May 29, 2013

My fellow Catholic Scouters,

I am writing this not only as the NCCS National Chairman, but also as an Eagle Scout with nearly 30 years of adult service in Catholic Scouting. I have had four children involved with Scouting and currently have another in Cub Scouting. I must admit that I have concerns about where the change in the Boy Scouts of America youth membership standard may lead. I have been in discussion with Bishop Robert Guglielmone, our liaison from the USCCB, and Fr. Michael Hanifin, our National Chaplain. I have been reading e-mail, blogs, postings to our Facebook page, and had discussions with members of BSA staff and leaders of other faith-based chartered partners. After all this, some prayer and discernment, I have come to the following conclusions:

- Scouting is still the best youth-serving program available to all youth
- We should be encouraged that the change in BSA's youth membership standard is not in conflict with Catholic teaching
- We need to use this opportunity to show our commitment to making Catholic Scouting a safe environment for all youth in which the Catholic faith is taught, practiced and nurtured.

What role has the National Catholic Committee on Scouting (NCCS) played? The NCCS exercises its advisory capacity as a member of the BSA Religious Relationships Task Force. The NCCS is not a voting member of the BSA. During the listening period, we expressed our concerns and provided references on Catholic teaching to BSA. The resolution appeared to respect those teachings and BSA's responses to our concerns were satisfactory. We felt that the Catholic Scouters selected as voters could, in good conscience, vote either for or against the Resolution.

The following are the pertinent responses, made as public statements, from the BSA to our and others' concerns:

- Any sexual conduct, whether homosexual or heterosexual, by youth of Scouting age is contrary to the virtues of Scouting
- The Boy Scouts of America does not have an agenda on the matter of sexual orientation, and resolving this complex issue is not the role of the organization, nor may any member use Scouting to promote or advance any social or political position or agenda
- The Scout Oath begins with duty to God, and the Scout Law ends with a Scout's obligation to be reverent. Those will always remain core values of the Boy Scouts of America. The values set forth in the Scout Oath and Law are fundamental to the BSA and central to teaching young people to make better choices over their lifetimes.

The NCCS has as its purpose to utilize and ensure the constructive use of the program of the BSA as a viable form of youth ministry with the Catholic youth of our nation. To do this, we cooperate with the bishops of the United States, relating to the USCCB through a Bishop Liaison. Each diocesan bishop must decide whether the membership standard is acceptable. Bishop Guglielmone has written to every bishop in the United States concerning the issue and has made himself available to assist them in doing what is best for our young people.

What was actually approved by BSA? Following is the resolution that was approved by more than 60% of the voters as the new BSA membership standard for youth:

Youth membership in the Boy Scouts of America is open to all youth who meet the specific membership requirements to join the Cub Scout, Boy Scout, Varsity Scout, Sea Scout and Venturing programs. Membership in any program of the Boy Scouts of America requires the youth member to (a) subscribe to and abide by the values expressed in the Scout Oath and Law, (b) subscribe to and abide by the precepts of the Declaration of Religious Principles (duty to God), and (c) demonstrate behavior that exemplifies the highest level of good conduct and respect for others and is consistent at all times with the values expressed in the Scout Oath and Law. No youth may be denied membership in the Boy Scouts of America on the basis of sexual orientation or preference alone.

We understand this to mean the following:

- A youth will not be prevented from receiving a rank award or religious emblem simply for having a same sex attraction.
- A youth will not need to hide the fact that he has or experiences this attraction, but a youth also will not be encouraged or pressured to disclose publicly the experience of such attraction.
- A youth thinking or knowing he has a homosexual inclination should not be afraid that he will be bullied or expelled by the Scouting community by disclosing his sexual orientation.

BSA is expected to provide more details on the application of this resolution over the coming months leading to the resolution's implementation on January 1, 2014.

What is the relevant Catholic Church's teaching? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) teaches that individuals who disclose a homosexual inclination or a same sex attraction are to be treated with the same dignity due all human beings created by God (CCC 2358). This teaching is followed in enrollment policies for Catholic schools, for Catholic sports programs, and for all programs of Catholic youth ministry. Scouting, as Catholic youth ministry, allows us to provide a safe environment in which the Catholic faith can be taught, practiced and nurtured. Scouting, as a program for all youth, gives us, as Catholics, the opportunity to meet youth in an activity they enjoy and evangelize them in our faith.

As Catholics, we believe that engaging in sexual activity outside of a marriage is immoral (CCC 2396).

What do we, as Catholic Scouters, do now? I encourage you to seek understanding of the resolution, the Church's teaching on the subject, and to pray for wisdom. Change is hard, especially when we don't understand why it's occurring, what it means, and when we aren't part of the process. NCCS will do its best to respond to your questions and concerns. We will pray for wisdom ourselves. We ask that Catholic Scouters and chartered organization heads not rush to judgment as the policy does not go into effect until January 1, 2014.

Over the next couple of months, the NCCS will use a task force to develop and execute a plan for insuring a consistent message is delivered to dioceses, parishes, Catholic Scouters and the media and to prepare guidelines to assist diocesan committees in understanding the issues associated with the change in the BSA youth membership standard. One of the action items will be to establish an online Q&A to respond to and collect the questions and concerns that you need answered. In this way, you can help us.

At this moment in history and as part of this Year of Faith, we have an opportunity for prayerful "reflection and rediscovery of the faith". My hope is that we deal with the challenge in the spirit of Christian charity toward all and the knowledge that the Holy Spirit will guide us with clarity. If you are like me, you joined Scouting to make a difference in the lives of others. Our youth don't want to leave Scouting. Scouting is still the best program around. Catholic Scouters like you are still very much needed. Let's continue this important journey together!

Thank you for all you do to promote Scouting as Catholic youth ministry!

Yours in Catholic Scouting,



Edward P. Martin
National Chairman (2013-2016)

References

1 Catechism of the Catholic Church (http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catechism/catechism-of-the-catholic-church/epub/index.cfm), paragraphs 2357-2359, 2396.
2 See *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination*, issued by USCCB, November 14, 2006 (http://old.usccb.org/doctrine/Ministry.pdf)
3 I have found the blog posting of Edward Peters on this issue (May 26, 2013) particularly enlightening (http://canonlawblog.wordpress.com/)