recruiter’s office?
- The number one reason most volunteers enlist is economic (education, job training). This is sometimes referred to as “the poverty draft.” Is the “All Volunteer Army” truly voluntary?
- Is there a difference between the justification of personal self defense and participation in the military? (Legally a Conscientious Objector need not renounce self defense.)
- It is common for draft boards to ask you what you would do if someone attacked your home and family. How would you answer? US soldiers are frequently ordered to attack someone’s home and family. How does this relate to the previous question.
- People frequently talk about soldiers and the military as “defending our freedom.” Think about this comment in terms of recent wars.
- To be recognized as a Conscientious Objector you must have a religious objection to *war in any form*, not just a specific war. What if you think the US is on the wrong side of a particular war? Is that just a political decision (which is what the draft board would say) or could that be a sincere decision of conscience? The law does not recognize this kind of conscientious objection. What would you do?
- The draft law recognizes two kinds of conscientious objector status: IAO: non-combatant status within the military, and IO: alternative service outside the military. These are fundamentally different positions. IAO means you object to personally carrying or using a weapon, but you would participate in a supportive non-combatant role. IO means you object to participating in the military at all, but you could be assigned to alternative service (in a hospital, mental hospital, forest service maintenance, etc.) unrelated to the military. Other options are leaving the country, or serving a prison term, or serving in the military against ones conscience. Quakers have taken all of these options. Consider what each option would mean for you.
- FYI: The term “religious” does not include political, sociological, or philosophical views. However a person who is not a member of a church or does not believe in God could be a Conscientious Objector provided his/her moral and ethical beliefs “have the same force” in that person’s life as traditional religious beliefs. (Be prepared to appeal!!!)