

# How to Create a Conscientious Objector's (CO) File

A CO file is a collection of faith statements, references, and other evidence that you are a conscientious objector to participation in the military. The purpose of the file is to give evidence to a draft board that your beliefs are long-held and sincere, not a ploy to avoid being sent into a specific war. Young women should also make a file, since it is likely that women would be included in a draft.

## Getting Started

First, get a pocket folder and plan to keep it where you can find it easily and occasionally add things to it. Then, start the file by putting the following things in it:

### 1. Christian Peacemaker Registration Form

This is the centerpiece of your CO file. Take time to study, pray, and discuss your beliefs with others before filling out the form. Two excellent resources for study and reflection are *Decide for Peace*, a Bible study in a workbook format, and *Change of Command*, a video on young people who left the military as conscientious objectors.

When you have filled out the Christian Peacemaker Registration Form:

- ▶ Make three copies of it.
- ▶ Put one copy in your file.
- ▶ Mail the second copy to yourself in a sealed envelope. Put the unopened, postmarked envelope in your file.
- ▶ Send the third copy either to your church, the Franconia Mennonite Conference office, or to MCC U.S. Peace and Justice Ministries.
- ▶ **Write in your file where you sent it!**

### 2. A Record of Any Actions You Have Taken Which Support Your Commitment to Peace

Actions might include a public speech, a research paper, mediation training, letters to Congress, charitable contributions, participation in service projects, etc. Make copies of a speech or paper, the certificate of completion of training, letters to politicians, etc. Whatever it is—keep a copy of it in your CO file.

### 3. Letters of Reference

Your references should be people who know you well, are familiar with the position you are taking, and believe in your sincerity. Try to get a good cross-section of people who know you—teachers, relatives, classmates, friends. It is not necessary that a person writing a letter agree with your beliefs. The best letters are often written by persons who disagree with the CO position, but believe in your sincerity.

References can help you most by answering in their letters the following questions:

- ▶ What is your relationship with this person and how long have you known him/her?
- ▶ Do you believe that this person is sincere in his/her claim as a conscientious objector?
- ▶ To the best of your knowledge, has his/her conduct since arriving at this belief been consistent with the claim being made?
- ▶ Do you believe this person's claim is based on deeply held moral, ethical, or religious beliefs, however broadly defined? If possible, give examples of influences or training

in the life of the applicant which you think might have led to the development of his or her beliefs.

#### 4. **For Guys Only: A Copy of Your Selective Service Registration Form**

When you register:

- ▶ Print in legible black ink across the middle of the registration form: I AM A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR TO WAR IN ANY FORM. This is not a classification, but may help you later to document your position.
- ▶ Make a photocopy of the form for your CO file before you submit it to the post office.

Now you have a good start on your file! Continue to add things to it as you write papers and letters, participate in peacemaking activities, and so on. If you are drafted, take this file with you to present to the draft board. Meanwhile, remember that the best witness to Jesus and his way of peace is a disciple who knows Jesus well and follows him in daily life. As he said, "*My sheep know my voice.*" May the peace of Christ be with you!

Sources: MCC U.S. Christian Peacemaker Registration Form packet by Titus Peachey and The Center for Conscience and War publications at <http://www.nisbco.org/>.

#### **For more information on conscientious objection:**

The Center for Conscience and War

MC USA Peace Advocate

Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Peace and Justice Ministries

Franconia Conference Youth Minister, Marlene Frankenfield

<http://www.nisbco.org/>

<http://peace.mennolink.org>

<http://www.mcc.org/ask-a-vet/>

[MarleneF@FMC-Online.org](mailto:MarleneF@FMC-Online.org)