

## **Mennonite Church USA initiates war tax redirection**

*Historic Peace Church affirms legacy; creates “Church Peace Tax Fund”*

Kansas City, Missouri; July 4, 2019—The creation of a “Church Peace Tax Fund” was announced today at the biannual convention of the Mennonite Church USA. This “Church Peace Tax Fund” replaces the denomination’s “War Tax Alternative Fund” and renews its commitment to support, enable and equip those who, because of conscience, are unable to pay taxes that underwrite war and militarism—a religious freedom right of the U.S. Constitution.

This action reaffirms the “Resolution on Faithful Action Toward Tax Withholding” passed by congregational delegates at the 1983 conference in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. That resolution states that “we accept our obligation to pay taxes. However, we must witness to governments our conviction that war and preparation for war do wrong to our neighbors and are contrary to the will of God as revealed in the teachings of Jesus Christ.”

Bearing witness to the good news of Jesus Christ in a world involved with endless war in the pursuit of imperial control, the establishment of this “Church Peace Tax Fund” enables and equips conscientious objectors who are unable for reasons of conscience to pay taxes that underwrite war and militarism. This “Church Peace Tax Fund” will channel conscripted income toward meeting human needs and help to save the planet while providing a faithful testimony to the world regarding Jesus’ way of nonviolence and peace.

Conscripted daily to pay taxes that underwrite killing and war making, many U.S. Mennonites are seeking ways to refrain from paying for war. This plan provides the spiritual resources, human solidarity and material support to enable Mennonites and other people of goodwill to follow the prompting of their Spirit-led consciences and publicly object to paying the taxes that are used to support killing, war making and militarism.

Because paying for war is a form of participation in war, legislation is needed to exempt conscientious objectors from paying taxes for military purposes just as conscientious objectors have received exemption from military service. Thus, Mennonites in the U.S. continue to work for the passage of the Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund Act (H.R. 1947 in the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress) that would allow individuals to designate all of their federal taxes for peaceful purposes.

Historically U.S. Mennonites have supported conscientious objectors with their money:

- The Historic Peace Churches bore the cost of the maintenance of the Civilian Public Service camps where conscientious objectors did their alternative service.
- Donations to the Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Central Committee have since underwritten most of the costs of subsequent Voluntary Service, Pax, Teachers Abroad Programs (TAP) and other church-related alternative service programs.

- More recently, the Mennonite Church USA established the Student Aid Fund for Nonregistrants (SAFNR) to support students who refused on the basis of conscience to register with the U.S. Selective Service.

We fail in our Christian calling if we only celebrate this legacy of witness and do not act during the current era of perpetual war, when our national government conscripts our money, not our bodies, and spends as much on military force as the next seven countries combined--\$716 billion during FY2019!

By creating a Church Peace Tax Fund, Mennonite Church USA will

- Provide a way to redirect resources from war to problem solving programs that, unlike war, are a realistic path to peace.
- Support individuals and their families who experience material loss as a result of their refusal to pay all of or a portion of federal tax assessments allocated to present or past military purposes.
- Underwrite peace education and action in the church.
- Provide a model for doing what the U.S. government has been unable or unwilling to do through the proposed Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund Act.

The “Church Peace Tax Fund” will be underwritten by designated contributions received from individuals and participating congregations. For record-keeping purposes via a mutual Memorandum of Understanding, donors will share with their local congregation whether their donation is a portion of the federal government’s income tax assessment attributable to war which is being redirected from war making to problem solving.

This “Church Peace Tax Fund” urges the U.S. government to curtail military spending and use its citizens’ resources for life affirming purposes. This endeavor has potential to capture the attention of the public, international governments and those involved in the manufacturing and sale of armaments, both in the U.S. and around the world, where it will likely be perceived as a challenge to exorbitant military spending. (Efforts to overcome slavery 150 years ago likewise challenged the “system!”)

In the process, might it be possible that many persons around the globe will become interested in this faithful peace-making pursuit of modern-day Anabaptists?

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