

Brethren to revive alternative service plans: In case of a draft

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Officials of the Church of the Brethren say they will follow through on a request from the Selective Service to have “alternative service” programs in place for conscientious objectors if a military draft is reinstated.

Leaders of one of the historic peace churches that shun military service, Brethren executives were “cautious” after an unannounced visit by a draft official to a church center in Maryland last October. They were worried that the visit signaled that a draft may be at hand, something Selective Service spokespersons continued to deny.

In follow-up meetings, draft officials urged the church to dust off longstanding alternative service programs that allow conscientious objectors to serve in two-year domestic service projects in lieu of military service.

In a meeting December 10, the church’s council voted to “maximize our efforts” on alternative service, as well as help “guide our youth in their choice of nonviolent service.” Said Chris Bowman, moderator of the church’s 2004 conference: “We don’t want to miss the part of providing resources to our youth that will help them understand and embrace the Brethren peace witness.”

Selective Service officials have insisted that there are no plans to reinstate the draft. They said Alternative Service Director Cassandra Costley stopped by the Brethren Service Center simply because she was in the area.

Dick Flahavan, a spokesman for Selective Service, said officials did their best to convince church leaders there is no draft on the horizon. “We answered every one of their questions and they didn’t leave with anything hanging,” he said. “What we were telling them was what we tell everyone. The story hasn’t varied.”

Brethren leaders also agreed to meet in March with representatives of other churches that oppose military service. The meeting in Elgin, Illinois, will bring

together six Brethren and Mennonite groups to discuss “how to prepare for alternative service opportunities.” -*Religion News Service*