

Resource Packet for Organizers



Compiled by Emily Luhrs, The Peace Abbey Nov 2009

For Organizers

How can you help promote peace person by person in your community?

By spreading awareness on the National Registry for Conscientious Objectors by bringing the Registry to your community!

Background:

The intent of The National Registry for Conscientious Objection is to emphasize one's absolute dedication to peaceful living and to peaceful resolution of conflict. The Peace Abbey in Sherborn, Ma began the National Registry in 1991 and is now committed to providing community organizations and universities with their own Registry. As more and more people begin thinking about peaceful alternatives to war and conflicts and sign their community's registry, a culture of peace will continue to grow.

The National Registry goes beyond the traditional notion of Conscientious Objection from war and allows anyone, regardless of gender, age, religion, or political affiliation to declare their commitment to an actively non-violent life as well as spread that message to their country. We recognize that there is no current draft in our country and that many of us may never be asked to fight in a war (although if there were to be a draft women would be included), but conscientious objection is more than "Getting out of or avoiding war." It is by being an active member of your community and devoted citizen to your country that works to create nonviolent means to conflict. In taking this public declaration of your lifestyle, it becomes part of your identity. The affirmation statement reads:

I Hereby Affirm That: Because of my deeply held beliefs about peace, justice and non-violence, I am opposed to the use of violence to settle disputes. Furthermore, I wish to make public my decision not to participate in any group, organization or agency of government that would require from me acts of violence against a fellow human being.

I sign The Registry for Conscientious Objection to have my position on peace, justice and non-violence duly recorded as a way of life that I embrace and am totally committed to.

More info can be found online at peaceabbey.org/confcenter/coregistry.htm

Costs: The National Registry for Conscientious Objection costs \$250. The first step is to work with an organization/group of people that can help donate and fundraise. One possibility is to have 25 people donate \$10 each and they would become the first 25 people to you're your Registry. Housing the Registry is also a necessary component to owning a Registry and you may decide to purchase a display case for secure public viewing. Each group can do this differently but it must be secure as well as easily accessible for signing ceremonies, and ideally in a space for people to view it regularly.

Planning: A kick-off event is ideal for bringing the Registry to your community in which you invite all those interested in learning about Conscientious Objections as well as those wishing to sign the registry. *See event write-up of a successful kick-off event is included in this packet and replication/modification is greatly encouraged!* Aspects of the initial and ongoing events could include: brief history of Conscientious Objection, testimonies from local Conscientious Objectors, dialogue on incorporating nonviolence into your life, question and answer session, discussion on taking nonviolent actions, sign-up for action table, planning for nonviolent actions, counter-recruitment, etc, concluding with the Signing ceremony.

Signing Ceremony: The signing ceremony, the basis of this initiative, should be replicated by The Peace Abbey model. Its intention is to create a serious and supportive environment that will be memorable for the signers, as they are publicly declaring their identity as COs. The room should be quiet, with the Registry placed open on a table (see photos below). Invite someone to light a candle on the table in front of the Registry. The leader of the event/ceremony invites signers up one by one. Each signer chooses 2 witnesses to sign (nice to have one on each side of new CO). Therefore, a ceremony should always include at least 3 people. The signer will first read the statement to his/herself silently then read it aloud to make their commitment public. Then they sign, witnesses sign, they are congratulated and given a card with the statement. If many people are signing, the process will continue silently as follows until everyone has signed. People may also wish to have their picture taken as they sign, so be sure to have a camera handy.

Perks: The individual who brings the National Registry to their community and initiates the signing ceremony will receive \$100 stipend from The Peace Abbey made possible by a grant from the James R. and Mary Jane Barrett Foundation in order to promote Conscientious Objection.

Sustainability: In order to keep the National Registry for Conscientious Objection *alive and growing* it is necessary to have a *point person* for each Registry that goes out, and to secure a *subsequent point person* to take over when one leaves. This person will remain in contact with the Conscientious Objector Campus Outreach Organizer to provide feedback and updates on the status of the Registry.

Current Campus Outreach contact Emily: emilyluhrs@gmail.com or call The Peace Abbey at 508-655-2143

National Conscientious Objector Registry Event Write-Up Length of time 2.5-3 hours (including welcoming/break/snacks)

Materials Needed:

1. People: 2-5 Facilitators (greeter, Introducer, dialogue instructor, facilitators for dialogue groups, extra witnesses for signing ceremony)
2. National Registry for Conscientious Objection \$250 (order from Peace Abbey)
3. Commitment wallet cards with oath (see below)
4. Resource Packets for Conscientious Objectors (copies for everyone)
5. Snacks -You might consider supporting a local business/restaurant and ordering local vegan/vegetarian food. FYI Samosas are a big hit
6. Tea/beverage
7. Hot water heater
8. Mugs/cups (consider reusable dishware)
9. Paper goods (plates, napkins, utensils)
10. Candle for ceremony
11. Chairs for speakers
12. Chairs for Participants (easily moveable into circles for dialogue)
13. Table for Book
14. Table for Food
15. Table for pamphlets, materials, sign-up for action sheets
16. Music player for light Peaceful music during welcome and break

Room set-up:

Reserve a nice enclosed space for dialogue and ceremony. If having guest speakers, set up chairs for them in front. Rows of chairs for Participants in back.

Table with the Registry displayed (or in display case) in front area of the room with a nice backdrop for picture taking, easy access for participants to walk up from chairs.

Tables in back with resources/sign up sheet and food/drink.

Time:

0:20-0:30 - **Greet**, snacks, and snacks, music playing

0:35-0:45 – **Introduction**-including history of CO (see below)

Have someone introduce speakers (may want explain not to ask questions until break depending on time)

0:45-1:25 – **Speakers**- Local COs speak/ Other speakers (ex: 3 COs from the Vietnam War shared their powerful stories, talking about what led up to their decision to be a CO, how they have lived that commitment, and how we can prepare ourselves to live a nonviolent life/become a CO)

1:25-1:55 – **Dialogue**- Have a Dialogue facilitator introduce dialogue, go over dialogue agreements, break into 4-5 groups

Dialogue Agreements taken from the Difficult Dialogues Initiative:

When speaking and listening:

Suspend Judgment listen to gain understanding

Allow equal Time for all voices within the circle

Speak not to Persuade but so others can gain an understanding of your point of view

Speak for Yourself rather than speaking for others

Be an Active Listener concentrate on listening to the speaker, rather than thinking ahead to what you will say next

Process

Confidentiality what's shared in the circle, stays in the circle

It's OK to Pass

Facilitators each take a group and move chairs into circles.

Explain Conversation Café style Dialogue: Each person says name before they speak. Go around circle once, so everyone gets an equal chance to speak (without responding to each other). Then open up for discussion/popcorn style.

Facilitator keeps track of time and makes sure agreements are upheld.

Facilitator Leads: There are four levels to practicing peace

1. Individual- inner peace ex: foster individual practice, daily mantra,
2. Interpersonal- daily interactions with others ex: workplace, roommates people you pass by
3. Community/Worcester- interactions with people you don't know personally, how you contribute to your community, neighborhood, etc
4. Global- contribute to eradicating violence, war, organizing for peaceful alternatives

Discussion questions:

- How can you practice nonviolence and uphold your CO status (if you chose to sign) in your everyday life? (go thru the 4 levels, or have each person talk about one level)

Additional questions for discussion:

- Think about how you want to live your life in a more peaceful way.
- What does it mean to be a CO?
- What is an example of violence that you see in your everyday life that you can let go or transform into nonviolence?
- How can we resist war and violence to solve disputes? Discuss possible alternatives and offer solutions
- How might this be a difficult thing to do? What issues may arise?

1:55-2:00- **Bring it back** (with entire group): Dialogue Facilitator asks what were the emerging themes, differing views. Goals of dialogue/this event. Tie in to everyday life.

2:00 – 2:15 **Snacks and Resource table browsing**

2:00-3:00 (or less) – **Signing Ceremony**

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**Organizer's Introduction:** Taken from Oct 30, 2009 event for Clark University and Worcester, MA Peace Community

Welcome, I want to first thank you for taking time this afternoon to learn about those that have let their conscience lead them and consider becoming a conscientious objector yourself by signing Worcester and Clark's own National Registry for Conscientious Objection. FYI, I will be using CO, in replace of Conscientious Objector. I'd like to start with a quote by Henry David Thoreau from Civil Disobedience ...

"Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man (human) a conscience then? I think that we should be men (human) first and subjects afterward...The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think is right."

Layout of event:

Today's event will include a brief history of conscientious objection, personal testimonies by two local COs from the Vietnam war, and a conversation café style dialogue followed by a break. At this break you may carry on discussion, have a chance to talk with COs and decide whether you want to sign the registry today. If you do wish to make your public declaration to a life as a conscientious objector or wish to witness the signing, we will be reconvening in this room for the ceremony.

So what is this National Registry?:

The intent of The National Registry for Conscientious Objection is to emphasize one's absolute dedication to peaceful living and to peaceful resolution of conflict. The Peace Abbey in Sherborn, Ma began the National Registry in 1991 and is now committed to providing community organizations and universities with their own Registry. As more and more people begin thinking about peaceful alternatives to war and conflicts and sign their community's registry, a culture of peace will continue to grow.

The National Registry goes beyond the traditional notion of Conscientious Objection from war and allows anyone, regardless of gender, age, religion, or political affiliation to declare their commitment to an actively non-violent life as well as spread

that message to their country. We recognize that there is no current draft in our country and that many of us may never be asked to fight in a war (although if there were to be a draft women would be included), but conscientious objection is more than “Getting out of or avoiding war.” It is by being an active member of your community and devoted citizen to your country that works to create nonviolent means to conflict. In taking this public declaration of your lifestyle, it becomes part of your identity. The affirmation statement reads (text on wallet cards):

*I Hereby Affirm That: Because of my deeply held beliefs about peace, justice and non-violence, I am opposed to the use of violence to settle disputes. Furthermore, I wish to make public my decision not to participate in any group, organization or agency of government that would require from me acts of violence against a fellow human being. I sign The Registry for Conscientious Objection to have my position on peace, justice and non-violence duly recorded as a way of life that I embrace and am totally committed to.*

#### History:

Surprisingly, a tradition of refusing military service—and the recognition of that right—can be traced to the first settlers of our nation. The founders of the United States were pacifists and did not believe the United States would ever need a standing army, therefore did not include the clause about conscientious objection in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment.

- ❑ At the onset of the Revolutionary War, **George Washington** issued a draft order which was a call to “all young men of suitable age to be drafted, **except those with conscientious scruples against war.**”
- ❑ Civil War, the **conscription law of the north provided for alternative military service for religious objectors** and men could buy their way out for \$300, but those who refused to cooperate were treated with extreme measures including being forced to sit under fire through the Battle of Gettysburg.
- ❑ World War I ushered in the first draft since the Civil War and policies that were **even less tolerant of conscientious objectors; of the 2.8 million draftees, only 4,000 men served in the military as unarmed, legal C.O.s. 17 draft resisters died** of mistreatment in Alcatraz Prison.
- ❑ WWII 42,000 young men refused to fight. Many WWII COs worked in civilian work camps. Because this was referred to as “The Good War” they were often viewed as cowards by their friends and family.
- ❑ Vietnam War, when 170,000 men were officially recognized as C.O.s; huge numbers also resisted by burning their draft cards and/or fleeing the country. This was first time in US history when draft resistance became mass resistance.

- ❑ Gulf War - 2,500 men and women, already enlisted, refused to serve in Saudi Arabia on the basis of conscience.
- ❑ The draft has been suspended for over 25 years **but registration is still a legal** requirement for all male U.S. residents at age 18 with a penalty of \$10,000 fine or jail time for refusal. Registration resisters have not been prosecuted since the early 80's, but **registration is required for college loans, admission to state schools in a number of states and government employment.**
- ❑ If drafted, you only have a week or two to register as a CO. You have to declare CO or hardship the first week of the draft. No longer student deferments, although they allow you to finish the current term. The only occupational deferments are for ministers or ministry students.
- ❑ All males living in the US and US citizens could be drafted. If the draft is re-instated women will probably be included.

The questions asked on an application to become a CO are as follows. Think about these questions as you contemplate becoming a CO today or in the future.

1. What do you believe about war?
2. How did you develop those beliefs?
3. How do these beliefs influence your life?

If you apply to become a CO, you will have to go in front of draft board, be sincere and focus on what you know.

(Historical info from *The Good War and Those who refused to fight it* ).

Conclusion: And finally, I will conclude with an excerpt from an open letter by The Shministim, Refusniks in Israel for conscientious reasons on the importance of dialogue and standing up for your beliefs.

“We are not refusing to serve the society we live in but are protesting against the occupation and the ways of actions which the militaristic system holds as it is today—crushing civil rights, discriminating on a racial base and acting opposing to international laws... In a place where there are humans, there is someone to talk to. Therefore, we ask to *create a dialogue that goes beyond the power struggle*, the retaliation and one-sided attrition actions; to disprove the “No partner” myth, which is leading to a lose-lose situation of ongoing frustration, and to move to more humane methods... We cannot hurt in the name of defense or imprison in the name of freedom; therefore we cannot be moral and serve the occupation.” (december18.org)

- ❑ Conscientious objection has never enjoyed popular support but opposition to war is here to stay. And that is the American way—the freedom to stand up for what you believe, even if it goes against the tide,
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It is fitting that the pacifist be bold in the knowledge that he or she (however unworthy) is with the prophets, and his or her inquisitors (however worthy) are speaking for the dead past out of which humankind is creeping. It is not right that the advocates of love should apologize or flinch.

Handbook for Conscientious Objectors Eighth Edition, 1965

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**Below Are Sample Letters and Flyer to get you started on Planning an event.  
See Resource Packet for Conscientious Objection for more Information.  
Good Luck!**

**Sample of Initial Donor E-mail:** *send to your contacts, listserves, peace groups, socially conscious groups, social networking sites....*

Dear Worcester Peace Activists,

You have likely received an e-mail or call from me before explaining the initial steps involved in purchasing a National Registry at Clark and I would like you to consider reading the attached letter inviting you to be a sponsor of this project. If not, I have received your contact information due to your involvement in peace building/community building in the Worcester and Clark area.

Attached is a donation/sign-up form to be a part of the National Registry for Conscientious Objection in the Worcester and Clark Community. The plan is for book to be housed at Clark University initially but possibly have it rotate among various peace groups/universities in Worcester especially during special events.

In order to bring this registry to our community we need at least 25 initial sponsors. This is the only time this project will ask you for financial help because the only costs are the book, \$250 total or 25 people at \$10 each.

Please take a few minutes to read the attached letter and think about your personal commitment to nonviolence. If this is something you feel strongly about and would like to know more about future plans please send me an e-mail (Do NOT hit Reply All) and I would be happy to keep you informed. Additionally, I am only one person, so if you know of other local peace activists (especially undergrads) please forward this along or send me their contact information. We will be holding events and discussion groups in the fall to discuss being a Conscientious Objector and appreciate all input. At our initial signing ceremony we are aiming to invite local Worcester Politicians, Peace Activists, and fellow COs to join as witnesses.

Thank you for your support!

**Sample Donation Form: *Tailor to fit your organization***

National Registry for Conscientious Objection for (your organization)  
Donation Form

**The National Registry is a national campaign to promote peacemaking as a practical ideal: a way of living in the present that represents our best hope for the future. It seeks to inspire peace and justice in society by inviting peacemakers everywhere to register their conscientious objection to violence, and in so doing, to share with others their commitment to a peaceful world. The intent of The National Registry for Conscientious Objection is to emphasize one's absolute dedication to peaceful living and to peaceful resolution of conflict. It is only by committing ourselves to peaceful living that peace will in fact prevail, in our lives and on the planet.**

My name is \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ University and. I invite you to support the global call for peace by spreading pacifism to our local community. In order to bring the Registry to \_\_\_\_\_ University and/or \_\_\_\_\_ community we need an initial group of twenty-five people to donate \$10 each. Your Donation will cover the costs of \$250 National Registry for Conscientious Objection book.

As one of the first twenty-five people in the \_\_\_\_\_ community to support this project, you will be honored by becoming one of the first twenty-five names in the Registry signing held at \_\_\_\_\_ University. (insert date of signing ceremony), a signing ceremony will be held for all those who wish to record their commitment to pacifism while witnessed by \_\_\_\_\_ local Conscientious Objectors, friends, and community members. Additionally, by signing, you join the network of all others who have declared publicly their commitment to Conscientious Objection throughout the country.

Signing the Registry requires thoughtful consideration and we request you reflect on how your wish to live your life as an active pacifist before signing.

**Affirmation Statement:**

*I Hereby Affirm That: Because of my deeply held beliefs about peace, justice and non-violence, I am opposed to the use of violence to settle disputes. Furthermore, I wish to make public my decision not to participate in any group, organization or agency of government that would require from me acts of violence against a fellow human being.*

*I sign The Registry for Conscientious Objection to have my position on peace, justice and non-violence duly recorded as a way of life that I embrace and am totally committed to.*

*Please detach lower half and include with check payable to The Peace Abbey to (your address):*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Sample Event Flyer:

# **SERIOUS ABOUT PEACE?**

If you believe peaceful alternatives to war exist, consider becoming a Conscientious Objector and sign Worcester's own

## **National Registry for Conscientious Objection**

**Friday, Oct 30<sup>th</sup>.**

**3:30 Dialogue followed by signing ceremony**

**Fishbowl room, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor of Dana Commons off  
Maywood St. Clark University**

Join in an afternoon of Dialogue on war resistance, learn about history of Conscientious Objection, meet with local COs, followed by a signing ceremony

The National Registry for Conscientious Objection provides the opportunity for men and women of any age to declare their commitment to non-violent living while spreading the message of peace to their country. By signing the registry we can work to bring peace into this world by rejecting violent means.

Questions? Want to donate \$10 and be one of the first 25 to sign the Registry?

Contact Emily: [eluhrs@clarku.edu](mailto:eluhrs@clarku.edu), 252-617-5857, [Peaceabbey.org](http://Peaceabbey.org)

**“Not all heroes fight on the battlefield.”**

Co-sponsored by Clark Difficult Dialogues, Clark Newman, Worcester Catholic Worker House, members of the Center for Nonviolent Solutions