

The churches are continuously reflecting on the teaching and example of Jesus in an attempt to discover just and Christ-like responses to the SA situation.

In relation to military service in SA, they, along with several secular groups, have pointed out the inadequacy of the provisions of the Defence Amendment Act (1983) which fails to accommodate the bulk of conscientious objectors, and thus criminalises them.

Many potential servicemen who are not "universal" religious pacifists are particularly unwilling to do service in the SADF on the grounds that they would be being used ^{as instruments of} ~~to defend or uphold~~ apartheid, whether on (or beyond) SA's borders or in the townships. They object to fighting and killing fellow South Africans in what they see as ^{an unjust} ~~the~~ cause of an unjust system. However, their objections are not acceptable to the state, and refusal to serve on such grounds is legally a crime.

But for the objectors, their convictions are sincere and of high priority. Hundreds, if not thousands leave the country to avoid military service for which no alternative is provided for them. A further number are now deciding to go to gaol rather than accept military conscription or self-exile.

Efforts to widen the scope of the Board for Religious Objection, both to recognise objectors of conscience rather than only those of religious views, and also to allow a greater range of alternative services and of bodies in which these may be performed, have gone unheeded. Young men are now being imprisoned for long periods for refusing to serve.

The churches have now decided upon the idea of creating their own programme ~~is~~ : the Churches' Alternative National Service Programme (CANSP). While this has no legal validity as an alternative to military service commitments or to the Religious Objections Board's offer of alternative "community" service for the few, it is hoped that it may witness to the willingness of objectors to undertake positive creative service to the community, even at pay, length of service etc equal to those of military servicemen. It could also prove a valuable service to the community, and therefore provide a model of a true national service provision for those rejecting the military option, while conscription lasts.

This programme is now launched, and we are asking the help of all clergy in bringing their churches actively into it and making young people aware of it.

The idea is that churches will offer vacancies in their own structures and welfare bodies, or those of other bodies they approve, or create new ^{benefitting the community} jobs in order to have work to offer that will not take work out of the labour market from ordinary jobseekers.

If a church offers a placement, it will undertake to employ a person for a time equal to the portion of his initial period of basics (2 years) owing to the military. For that time it will pay him at army rates (see attached). The church will also insure the man against the hazards of his work, support him in times of illness, and assist or obtain assistance with any legal fees involved in his stand. Some churches might combine to provide the several aspects of his work, supervision, and pay, so long as they can together provide a sound system of employment, care and support for the volunteer. He should also have access at all times to counselling, which is available in most main centres through the Conscription Advice Service (CAS. See list below), so that he can make informed decisions about his call-up in relation to the state's requirements under the Defence Act. This programme will provide information, support and guidance to churches involved, and will find suitable incumbents for vacancies from among applicants.

Please discuss this with your youth groups and parents in your parish. If you have vacancies or can make placements, let your diocesan office (or equivalent) know details, so that positions can be offered to our placement committee and suitable applicants found to come for interview. This will imply that your church / congregation accepts the undertaking mentioned above for a minimum period of 2 years.

We shall be glad to answer any questions and also to find placements for conscientious objectors (COs) whose churches have not come into the scheme or cannot provide suitable places for them.

Young people can also get into touch with our office direct for any information, and are encouraged to take personal problems or uncertainties about conscription to the CAS counsellors nearest to them, so that they can clarify their position and options, and have time to think these through as soon as possible, even if they need modification later.

A booklet "National Service: A Christian Reflection" has been prepared for young people considering these matters together in groups ^{and churches joining the scheme.}. We shall be glad to supply copies (please specify numbers) to your church office on request.

<u>CAS Counsellors</u>	<u>Area</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Tel.No</u>
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Collection Number: AG1977

END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (ECC)

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive

Location:- Johannesburg

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