

How to Create a Conscientious Objector (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.

A conscientious objector is defined by the law as one who, “by reason of religious training and belief, is conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form.” If the draft were reinstated, it is possible that draftees would have two weeks or less to make the case that they fit this definition. The purpose of the CO file is to be prepared, within a short time frame, to demonstrate to a draft board that 1) your objection is based on religious training and belief, 2) you are sincere, and 3) your belief is longstanding, not a sudden ‘conviction’ after being drafted. Young women should also make a file, since it is likely that women would be included in a draft.

Getting Started

It is a good idea to start your CO File in your late teens. Get a pocket folder or large envelope 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. You can download it at AnabaptistFaithFormation.org. Click on Youth then [CO Resources](#). Take time to study, pray and discuss your beliefs with others before filling out the form. An excellent resource for study and reflection is [Decide for Peace](#), a Bible study in a workbook format. Order from store.mennomedia.org or ask if your church already has a copy.

When you have filled out the Christian Peacemaker Registration Form:

Make three copies of it. 

 Mail the original to yourself in a  sealed envelope. Put the unopened, postmarked envelope in your CO File to show when you wrote it.

 Put one copy in your  CO File.

 Give the second copy to your  pastor to keep on file at church.

 Send  the third copy to Central Plains Formation Minister Shana Peachey Boshart, P.O. Box 352, Kalona, IA 52247.

#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 or emails to Congresspersons, charitable contributions, participation in

service projects, etc. Make copies of a speech or paper, the certificate of completion of a training, emails to politicians, 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.

Now you have a good start on your file!

Continue to add things to it as you write papers and do projects, participate in peacemaking activities, and so on. If you are drafted, take your CO 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.

For more information on conscientious objection:

The Center for Conscience and War www.centeronconscience.org

MC USA Peace and Justice Support Network www.pjsn.org

Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Peace and Justice Ministries co.mcc.org