

Methodist pension board complies with IRS under protest: Levy against war-tax resisters

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A Portland, Oregon, couple that has refused for years to pay federal income taxes in a protest against warfare now is at odds with a decision of the pension board of the United Methodist Church.

The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits announced on April 26 that it would continue to comply, under protest, with an Internal Revenue Service levy against John T. Schwiebert, a retired but still active pastor.

The board has drafted a letter to the IRS, arguing that “the levy forces us to be a collection agent . . . in a dispute between the federal government and a church member who is acting out of conscience and long-standing church teaching.”

Schwiebert and his wife, Pat, have refused to pay all or part of their federal income tax since 1977. For the past several years they have paid what they owe the federal government to the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners instead.

In December 2006, the IRS placed a levy on the pension that Schwiebert receives as pastor of the Metanoia Peace Community United Methodist Church. The pension board objects that the levy has “coerced” it into violating the church’s principle that “war is incompatible with the teachings and examples of Christ.”

Schwiebert said the letter “is the least” that the pension board could do and may be ignored by those who receive it. He said he understands that the board is responsible to other pension-holders, but is concerned that members may think they need permission from the denomination’s General Conference to refuse to cooperate with the IRS.

“Our denomination has to realize,” he said, “how deeply it has compromised itself with the values of the dominant culture.” *-Religion News Service*