



## DIOCESE OF FORT WAYNE-SOUTH BEND

Secretariat for Catholic Education  
Archbishop Noll Catholic Center  
915 South Clinton Street P.O. Box 390  
Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801

To: Pastors and principals

Re: Boy Scouts of America in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend

On July 27<sup>th</sup>, the National Executive Board of the Boy Scouts of America ratified a resolution stating that no adults can be denied registration as employees or non-unit-serving volunteers of the Boy Scouts of America “on the basis of sexual orientation”. The resolution also affirms the chartered organization’s right to select its unit leaders based on its religious principles, rejects any interference with that right, and provides that local Scout councils will not interfere with chartered organizations’ rights in this regard. After seeking the guidance of the National Catholic Committee on Scouting, Bishop Guglielmone (South Carolina) who is the liaison between the Boy Scouts of America and the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, and our own internal diocesan discussions, I offer the following guidance, with the approval of Bishop Rhoades, concerning the recent policy change of the Boy Scouts of America and how it effects Boy Scouts in our diocese.

Since 1910, the Boys Scouts of America have served our nation by helping to form young men who are “trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent. (Scout Law)” They have taught the young men the Scout Oath (or Promise): “On my honor I will do my best, to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.” There are over twenty Boy Scout units chartered in our diocese through Catholic parishes or Knights of Columbus Councils. These Boy Scout units give great service to our parishes, schools and communities.

On June 15, 2015, in an audience with thousands of Italian scouts and guides, Pope Francis said the following:

“I will tell you one thing – but don’t boast! -- You are a precious part of the Church in Italy. Thank you! Perhaps the littlest ones among you don’t realize this well, but I hope the older ones do! In particular, you offer an important contribution to families for their educational mission to girls, to boys and to young people. Parents entrust them to you because they are convinced of the goodness and wisdom of the scout method, based on great human values, on contact with nature, on religiosity and faith in God; a method that educates to freedom in responsibility. This trust of families is not disappointed! And also that of the Church: I hope that you will always feel part of the great Christian community....

When someone once asked your founder, Lord Baden Powell, “how does religion come in to [scouting]?”, he answered that “religions did not need to ‘come in,’ because it was already in! There isn’t a religious side of the scout Movement and a side that is not ... the whole of it is based on religion, that is, on the awareness of God and on his Service”

*(Address at a Conference of Scout/Guide Administrators, July 2, 1926, in Education Never Ends, Rome, 1997, p. 43). And he said this in the year '(19)26."*

The Boys Scouts of America have given great service to our country, and we are pleased to have many Boy Scout units chartered through our Catholic parishes. The recent changes at the national level of Boy Scouts of America have raised questions in the minds of Catholic scouters. The following is an attempt to address those questions.

Boy Scout troops or packs that are chartered through a Catholic Church or Catholic School are in a strong position. The Church or school "owns" the scout unit. These Boy Scout units should not be seen as outside groups using our facilities. This is the Catholic Church using the vehicle of the Boy Scouts to fulfill its mission. Just as in any other ministry of the parish or school, the pastor has direct control over who leads the pack or troop. The Boy Scout leader should be someone, preferably Catholic, who leads a life of integrity and in line with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Catholic families who choose to enroll their children in Boy Scout or Venture Scout units that are *not* chartered through a Catholic parish or Catholic school are not offered the same protection. The leadership of those non-Catholic units is up to that chartering organization.

Boy Scout units chartered through the Knights of Columbus are in a grey area. The Knights of Columbus are a great organization and give great service to our local Church and to the Church universal. However, it is not entirely clear whether or not these troops are seen by the federal government as Catholic in the same way that Boy Scout units chartered through a Catholic parish are seen to be Catholic. It may behoove these units to seek their next re-chartering through a local Catholic parish in order to ensure that the pastor has the ability to designate the leaders of that Catholic Boy Scout unit.

This is an important opportunity for us to be intentional about our Catholic identity in Boy Scouts. Please encourage your scout leaders to incorporate Catholic activities into your scouting program if they are not already doing so. The meetings should begin and end with prayer. The scouts should be encouraged to work on their religious emblems. Your scout unit should explore the wonderful activities available through the National Catholic Committee on Scouting such as the Footsteps of the Saints Program, the Rosary Program, and the vocational discernment program called the St. George Trek. I encourage Boy Scout units to partner with their parish to celebrate Scout Sunday, February 7, 2016 as a way to live out their "duty to God and to demonstrate that "a scout is reverent." I encourage scouting leaders to ask their pastors if at one of the Sunday Masses that weekend, their parish Boy Scout unit could serve as ushers, lectors, altar servers, and gift bearers as a way of involving the scouts in the life of the parish and in particular in the Eucharist, the source and summit of our faith. Another opportunity to be intentional about incorporating Catholic identity into our parish chartered Boy Scout units is to participate in the Catholic Camporee. Each fall, the Diocesan Catholic Committee on Scouting hosts a Catholic Camporee on alternating ends of the diocese. Just a week ago, this event was held at the University of St. Francis, and it gave Catholic scouts and their families the opportunity to learn about St. Francis and the Franciscans, to attend Mass celebrated by Bishop Rhoades, and to receive their religious emblems from Bishop Rhoades. Next year, this event will be on the South Bend end of the diocese where Holy Cross College has been a wonderful partner with past Catholic camporees.

In response to the policy change of the Boy Scouts of America, at least one diocese has decided to disassociate with the Boy Scouts of America. The vast majority of Catholic dioceses have not disassociated with the Boy Scouts of America. Because the pastor maintains control of who leads Boy Scout units in his parish, the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend will continue to allow and encourage parishes to charter Boy Scout units.

In conclusion, to use a phrase from the National Catholic Committee on Scouting, "scouting is youth ministry." Now, more than ever, our young people need vibrant youth ministry programs. When viewed rightly, the Catholic Church can use the vehicle of scouting for service, evangelization, and catechesis as the scouts learn to respond to their "duty to God". I thank you for sponsoring Catholic Boy Scout troops or Venture Scout units and encouraging our precious young people to participate in scouting. With the appropriate control and direction of the pastor, Boy Scouts units will continue to be a wonderful enhancement to a parish's youth ministry offerings and an avenue to work with parents for the formation of their children.

Sincerely,



Carl Loesch

Chair, Diocesan Catholic Committee on Scouting  
Secretary for Catholic Education