

NONCOMBATANCY

(Conscientious Objection to Bearing Arms)

Seventh-day Adventists, by their historical position, are noncombatants. From the very beginning of the Church the principle of noncombatancy has been held by Seventh-day Adventists. This was officially registered with the Federal Government at the time of the Civil War.

Selective Service regulations in the United States stipulate that individuals who are classified as conscientious objectors, but who are willing to engage in noncombatant military service shall be classified as 1-A-O. In Executive Order Number 10028 issued 13 January 1949, the President of the United States defined noncombatant service and training as follows:

1. The term 'noncombatant service' shall mean (a) service in any unit of the armed forces which is unarmed at all times; (b) service in the medical department of any of the armed forces, wherever performed; or (c) any other assignment of the primary function of which does not require the use of arms in combat; provided that such other assignment is acceptable to the individual concerned and does not require them to bear arms or to be trained in their use.
2. The term 'noncombatant training' shall mean any training which is not concerned with the study, use, or handling of arms or weapons.

Department of Defense Directives and regulations in each of the Armed Forces outline the steps to be taken for individuals on active duty who object to bearing arms.

The official stand of the Church, adopted from the action taken at the 1972 Annual Council, is

Genuine Christianity manifests itself in good citizenship and loyalty to civil government. The breaking out of war among men in no way alters the Christian's supreme allegiance and responsibility to God or modifies their obligation to practice their beliefs and put God first.

This partnership with God through Jesus Christ who came into this world not to destroy men's lives but to save them causes Seventh-day Adventists to advocate a noncombatant position, following their divine Master in not taking human life, but rendering all possible service to save it. As they accept the obligation of citizenship as well as its benefits, their loyalty to government requires them willingly to serve the state in any noncombatant capacity, civil or military, in war or peace, in uniform or out of it, which will contribute to saving life, asking only that they may serve in those capacities which do not violate their conscientious convictions.

This statement is not a rigid position binding church members, but gives guidance leaving the individual member free to assess the situation for her or himself.

1. For members in the United States, the counsel of the Church is that the above action is best reflected at present by the 1-A-O classification (military service as a noncombatant) under Selective Service regulations, and

2. A member in the United States making his personal decision on how to fulfill his obligated term of service to the country shall first consider the historic teaching of the Church on noncombatancy which could lead him to choose the 1-A-O classification. If because of personal convictions he chooses to seek other than a 1-A-O classification his pastor, teacher, or other church worker should aid him in satisfying the legal requirements for securing the classification of his choice and should minister to his spiritual needs as follows:

a. For those choosing the 1-O classification (civilian alternative service in lieu of military service), pastoral guidance and counsel should be provided when it is established that such a request is based on consistent religious experience. Pastors, teachers, or other workers should provide statements of their personal knowledge of the man's position on the following: (1) church membership, (2) attendance and participation in services of the church, (3) personal standards of conduct, (4) previous expressions of belief supporting his request for the 1-O classification. Those providing such statements should request the draft board to respect and honor the man's personal convictions. Such statements will be placed in the registrant's hand to be used at his discretion.

b. For those who conscientiously choose the 1-A classification (military service as a combatant), pastoral guidance and counsel should be provided in ministering to their needs since the Church refrains from passing judgment on them.

Notice that the Seventh-day Adventist Church *advocates a non-combatant position* but does not require it. Thus you may find some church members who are very willing to train with and use weapons, and others who can not, because of their own individual conscience, have anything to do with weapons or military service. Historically, the bulk of Seventh-day Adventist have served as noncombatant medics for several reasons: 1) It is in an area of service where there are minimal Sabbath conflicts (saving and maintaining life is honorable on Sabbath), and 2) it is most clearly in harmony with the Church's stated recommendation.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not seek to be the conscience for any member or commander. But we do seek to inform the conscience and behavior of both, so decisions can be made with maximum rather than minimum understanding and thought.

Information provided by Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904. For further information, please contact ACM by calling (301) 680-6780. Email: acm@gc.adventist.org. Website: www.adventistchaplains.org