

Case Studies

The world tries to make a claim on our children. It assumes that it has a right to do so, and, as a result, our children can be called on to make very mature decisions at a very young age. Everything they know about the Bible and everything they have learned at home and in Sunday school is put to the test.

Here are the experiences of two young people, teenagers in a Christadelphian family. Like many other Christadelphian young people who attend public high school in the United States, this sister and brother had to deal with a military presence at their school. The report of their experiences was written by the sister shortly after the events took place.

Five questions have been added at the end. Read the reports and discuss the questions.

These Young People Took a Stand Case Studies in Religious Conscience

Pressure to Sign Up! – Decision 1

“It was mentioned to me one day at school that the Navy Seals would be performing a rock concert at our school. I wanted to find out more about it before attending, so I decided to speak with the sophomore class advisor. The only information that she could give me was that the mentors were sponsoring the event. As it worked out, my math teacher was the head of the mentors. So, wanting to know more, I decided to ask my math teacher, nonchalantly, one day before class, what the concert was about. I got the response, ‘It’s a rock concert, just come and see.’ This teacher had no idea that I am a conscientious objector, and, obviously, her response did not help much.

“I spoke with my mom and younger brother (who is in the same school) about whether or not we should attend the rock concert because we are conscientious objectors. We talked about what to do in the situation. Naturally, I didn’t want to make myself stand out unnecessarily, but I didn’t want to be where I shouldn’t be, either.

“There were only about two weeks left before the concert. My math teacher began making comments in class like, ‘Now that you know certain math equations, you can work on submarines and you can sign up with the recruiters when they come on Tuesday.’ As we have recruiters who regularly come to our school and set up tables at lunchtime, I wanted to know for sure whether recruiters would be at the concert. Knowing full well that Tuesday was the day of the concert, I asked the teacher what was happening on Tuesday? The response I got was, ‘You don’t know what Tuesday is? It’s the day of the rock concert.’ She also made comments about how, on Tuesday, ‘You can sign up for the Navy.’

“When I knew that recruiters would be there, I knew that the intent of the concert, at least in my opinion, was to get the teenagers hyped with rock music and then ask them

to sign up for the Navy. My brother agreed with me that he did not want to go. We figured that the best person to speak with about missing the concert was the principal.

“Originally, our intent was for my brother and me to speak with the principal ourselves, but then we figured having an adult go for us might get better results. We asked our mom to speak with the principal, which she did. The principal was very understanding. Our mom told her that she taught us her beliefs and that she was a conscientious objector. She also said that we would make our own choice to be Christadelphian, when we got older, if we chose to be baptized. She told the principal that she was speaking for us only because we had asked her to, and that we both felt strongly about our conscience. For this reason we felt we could not attend military events.

“The principal was fine with this and said that we could go to her office when they called our grade levels for the concert. She allowed us to stay in her office and do homework without drawing attention to us. When we heard everyone leaving at the end of the concert, we just went to our lockers with everyone else and left for the day. When other teenagers asked me where I had been, my response was, ‘I had something I had to do’ – which was true, I had to do my homework.

“We were fortunate that our principal was so understanding. To date, there has been no mention of the situation. Let us pray that all people we come into contact with may be so understanding.”

The Military Aptitude Test – Decision 2

“In March, 2006, it was brought to my attention that the military would be administering a test in our school called the ASVAB Career Test.¹ The test would be administered to juniors to assess their abilities and steer them toward a possible military career.

“Being a junior, I went to the vice principal and explained that I was a conscientious objector and wished to be excused from the test. He was very respectful of my situation and said that I need not explain my stand any further because he understood. He said that being excused from the test was a matter we would have to discuss with the principal (now different). He took me to the principal's office and explained my situation. The principal said that he remembered there was a student in the school who was a conscientious objector but could not remember who it was. (In fact, the principal had been vice principle the previous year when I stated my position about attending a Navy rock concert.) The principal excused me from the test and offered to explain my position to anyone who wanted to know why I was not at the test site. I told him I would be fine explaining the situation, but, as it turned out, there was no need to do so.

¹ ASVAB: Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery. This career aptitude test is administered annually to high school juniors in the United States.

"I took an important lesson from the conversation. Although the principal could not remember which student was a conscientious objector, he knew there was one. I realized that my behavior and attitude always needed to reflect my position and my belief, because my actions would speak louder than my words."

Junior Awards Night – Decision 3

"On April 9th, 2006, I attended an awards dinner for the junior class. When I walked into the room, I noticed that a serviceman was present. This surprised me, and I began to wonder what was going on because, to my knowledge, there was no reason why he should be there. I did not have long to wonder before the principal rushed up to my mother and me. He knew my conscientious objection stand from a recent conversation I had with him about ASVAB testing. He addressed my mother and said that he just wanted us to know that the military was present only to hand out awards.

"We were seated, and within minutes the vice principal arrived at our table to explain the situation further. The military had covered the cost of the award plaques and, for this reason, they had been invited to hand them out. It had already been explained to the serviceman that a family would be attending who were conscientious objectors, and the serviceman's response had been (paraphrased): 'If she doesn't feel comfortable shaking my hand, she doesn't have to.' This came as a shock to me. It never crossed my mind that anyone would think a conscientious objector might not shake a person's hand because they were in the military! It was explained to the vice principal that we would not be rude to this man because he was in the military and we were conscientious objectors.

"The vice principal also explained to us that the officers above this serviceman had wanted to make the ceremony a military event, but the serviceman had spoken against it, saying that this was a night for the juniors and not for the military.

"The serviceman handed the plaques to each student, and when I was called, I made sure to shake his hand as I would any other person, and hoped that this action would show those involved that Christ did not teach his disciples to be rude or disrespectful to anyone."

Michelle Davey

Questions

- 1 – How did Michelle's decision to take a conscientious stand during her sophomore year in high school pay off when she was a junior? What can we learn from this?
- 2 – In the case of the Navy rock concert, sister and brother took a conscientious stand together. How did this help and what can we learn from it?

3 – How would you have handled:

The Navy rock concert?

The ASVAB Test?

The awards dinner?

4 – Would you have shaken the hand of the military man at the awards dinner? Please explain.

5 – What Bible passages would guide your decisions in situations like these?

If passages don't come to mind right away, read the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6, and 7) and look up cross-references that go with it.