



**Mennonite
Central
Committee**
Washington Office

13th Annual (2011-2012) Public Policy Essay Contest for Anabaptist Youth

Purpose and Guidelines

Purpose

- To promote church-wide awareness of significant public policy issues by highlighting Mennonite and Brethren in Christ (BIC) youth perspectives
- To promote youth understanding of the relationship of faith to public policy
- To promote greater awareness of the work of MCC's Washington Office and expand the base of Anabaptist policy advocates

Guidelines

- Contest is open to all Mennonite, Brethren in Christ and other Anabaptist youth of high school age, and to all youth who attend Mennonite high schools.
- Immediate family members of current MCC staff or board members are not eligible for the contest.
- Essays should be 4-6 pages, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font with 1-in. margins.
- Each student may submit only one essay. Essays should be submitted electronically, as an attachment to an email. The student's name and any other identifying information should appear only on the first page of the document, which shall be a cover sheet that includes the essay title, student's name, mailing address, email address, home congregation, school name, current grade, name of school paper and local paper with editor's name and email (this information is often available online).
- Essays will be judged anonymously.
- Resources are available from the MCC Washington Office (920 Pennsylvania Ave. SE, Washington, DC 20003; email: mccwash@mcc.org); and on our web site at washington.mcc.org/advocate/essays.
- Essays must be e-mailed or postmarked by January 27, 2012 and submitted to your regional MCC office (see map below).
- Prizes will be awarded as follows: Grand prize \$300; three (3) regional winners \$100.
- The MCC Washington Office will announce winners by March 30, 2012.
- Entries will be judged on *content* (demonstrated understanding of the issues), *clarity* (writing style) and *creativity* (imaginative and thoughtful policy positions).
- Excerpts from the winning essays will be published in the *Washington Memo* and online. All entrants will receive a subscription to the E-Memo and *Washington Memo*.

Entries must be e-mailed or postmarked by January 27, 2012 and submitted to your regional MCC office:

MCC Central States
121 East 30th Street
P.O. Box 235
N. Newton, KS 67117
kkw@mcc.org

MCC East Coast
900 E. Howell St.
Philadelphia, PA 19149
eastcoast@mcc.org

MCC Great Lakes
1013 Division Street
Goshen, IN 46528
GreatLakesOffice@mcc.org

West Coast MCC
1010 G Street
Reedley, CA 93654
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Topics (students should select ONE of the following):

Wealth gap in U.S.

The United States is one of the wealthiest countries on the globe. It also has some of the worst economic inequality throughout the world. Currently, the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans owns more wealth than 90 percent of the rest of the nation combined. This 'wealth gap' existed before the economic recession and before high budget deficits. In this essay, investigate the economic recession and current budget policies in light of this wealth gap, its implications for creating peace in the U.S. and for our increasingly diverse population. You should:

- Describe the wealth gap:
 - How does the U.S. fare in comparison to other countries when we think of the amount of wealth is held and how it is shared?
 - How long has the wealth gap existed? What are some policies which contribute to the gap?
 - What happened to the wealth gap during the 2007-2009 economic recession? Consider:
 - changes in unemployment, poverty, demand on social services like food pantries and homeless shelters
 - loss of wealth for the richest in the U.S.
 - changes in the middle class
- Discuss some social implications of the wealth gap:
 - Describe the connection between income distribution and peaceful communities.
 - Describe the changing population of the United States in terms of age, race and ethnicity. What will our population look like in 2050?
 - Keeping these demographics in minds, what does the wealth gap mean for our future generations?
- In conclusion:
 - As Christians, can we pull from the biblical narrative any guidance in addressing the wealth gap or the federal budget? How so?
 - Briefly summarize the approaches taken so far to address the federal deficit in light of taxes and spending. How will these decisions affect the wealth gap?
 - How should policymakers respond to the wealth gap?

Domestic violence

Individuals of all backgrounds experience domestic violence. However, the severity of such abuse was not recognized until recently as something to be addressed through preventative and protective legislation. Generations still alive may remember a time when they would have much less legal recourse against domestic abuse. Still, as we learn that different communities experience domestic violence at similar rates, we are also learning that policies fail to respond to all communities with the same level of protection. In this essay, discuss the growth of significant preventative legislation like the Violence Against Women Act and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act.

- Describe the demographics of domestic violence: who experiences and how does it compare across class, race and religious lines in the U.S.?
- What legislation works to prevent domestic violence and serve victims? When was this legislation passed initially? What is its purpose?
- If possible, interview a woman you know who remembers when this legislation or protection didn't exist. What was it like for her? How have things changed since then?
- Choose a specific community listed below, and discuss how legislation to address domestic violence does or does not meet their unique needs:
 - Native American women
 - African American women
 - Undocumented immigrant women
- In conclusion, describe how Christian communities can become safe places.

Global poverty

Loving our neighbors: Sharing abundance

In recent years, Congress has continued to cut funding for international poverty programs. With an agreement reached to raise the national debt ceiling and decrease the deficit, many of these life-saving programs face even more significant cuts in funding. In your essay, please address the following:

- What is the international affairs budget? Does it matter to you and if so, why?
- What percentage of the total federal budget goes to international affairs? How does it compare with *other* federal budget accounts? From your perspective as a Christian, how much should the U.S. government allocate to international affairs and why?
- Reflect on the roles of the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in advancing peace and mitigating international conflict. What are some specific programs that address these areas within these agencies?

Faith, values and voting

Candidates are gearing up for the November 2012 presidential election, along with candidates for the U.S. House and Senate. Anabaptists have long been wary of getting involved in politics, with some believing they should not vote and others drawing the line at running for various levels of political office.

- Find out what the candidates who are running for local, state and national office from your area are saying. Do any of them claim publicly to be Christian, and if so, do you think their positions reflect their beliefs? Should candidates be vocal about their religious beliefs?
- How do the candidates' positions line up with your own? If you agree with some positions and disagree with others, what helps you decide which candidate to support?
- Do you think Anabaptists should vote? Should be a member of a political party? Should run for office?
- What Scriptures influence what you think about getting involved in politics? What other factors influence you—family, church, media, etc.?