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# NATIONAL SERVICE AND SELECTIVE SERVICE REFORM

*(Adopted by the Fifth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church October 21-27, 1970, paragraphs 6-8 "as a policy statement, normative for governing the corporate decisions and actions of all units of The American Lutheran Church," paragraphs 1-5 "as a statement expressing the judgment and corporate conviction of The American Lutheran Church as its contribution to the discussions seeking an informed solution to a difficult problem of contemporary life and society.")*

1. Service to the nation takes many forms. In a broad sense it includes all endeavors which contribute to the well-being of the country. More specifically it refers to those activities, determined by the Congress to be in the national interest, in which men and women may participate apart from the normal patterns of their occupational training. National service includes social services as well as military activities. Such service usually is for a short period of time and may be on either a voluntary or a mandatory basis. The Peace Corps, VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), the Teachers' Corps, community action programs, and military duty are examples of national service.

2. National service accomplishes more than the meeting of critical needs of national defense. It also engages the energies and idealism of men and women in peaceful and constructive pursuits. Among these are teaching, community and agricultural development, health care services, and conservation measures both in this country and abroad. Such social service normally should be on a voluntary basis.

3. Current public attention is focused upon reform of the Selective Service System. Americans traditionally have regarded military conscription as a measure for times of national crisis. For most of the period since the Second World War, however, conscription has been a regular feature of public policy. We believe that serious consideration should be given to the feasibility of providing for the regular military defense needs of the country through a voluntary defense force. We favor the use of additional incentives to attract the needed numbers of volunteers. At the same time, we support provisions for conscription as authorized by Congress in time of declared national emergencies. If the President and the Congress should determine that conscription is necessary that decision should be subjected to periodic public scrutiny as to its continued necessity.

4. We believe that the recent amendment of the Selective Service Act which permits the selection of draftees by an impartial system of random choice and makes possible the limitation of maximum vulnerability to the draft to those between the ages of 19 and 20 is a significant improvement. If conscription must be retained, the Selective Service Act should be

amended further in at least the following ways in order to provide increased protection to the registrants:

a. Draftees, determined by an impartial random selection, should be called on a national basis rather than on the basis of a quota established for each local board.

b. Ministerial student exemptions should be repealed. Student deferments should be designed so as to make students, upon completion of a school year, eligible for impartial random selection along with other registrants. Deferments should be continued for specified hardship cases.

c. Occupational deferments should be discontinued except for persons with specialized skills essential for national defense. The granting of such deferments should be carefully scrutinized.

d. Local boards, if they are retained, and appeal boards should include a representative cross-section of the various economic and ethnic concerns and age groups of the area.

e. The administration of the Selective Service System should be revised so as to provide a greater degree of national uniformity in procedures, regulations, and guidelines for the classification of registrants.

f. The procedural rights of individuals should be given increased protection by requiring that each registrant be given a statement of his rights and responsibilities and of the procedures of the Selective Service System; by allowing legal counsel at all hearings and appeals and adhering to normal judicial standards of due process; by providing for legal service to registrants, similar to that of the public defender system; and by permitting prompt judicial review of a contested classification before the person is required to report for induction.

5. The Congress has provided for alternate service in the case of citizens who object on religious grounds to participation in any and all wars. This provision both affirms validity of religious training that forms the conscience and recognizes that a democracy must protect the personal integrity of its citizens. Such religious training and protection of personal integrity are necessary for the welfare of a democracy. These provisions in the law are a response to the appeals of many religious groups through the years, and now receive the general support of sensitive Americans. We believe it is time now to amend the Selective Service Act so as to provide alternate forms of national service to those who object to war on moral and philosophical grounds other than specifically religious considerations. In addition we believe it is time also to amend the act to provide alternate forms of national service to those who object on religious, moral, and philosophical grounds to participation in a specific war.\*

\*Recent regulations announced by the Selective Service Director may already grant alternate forms of national service for those who object to war on social and philosophical grounds other than the specifically religious, but require that the registrant appear before his draft board to convince the board of the sincerity of his views. He also has the right of appeal to his appeals board, and thereafter to the courts.

6. Few judgments of conscience can be made categorically, applying in all times and in all places. Most such judgments are made in reference to particular situations, in light of dominant moral values. The exercise of moral judgment accepts the legitimacy of service in the armed forces. The exercise of moral judgment also requires the acceptance of the principle of selective conscientious objection. Furthermore, Christian faith and the Lutheran heritage hold that every person has the right and the responsibility to make his decisions in the love of God, in obedience to His living Word, and in service to his neighbor, not excepting decisions relating to military service. *War, Peace, and Freedom*, adopted by the 1966 General Convention, affirms that a Christian's expected obedience to government policy must not violate his conscience (para. 14). The Christian is personally accountable to God for his moral judgments and actions on matters of public policy.

7. Alternate service allows a democratic society to respect the claims of conscience without forcing objectors into imprisonment, exile, or a seriously compromised integrity. At the same time the public interest is protected. Claims of selective conscientious objectors should be examined as to their sincerity and depth of moral conviction according to nationally established criteria and uniform procedures.

8. The ALC encourages Christians to active participation in service to the nation. It teaches the responsibility of all citizens to contribute to the needs of the country in ways appropriate to their skills. The ALC is grateful to its chaplains who minister to those of its members who serve the military needs of the nation. The church also renders pastoral care and understanding to persons in agony of conscience, and pleads that avenues of alternate service be open to them. Along with the 1968 General Convention, The ALC today "urges its members, and especially its pastors, to counsel with and stand by those who conscientiously object to military service as consistently as they counsel with and stand by those who for equal reasons of conscience serve in the armed forces. It warns against attempts to judge a person's patriotism or his Christian faith by his willingness or unwillingness to render military service" (*Reports and Actions*, p. 486).

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