

SOUTHERN AFRICAN CATHOLIC  
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE



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24 September 1987

Dear Friends

Enclosed please find a copy of the next draft of the Alternative Service Programme. The steering committee would like to finalise the document as soon as possible. To help us do this could you please get your comments to us- either by post or telephone- by the 2 October.

If possible we would like to have the document ready by mid-October for the Methodist assembly.

Sorry about the rush.

Yours in Christ

Sheena, Paul, Noel, Brian, Steve and Jacqui.

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SECOND DRAFT

CONSCRIPTION TO MILITARY SERVICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

PROPOSALS FOR AN ALTERNATIVE SERVICE PROGRAMME WITHIN THE CHURCHES

The Churches in South Africa have over a period of many years, addressed themselves to the question of the compulsory conscription of white men into the SADF.

Much work has been done over many years to press for a proper recognition of conscientious objectors. The Defence Amendment Act of 1983 was a crushing disappointment. It established a Board for Religious Objection and limited the recognition of objectors to those who are universal religious pacifists. A tiny minority of people hold to this position.

Only those who are recognised by the Board as being universal pacifists on religious grounds are offered alternative service. This has done nothing to solve the dilemma of conscience which many young South Africans experience,

There are conscientious objections to conscription into the SADF based on the traditional teaching of the church on just war and just revolution. There are conscientious objections to conscription into the SADF on entirely non-religious but moral grounds. Many young men deny that they should be compelled to serve in the armed forces in a cause which is absolutely unjust. None of these objections are recognised in South African laws.



Many young South Africans are resolving this crisis of conscience by leaving the country before the date of their call-up. This is a self imposed exile which cannot end until the political conflict is resolved. A small minority courageously remain to declare their determination to resist conscription and their preparedness to sacrifice by spending up to six years in prison as a consequence of their obedience to conscience.

Many objectors are seeking ways in which their commitment to their country and the service of the people of South Africa can be demonstrated. They are prepared to do "national service" but they are not prepared to fight, or to support the armed forces, in what they believe to be an unjust cause. They wish to render genuine service to their country and its people.

These proposals for an alternative service programme within the churches arise from the churches' duty and obligation to support those who are holding fast to the dictates of conscience and who are prepared to offer a considerable sacrifice as a consequence, and from the churches' desire to persuade the government that conscription to military service is not in accord with Christian teaching and must allow for the recognition of conscientious objection on grounds other than universal religious pacifism.

It must be made absolutely clear that these proposals for an alternative service programme within the churches do not offer any protection to conscientious objectors from the sanctions imposed by the law. It is not a law avoidance or evasion scheme.

Any young person volunteering to work in the church programme is not seeking protection from the consequences of his refusal to obey the law. He is seeking to demonstrate his willingness to serve, at considerable sacrifice to himself, knowing that his service in the church cannot protect him from the term of imprisonment which will be imposed on him by the courts.



The programme offers a way in which the church can express its unconditional support to him, and a way in which the church can demonstrate that its commitment to the cause of freedom of conscience goes beyond words and resolutions to action which is designed to contribute towards changing the law and to terminating any system of compulsory military conscription in South Africa.

For those objectors who do not feel able or called upon to face long terms of imprisonment as a consequence of their refusal and who leave the country the alternative service programme can offer an opportunity to demonstrate their commitment by giving them the possibility of working in the service of the church in Southern African countries on South Africa's borders.

Conscientious objectors in S.A. are accused of cowardice and of seeking to enrich themselves by avoiding national service in order to further their own interests. Any person who is prepared to volunteer to work for the church wherever the church chooses to send him at the same pay as would be paid to a private in the SADF is not seeking to enrich himself. It is the churches duty to enable him to give concrete expression to his commitment. It is the churches duty to persevere in determination to bring compulsory conscription to military service to an end in South Africa.

#### THE PRACTICAL PROPOSALS

The working group has rejected the idea of any kind of Board to test a person's conscientious objection. We do not believe that anyone would be prepared to offer such a sacrifice of time at pay well below the living wage were he to have ulterior motives of avoidance or evasion of conscription. A person seeking to evade for reasons other than conscience will not come to the churches for help.



We suggest the following procedures:

1. The programme should encompass all those who cannot or will not apply to the Board for Religious Objection whether or not they hold any religious belief.
2. The various church denominations will identify those geographical regions and projects where they need person power to carry out programmes as well as needs in secular welfare and community development projects.
3. Each denomination will commit itself to raising the money necessary to employ conscientious objectors in such programmes at the normal rates of pay and allowances for privates in the SADF.
4. Each denomination will commit itself to regional co-operation with other churches and will appoint a representative to a regional placement committee. This placement committee will receive applications for service from C.O. volunteers and will place them in projects of either a denomination or a Regional Council of Churches in the area, or in a secular service organisation operating in the area whose aims and objectives are in accordance with the teachings of the gospel.
5. After the placement has been made the church or ecumenical organisation responsible for the conscientious objector concerned will continue to offer him pastoral support in all ways - prayer counselling, legal advice, legal defence, prison visiting, concern for his family and friends, etc.



6. In dealing with those objectors who cannot face the consequences of remaining in South Africa and defying the law but who want to demonstrate their commitment the regional placement committees will identify places for volunteers in the churches in neighbouring countries and make all arrangements for an objector to be received and put to work in ways which will serve the interests of the people in the country concerned.

The representatives of churches and secular organisations who met in Pretoria on 31st August 1987 request you to present these proposals to your forth coming assembly or Synod and to seek acceptance in principle to the plans for an alternative service programme to be established within the churches in Southern Africa.

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## **END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (ECC)**

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