

Minutes of the 2nd Alternate Service Programme meeting held 4.11.1987 in Pretoria.

Present: Rev. P. Verryn (MCSA), S. Britton (Diakonia), Rev. C. Vermulen (PCSA), J. Leach (SUCA), B. Leong (NCPS), D. Kqonqwana (CASA), R. Steele (COSG), F. Crundwell (CSG), D. Waddilove (OSG), O. Gibson (Quakers), H. Lancelor (CPSA), A. Kirsten (ECC), D. Matthews (ELCSA), L. Parsons (CPSA), G. Connel, D. Hazelton, M. Kelly, S. Lowry, J. Boulle. (Catholic)

Apologies: T. Farrell, L. Goemans, R. Robertson, M. Walker, S. Duncan, Archbishop Daniel.

1. Welcome and Prayer lead by Rev P Verryn.
2. Agenda Review.
3. Reportback from Steering Committee.

At the last meeting held 31.08.87 a steering committee was elected. Its tasks were:

1. To redraft the proposal and consult with the broader grouping.
2. To involve other churches.
3. To take the proposal to all the official church structures / bodies.

The proposal has been redrafted, finalised and circulated to everyone. It has already been taken to the Catholic Church. All the other Churches have been approached but have not met yet. As to involving other churches - very little work has been done in this area.

4. News flashes.

Everyone in the room was asked to share the comments and/or feedback that they had received re the proposal. Generally it seems to have been received favourably and has met with enthusiasm and interest in several quarters.

Questions arising out of feedback that need consideration:

1. What is the role of ecumenical bodies and non-church organisations?
2. How do we ensure maximum support for the programme?
3. What are the legal implications of the programme?
4. What about criteria for volunteers? Some concern was expressed about no selection process.
5. How do we involve other churches?

5. Discussion on the message and tone of the ASP.

This was divided into 3 categories:

- What do we want to say to the:
1. Conscript
 2. Church
 3. Government.

A basic package stating the following was agreed upon for all three groups:

A. We oppose conscription:

1. As it denies conscripts the right to choose.
2. Apartheid is evil. The SADF is often used to maintain apartheid.

B. While conscription exists, our interim calls are for:

1. The recognition of all objectors.
2. For the length of alternate service to be the same as that of military service.
3. That objectors be allowed to work in the church and welfare organisations.

The programme is mainly task orientated and that is what is new about it. The major thrust is that it is a pastoral

programme aimed at the objector. The churches already provide for participating conscripts with advice services, chaplains, etc, yet little is done for objectors. The programme is thus a way of restoring parity.

What should we be saying in particular to:

1. The Conscript:

- We should not alienate conscripts. We support them in the dilemma that fighting in the SADF creates. Yet despite this support there must also be an element of challenge.
- Three categories of conscripts were identified.
 - A. The objector. We support these individuals in their stand and the church must give its full backing to them. Our message to this group would be:
 - We realise that the choice is limited. The ASP is a small attempt to expand the choice.
 - The programme is open to all objectors.
 - There is an element of flexibility in the programme. Volunteers can thus play a role in directing it.
 - B. The Unwilling Conscript. Support them in their dilemma and realise the difficult choice facing them. The ASP is an attempt to broaden their choices.
 - C. The Willing Conscript. This includes those who are consciously willing and unconsciously willing. Our role or message here is to encourage the unconsciously willing conscript to ask questions and to challenge him.

2. The Church.

- Explain why the church is embarking on this programme - the history of our approaches to the government and their deafness. It is out of our concern for the objector that the church is being forced to embark on this programme.

- It is a pastoral programme.
- The ASP puts Church resolutions into action. The church will engage the conscript and put itself on the line.
 - The programme challenges the church re its pastoral responsibility. The church is challenged to take sides.
- It was agreed that we should steer away from the traditional just war debates.

3. The State.

- The Churches have a long history of dialogue with the government, yet we still find ourselves with limited alternatives to conscription. This conflicts with the churches teachings on conscience and war.
- Our interim call is for:
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We (the Churches) are now going to put these calls into practice through the ASP.

The idea of sending a delegation, of hierarchy and lay representatives of all the participating churches, to the government to present them with our proposal was raised. (A written document should also be forwarded.) This was accepted with the following cautions:

1. We must in no ways negotiate with the state - simply present our proposal.
2. We need to be aware of how it could be used against us and receive the right to make it public.

On the question of confrontation the following points were

raised:

1. We need to emphasise the right and responsibility of the churches to continue assessing our calls for changes in the law.
2. What we are doing is correct - it is our duty.
3. We have tried to dialogue with no success.
4. Thus our pastoral duty now leads us into this programme and possibly into a confrontation with the state. We should emphasise that our aim is to respond to the needs of conscripts and more particularly, objectors. The state, and not the Church, is the aggressor.

6. Discussion on structures and publicity.

This was not completed and the task was passed on to the steering committee.

Suggestions/Points made were:

Structures:

- Bodies like ECC, COSG, Diakonia etc should have observer status on the supervisory body and participate in other structures.
- There should be some kind of counselling process available for volunteers. They must be prepared for the consequences and sure of their decision.
- The programme must be open to all conscripts at any time (not only when they receive a call-up).

Publicity:

- We need to lobby support for the programme
- Publicity should be around the programme
- Maybe a small booklet, asking questions and advertising the programme, should be produced.

Legality:

- The ASP could contravene Section 121C and the State of Emergency regulations. Yet despite the risk we need to be fulfilling our duty as churches.

7. Steering Committee.

It was agreed that the steering committee be expanded. This task was left to the current group.

Tasks of steering committee:

1. To consider its membership and expand itself.
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