

[Personal response to the Pledge of Allegiance -- 1988]

I am a teacher in a public school where the pledge of allegiance is recited regularly. I have never been comfortable with the notion of directing my allegiance toward a flag. Flags originated as instruments of organization on the battlefield. They were rallying points and used to signal when to advance or retreat. In a civilian setting allegiance to a "flag" carries over the same connotation of automatic response. The Pledge is not said in private: it is said in unison. The context is coercive. It implies suspension of personal judgment and following the leader, just as in battle.

Importing battlefield values into civilian life is inappropriate and dangerous. In a democracy we should *not* suspend our judgment and blindly follow the leader. Rather, our leaders must be responsive to the people. Blind patriotism, reinforced by constantly pledging their allegiance to Hitler and the Fatherland, is what got Germany into trouble. The abuse of the "patriotism," which has so visibly surfaced again in this year's election campaign has made me rethink my response to the Pledge.

I have decided to declare my conscientious objection to this questionable, often meaningless, sometimes offensive ritual. I will no longer say "the Pledge."

My true and appropriate allegiance is to the Kingdom of God (more understandable as "the reign of God"), which is to be found within all who love and care for "the least of these my brethren": the poor, the oppressed, the outcast, the homeless, and the refugee. I support the nation which is my home insofar as it embodies the values of God's kingdom, the elevation of human worth, liberation, truth, justice, and equality. I resist this nation whenever its actions represent the worship of money, power, and privilege or promote lying, greed, indifference, racial hatred, militarism, and oppression. I love the people of America, but it is a love with no national boundaries. I will work for that day when the whole world will see freedom and justice for all.

I don't believe taking this stand diminishes my worthiness as a citizen or a neighbor. Any nation that would discriminate against someone taking such a stand does not provide freedom of thought or belief.

--David Chandler