

October 7, 2013



DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

The grace of our Lord ✠ Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

A recent membership change by the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) pertaining to sexuality has caused us all great concern. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) spoke against this proposed policy change and has been working diligently over the last several weeks to address it and provide guidance to the church. We have appreciated the patience of the church as the Office of the President, staff from the Commission on Theology and Church Relations and the Office of National Mission have spent much time in conversation and study of the issues. Many hours have been spent examining LCMS history with Scouting, talking with LCMS pastors who are deeply involved in Scouting, meeting directly with the top leadership of the BSA and looking into alternative programs. This has been no small undertaking, and we pray that the enclosed information will prove helpful as congregations determine how to best move forward with Scouting.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has never “endorsed” Scouting. Past Synod conventions determined that participating in Scouting was not a matter of fellowship and did not undermine our theological convictions or violate our position on unionism and syncretism. In the end, the matter of Scouting “should be left to the individual congregation to decide,” with each congregation left to “establish its own policy as pastoral wisdom on the part of both the congregation and the ministry in its own particular situation dictates.” The “Synod thus neither encourages nor discourages Scoutism in any congregation” (*1953 Convention Proceedings*, pp. 555-556). This is still the case.

The attached document, “Participation in Scout-type Organizations for Boys: Considerations for LCMS Churches and Individuals,” will be helpful for congregations to consider as they move forward. The document shares information about both the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) and Trail Life USA (TL), which is gaining momentum as an alternative to the BSA. As you will read, there are pros and cons to both organizations, and there are considerations that should be carefully addressed by congregations that wish to participate. It cannot be emphasized enough that congregations desiring to participate in Scouting should do so only after careful consideration and with a commitment to provide guidance and direction for the unit. Congregations that have little to no involvement with their Scouting unit should consider their reason for remaining involved.

The newly signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the BSA (also attached) is critical for those who wish to retain their local charters. The final resolve is important: “That it is agreed all member congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod may rely on the stipulations in this Memorandum of Understanding in operating under any charter they sign with the Boy Scouts of America.” If you are renewing charters in the coming weeks, please carefully read the attached MOU, which offers clarity on the

1333 S. Kirkwood Road
St. Louis, MO 63122-7295
888-THE LCMS (843-5267)
www.lcms.org



implementation of the new membership standard and the congregation's ability to publicly teach the faith and set boundaries, including when a member may be removed. Please read both documents if your congregation is making a decision about involvement in a Scout-type program.

Of note, in addition to the enclosed information, is the Roman Catholic Church's (RCC) response to this membership change. The RCC has publicly stated that this policy change is not in conflict with Catholic teaching, since the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* instructs that those who disclose an affinity toward same-sex attraction are to be treated with the same dignity due all others created by God (CCC 2358). In fact, this understanding provides the basis for enrollment policies in Catholic schools, sports programs and youth ministry.

Whether congregations remain with the BSA or move toward chartering with TL, navigating the world of Scouting will be a challenge. The BSA is a nonsectarian organization, and so we should not be surprised when it reflects the changing secular worldview of our country. The BSA is pluralistic, yet in the past we have found paths to navigate those waters, primarily because the BSA willingly allows chartering congregations to have full ownership and control over the spiritual and moral dimensions of its troop's activities. We believe this can still faithfully be done, but only with strong pastoral and congregation involvement.

TL is charting its course with an intentional grounding in Christian spiritual formation. TL is attempting to be "nondenominational," and its leaders have been very open to listening to some of the concerns we have expressed about elements of the TL program and groups it is partnering with that are inconsistent with Lutheran teaching. TL has emphasized a desire to work with LCMS congregations so that they can participate in ways that are in accord with Lutheran doctrine and practice. However, the newness of the organization makes it difficult to assess how fully this respect for Lutheran convictions will play out as TL develops over time.

Both the Boy Scouts and Trail Life USA seek to aid in the formation of young men by instilling in them wholesome, positive values. To this end, the church may be involved. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has seen Scouting as an opportunity for witness and outreach to our communities, while at the same time serving our young men as they develop physically, socially and as citizens. We pray that the Lord will grant wisdom to congregations as they wrestle with their involvement in either program as they seek to share the love of Christ with the world around them. We believe that, at present, both the BSA and TL can serve the church and her mission if LCMS congregations are committed to theological integrity, exhibit pastoral wisdom in their involvement and commit to significant involvement with their local program. May the Lord bless our young men as they grow in faith toward Christ and in fervent love toward one another.

Peace,

.....
SIGNATURE WITHHELD FOR SECURITY REASONS
.....

Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, President
THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD