

PRESBYTERIANS AND MILITARY SERVICE



The Draft—Q and A

What is the draft?

The draft is compulsory enrollment in the armed services. The last draft in the United States occurred during the Vietnam War. Registering for the draft is not the same as enlisting to serve with the armed services. While registering for the draft is required and is unique to men, enlisting in the armed services is not required but is an option for both men and women in the United States.

Is there a draft now?

There is no draft in the United States at the present time; the last draft ended in 1973.

What is needed to reinstate the draft?

The draft can be reinstated at any time by an act of Congress. If Congress does authorize a draft, the first draftees may be inducted within two weeks. Two organizations that monitor the status of the draft are:

Center on Conscience & War
www.centeronconscience.org

Central Committee for
Conscientious Objectors
www.objector.org

Who registers for the draft?

Although there is no draft at present, almost all male U.S. citizens and male aliens living in the U.S. who are aged 18 through 25 are required to register with the Selective Service System (SSS).

See www.sss.gov/must.htm for a chart of who must register. Young men have a 60-day period, beginning 30 days before their 18th birthday, in which to register. Currently, women are not required to register. Congress would have to act for this to change. Almost all draft bills recently introduced in Congress include women.

How and where do I register for the draft?

You register by filling out a form at a local post office, an overseas consular office, or in other ways approved by the SSS, including online at www.sss.gov, over the phone, or in many states by applying for a driver's license.

What if I am a conscientious objector to war?

You may choose to register. If you do, consider registering on paper. Write on the front of the registration form that you are a conscientious objector. Make a copy of the form for yourself and a copy of the form for the PC(USA). This is a first step in establishing your beliefs, even though the SSS will not recognize your statement.

Classification as a conscientious objector by the SSS would occur only after a draft is reinstated and your lottery number is chosen. Should this occur, it is likely that there will only be a short time to demonstrate your status as a conscientious objector. This makes it important to begin documenting your position now. Noting that position on your registration form is a step in that process. If you live in a state where registration takes place upon receiving a driver's license, consider registering for the draft before you receive your driver's license so you can make your statement as a conscientious objector.

What if in good conscience I decide not to register?

The law requires men to register at age 18. Failure to comply with the law and regulations of the Selective Service System is a felony. Nevertheless, some young men opposed to the act of and/or preparation for war have refused to register.

There are some potential consequences of refusing to register. Prosecution with a penalty of up to five years in prison and/or a fine up to \$250,000 is possible. No one has been prosecuted for doing this since 1985. Federal law also requires that young men be registered for the draft before they can be eligible for federal financial aid for higher education or job training programs. Failure to register may also result in denial of federal employment and, in some states, denial of state employment and a driver's license.

If this is your stance:

- Check with the Center on Conscience & War at 800-379-2679 to make sure you are aware of all possible consequences.
- Begin to prepare spiritually and psychologically for possible trial and imprisonment.
- Talk with your family, pastor, and session.
- Contact the Center on Conscience & War (www.centeronconscience.org) for referral to an attorney knowledgeable about current draft law.
- Keep records of your conscientious conviction and behavior.
- Send a copy of your beliefs to the Stated Clerk in the Office of the General Assembly as described an earlier question about registering as a conscientious objector.

What special circumstances may be taken into account if a draft occurs under current U.S. law?

1. Postponements, deferments, and exemptions are allowed for physical and mental health conditions, extreme hardship to dependents, ministerial students and ministers, and those whose father, brother, or sister were killed in action or died as a result of injury or illness incurred while on active duty.
2. A special service category of conscientious objector is provided for persons with moral, ethical, or religious objections to participation in war.
3. If you are the only child in your family, you can still be drafted.

4. There are no student deferments, but induction can be postponed until you complete the term or graduate if you are in the last year of school.
5. This classification system does not go into effect until a draft is authorized.

Once induction orders are issued there will be the opportunity to claim classifications. As it stands, draftees would have 10 days (or less) to return SSS Form 8 or Form 9, making their initial classification claims for deferment, exemption, or conscientious objector status. The rules and regulations for the Selective Service System are published in the Code of Federal Regulations at Title 32—National Defense, Chapter XVI—Selective Service System, Parts 1600-1699.

PC(USA) Policy

195TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY (1983)
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

1. "Reaffirms previous General Assembly pronouncements (UPCUSA) 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1973, 1979, and 1981) opposing peacetime conscription and supporting the rights of individuals to exercise their consciences.
2. Directs the Co-Stated Clerks to communicate to members of Congress that this Assembly favors the repeal of the Military Selective Service Act and the cessation of funding for draft registration.
3. Urges agencies, governing bodies, and individual Presbyterians to work for the repeal of laws that deny funding of employment training or financial aid for students who exercise their conscience and to support legal challenges to those laws so long as they exist.
4. Affirms that the church has a responsibility in the formation of conscience in its members . . .
5. Urges all ministers and governing bodies to provide competent draft counseling for young men as they approach the age of 18 so they can make informed, conscientious decisions as they face draft registration.
6. Urges churches and governing bodies to provide counseling and support, especially for those who conscientiously refuse to cooperate with the Selective Service system . . .
7. Urges Presbyterian attorneys to make their services available to non-registrants on a pro-bono basis, and to register their willingness with an appropriate General Assembly agency to be designated by the new program structures of the Presbyterian Church.
8. Reminds Presbyterian conscientious objectors that they can register with the Co-Stated Clerk's offices; and urges them to do so to help document their claims, since Selective Service regulations will not allow them to file as a conscientious objector until after they receive an induction order.

▪ Minutes, 1983, p. 358

FOR MORE INFORMATION

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

www.pcusa.org

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SELECTIVE SERVICE SYSTEM

www.sss.gov

CENTER ON CONSCIENCE & WAR

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www.centeronconscience.org

CENTRAL COMMITTEE FOR CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

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AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

Youth and Militarism—
Conscientious Objection
www.afsc.org/youthmil/conscientious-objection/default.htm

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Presbyterians and Military Service Series

- Enlistment—Q and A
- The Draft—Q and A
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- Selective Conscientious Objection and Just War Principles—Q and A
- Resources on Military Service, the Draft and Conscientious Objection

Series available at
www.pcusa.org/oga/conscientious-objection.htm

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