



March 2010

To every congregation and presbytery in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and its predecessor denominations, has long recognized that followers of Jesus Christ make different choices in regard to military service. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) teaches that one way Christians can be faithful is through service in the armed forces. The General Assembly's first statement in support of conscientious objection as an option for people of faith was made in 1930. In 1969, the General Assembly made a statement in support of selective conscientious objection, which means that objection to a particular war judged by the individual conscience to be wrong is a moral obligation that may stem from Christian just-war teaching.

The 218th General Assembly (2008) took actions that relate to Presbyterians and military service in several ways. These actions include implementation steps for General Assembly programs, presbyteries, and sessions. The assembly's action *On Supporting Those Who Feel Called to Seek Status as Conscientious Objectors*:

- “Reaffirms the church’s position on the freedom of conscience, especially as it relates to a person’s status as a conscientious objector against participating in the armed services.
- “Encourages the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program to produce and identify study guides and discernment materials for individuals, congregations, and presbyteries to help church members and their friends be able to articulate God’s calling on their lives in regard to participating in the armed forces, and war.
- “Encourages presbyteries to provide education opportunities for ministers, military chaplains, and sessions on how to fulfill their responsibility of educating young people about issues of faith, conscience, and war, including civic alternatives to serving the country through the armed forces.
- “Encourages presbyteries and sessions to create a structure to document and support those who feel called to seek status as conscientious objectors to participation in the armed forces, or war.
- “Encourages presbyteries and sessions to create a structure to document and support those who feel called to seek status as conscientious objectors to participation in the armed forces, or war. Active members of the church can now register with the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly for conscientious objector status, and certificates are sent to the church for their records and for the church member (*Book of Order G-5.0202*; *GA Minutes*, 2003, Part I, p. 651, Recommendations 2, 3; “Presbyterians and Military Service” – PDS #7027005035).”

In the action, *On Building Peace in Iraq*, the 218th General Assembly (2008) voted to “call upon the United States government to support our military personnel by granting speedy discharges to conscientious objectors; fully funding veterans’ benefits; ensuring that injured service personnel and veterans have the best medical, mental health, and rehabilitation care available; and providing generous benefits to surviving family members.”

The Presbyterian Peacemaking Program has created a Web page with resources to help individuals discern God’s call in relation to participation in the armed forces. It is available at www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/actnow/conscientious-objection.htm.

The Office of the Stated Clerk is prepared to register active members, baptized members, and active nonmembers of congregations as conscientious objectors. Contact Joyce Evans at (888) 728-7228, ext. 5424, or read “Presbyterians and Military Service” (PDS# 70-270-05-035 in English; PDS# 24-358-07-012 in Spanish) for the process. This information will be included in future publications related to this issue. The Presbyterian Washington Office has communicated the concerns of the 218th General Assembly for our military personnel to our elected officials in Washington.

Choices related to military service may be challenging. We will hold you in prayer as you provide assistance to individuals as they make and live out their decisions.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gradye Parsons".

The Reverend Gradye Parsons
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly