

An Epistle to Friends Concerning Military Conscription

Dear Friends,

It has long been clear to most of us who are called Friends that war is contrary to the spirit of Christ and that we cannot participate in it. The refusal to participate in war begins with a refusal to bear arms. Some Friends choose to serve as noncombatants within the military. For most of us, however, refusal to participate in war also involves refusal to be part of the military itself, as an institution set up to wage war. Many, therefore, become conscientious objectors doing alternative service as civilians, or are deferred as students and workers in essential occupations.

Those of us who are joining in this epistle believe that cooperating with the draft, even as a recognized conscientious objector, makes one part of the power which forces our brothers into the military and into war. If we Friends believe that we are special beings and alone deserve to be exempted from war, we find that doing civilian service with conscription or keeping deferments as we pursue our professional careers are acceptable courses of action. But if we Friends really believe that war is wrong, that no man should become the executioner or victim of his brothers, then we will find it impossible to collaborate with the Selective Service System. We will risk being put in prison before we help turn men into murderers.

It matters little what men say they believe when their actions are inconsistent with their words. Thus we Friends may say that all war is wrong, but as long as Friends continue to collaborate in a system that forces men into war, our Peace Testimony will fail to speak to mankind.

Let our lives speak for our convictions. Let our lives show that we oppose not only our own participation in war, but any man's participation in it. We can stop seeking deferments and exemptions, we can stop filling out Selective Service forms, we can refuse to obey induction and civilian work orders. We can refuse to register, or send back draft cards if we've already registered.

In our early history we Friends were known for our courage in living according to our convictions. At times during the 1600's thousands of Quakers were in jails for refusing to pay any special respect to those in power, for worshiping in their own way, and for following the leadings of conscience. But we Friends need not fear we are alone today in our refusal to support mass murder. Up to three thousand Americans severed their relations with the draft at nation-wide draft card turn-ins during 1967 and 1968. There may still be other mass returns of cards, and we can always set our own dates.

We may not be able to change our government's terrifying policy in Vietnam. But we can try to change our own lives. We must be ready to accept the sacrifices involved if we hope to make a real testimony for Peace. We must make Pacifism a way of life in a violent world.

We remain, in love of the Spirit, your Friends and brothers,

Don Laughlin	Stephen Tatum
Roy Knight	Herbert Nichols
Jeremy Mott	Christopher Hodgkin
Ross Flanagan	Jay Harker
Richard Boardman	Bob Eaton
James Brostol	Bill Medlin
George Lakey	Alan & Peter Blood