

# **Tenth Annual Public Policy Essay Contest (2008-09) for Anabaptist Youth**

**Sponsored by the  
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office**

## **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 must be a maximum of 6 pages, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font with 1-in. margins.
- Each student may submit only one essay. Please keep an electronic copy of your essay. On a separate cover sheet, please list school name, current grade and contact information (mailing address and phone number or email address). Essays will be judged anonymously.
- Resources are available from the MCC Washington Office (920 Pennsylvania Ave. SE, Washington, DC 20003; email: [mccwash@mcc.org](mailto:mccwash@mcc.org)); and on our web site at [mcc.org/us/washington](http://mcc.org/us/washington).
- Essays must be postmarked by December 15, 2008 and submitted to your regional MCC office (see map below).
- Prizes will be awarded as follows: Grand prize \$500; four (4) regional winners \$100.
- The MCC Washington Office will announce winners by February 27, 2009.
- Entries will be judged on *content* (demonstrated understanding of the issues), *clarity* (writing style) and *creativity* (imaginative and thoughtful policy positions).
- Portions of the winning essays will be published in the *Washington Memo*.

(over)

**Entries must be postmarked by December 15, 2008 and submitted to your regional MCC office:**

MCC Central States	MCC East Coast	MCC Great Lakes	West Coast MCC
121 East 30 <sup>th</sup> Street	21 S. 12 <sup>th</sup> Street	1013 Division Street	1010 G Street
P.O. Box 235	P.O. Box 500	Goshen, IN 46528	Reedley, CA 93654
N. Newton, KS 67117	Akron, PA 17501-0500		



## Students should select from one of the following topics:

### U.S. Energy Policy – Impacts to the Economy and the Environment

Gas prices are at an all-time high. Churches are increasingly talking about “Creation Care.” Meanwhile, the U.S. Congress continues to debate both how to address global warming and how to keep energy costs down. This rise in energy costs disproportionately affects the poorest, but often so does the pollution from power plants burning fossil fuels. How do we balance the need to keep costs reasonable for transportation and home heating with the need to be good stewards of the environment and human health? How do we balance the need for jobs provided by the coal mining or ethanol industry, for example, with our need for clean air and clean water?

Policymakers in Washington will face critical decisions as the 111th Congress convenes on January 3, 2009. The policy choices we make today will have huge consequences for future generations. Discuss the relative costs and benefits, from both an environmental and an economic standpoint, of at least (4) of the following sources of energy. Consider how these costs and benefits might change over the next 10, 20, and 50 years.

- oil (including offshore drilling)
- coal
- nuclear
- ethanol and other bio-fuels
- solar
- wind
- other (hydrogen fuel cells, hydroelectric, geothermal, etc.)

What direction should U.S. energy policy take? What factors should legislators be considering? Consider the impacts to the environment, human health, the economy, and the cost of energy, as well as ways to mitigate these impacts. How can/should the U.S. government encourage energy providers and consumers to move toward more renewable sources of energy? How do Christian principles of good stewardship and caring for the least factor into these decisions?

### The Global Food Crisis: How should Christians and policymakers respond?

The global food crisis has had an unprecedented effect on people around the world. The food crisis caught international attention earlier this year when riots broke out across the world in Haiti, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and many other countries. People were desperate due to sky rocketing food prices and took to the streets.

According to the United Nations, food commodities in the global market have risen by 83% over the last three years. Corn prices have doubled in just one year. Wheat prices are at forty percent higher than in 2007 and the price of rice is at three times its level from last year. This unprecedented rise in food prices has left millions of people hungry and desperate. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food reports that an estimated 854 million people are currently living in a state of *food insecurity*.

Josette Sheeran director of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) compared the food crisis to the 2004 Asian tsunami by calling this a ‘silent tsunami.’ In a statement Sheeran said, “What we are seeing now is affecting more people on every continent, destroying even more livelihoods and the nutrition losses will hurt children for a lifetime.”

#### Questions:

- What are some underlying factors that have contributed to the global food crisis? List and analyze at least three of the root causes of the crisis, both long term and short term.

- Discuss steps that should be taken in order to address the food crisis. Discuss both short term and long term steps. Short term steps are ones that provide immediate relief, while long terms steps are ones that tackle the root causes of the crisis.
- What are some biblical principles that talk about food, poverty and economic justice? What would a Christian response to the crisis look like?

### **Gun Deaths**

In the recent court case *DC v. Heller*, the Supreme Court ruled that the Second Amendment’s “right of the people to keep and bear Arms” applies to individuals (and individuals’ legal right to self defense). The Court therefore found that the District of Columbia’s gun law (an absolute ban on the possession of handguns) was unconstitutional, since it interfered with that right. At the same time, however, the Court made clear that it was *not* ruling on laws concerning gun licensing, the sale of guns to felons or the mentally ill, and restrictions on assault weapons.

What, if anything, should the government do to reduce the number of gun deaths in the United States? Do Christians have a unique position to voice on this issue? In your essay, you may want to discuss the following:

- What are the cultural and experiential reasons why many people, especially in rural areas, are resistant to laws that place restrictions on gun ownership and use? What are the reasons that others, especially in urban areas, support such laws? Do the concerns of rural and urban residents conflict?
- Do Jesus’ commands in the Sermon on the Mount to “not resist an evildoer” and to “turn the other cheek” (Matthew 5:39) apply to Christian gun ownership for self-defense? If so, should this have any impact on Christian advocacy surrounding gun legislation?
- If the government should take action to reduce the number of gun deaths, at what level(s)—national, state, and/or local—should this happen?

### **Choose Your Own Topic:**

We are open to essays on topics other than the three provided.

The essay **must** address:

- An issue with a national legislative component.
- An issue that the MCC Washington Office covers (a list of issues is available at <http://www.mcc.org/us/washington/issues/>).

The essay should include the following:

- A clear overview and analysis of the issue, including an acknowledgement of other views on the issue.
- An understanding of the government institutions involved in addressing the issue.
- A biblical or theological reflection (i.e. why should Christians care about this issue, and what is a Christian approach to the issue?)