



THE DIOCESE OF KALAMAZOO  
*Renew Faith • Build Communion • Inspire Hope*  
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

January 11, 2016

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In recent years, there were concerns raised regarding the Girl Scouts of the United States of America (GSUSA) and their purported relationships with certain secular organizations, such as Planned Parenthood and the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS). These concerns led to questions regarding the appropriateness of Catholic involvement with GSUSA.

I write again this year to indicate that much has been done at both the national and local levels to address these concerns. Most recently in 2014, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), through their Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth of which I am a former member, engaged the GSUSA in substantial dialogue for the purpose of gathering information, building a mutual understanding, and providing guidance to leaders. As a result of this dialogue a resource has been developed that contains important information for Catholic leaders and parents. It can be accessed online at: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/who-we-teach/youth/catholic-scouting-questions.cfm>. I strongly encourage you to read through it and share it with Catholic parents in your troop, particularly question number ten (10), which provides guidance at the local level. These five (5) points offer tremendous clarity on how our local Girl Scouts can foster an authentically Catholic identity. Some of the key issues from the aforementioned document are listed below:

1) GSUSA has no official relationship with Planned Parenthood, so money generated from the sale of Girl Scout cookies, for example, stays with the Councils and the Troops that sell the cookies and does not go to support Planned Parenthood and the like. However, the national GSUSA office does not have authority to prohibit local councils or troops from forming relationships with such groups. Therefore, education and vigilance are necessary by Catholic leaders and parents to ensure that our local councils and troops avoid any such relationships. Our Diocesan Catholic Committee on Scouting (CCOS) is dedicated to promoting an authentic Catholic identity with the local Councils to safeguard and protect our girls and adult leaders in handing on the Catholic faith and to help them avoid any contradictory material if any should arise. I ask that every leader and parent pay close attention to the community organizations your council and/or troop is interacting with.

2) WAGGGS is an international association of scouting organizations dedicated to girls and young women. Its partner organizations are both national and international, and

include the United Nations. The relationship between WAGGGS and its member organizations is similar to GSUSA's relationship to local Girl Scout Councils, meaning that it has limited authority over member organizations. An ongoing concern regarding WAGGGS is their promotion of education for girls in the area of "sexual and reproductive health/rights." This phrase isn't specifically defined and thus leaves room for the inclusion of certain popular "sexual health" methods (i.e. contraceptives and other positions and agendas at odds with respect for the gift of human life and dignity of human sexuality). These concerns have been communicated to both WAGGGS and GSUSA, and while both have been responsive, the USCCB will continue careful monitoring of these positions. As leaders and parents, I urge you to be vigilant. In the unlikely event that objectionable materials are disseminated, refuse to accept them and make a report to Mr. Tim McNamara, our Diocesan Liaison for Scouting. I also recommend that Catholic Scouts (youth and adults) do not wear the WAGGGS pin and that Catholic leaders and parents continue to promote the authentically pro-life teaching of the dignity of human life and sexuality.

3) While we support the efforts of GSUSA to identify female role models from the popular culture, some of the women selected as examples do not model Christian virtues and values. Catholic leaders and parents are encouraged to contribute to the conversation by introducing women who model Christian virtues and Catholic values in their work, volunteer, and social life, thus providing and upholding true examples of what it means to be a woman.

While there are areas of concern, there are hopeful signs too! The Girl Scouts promote many of the same values that we share in our beautiful faith, from honor and respect for both God and country to inspiring self-worth and dignity within each participant as one who has a voice to share in making the world a better place. While themselves a secular organization, Girl Scouts seeks to enrich girls by building up their spiritual life, and recognizing the importance of forming both body and soul in developing the whole person. The Girl Scouts offer a long standing tradition of forming girls in being the best they can be for themselves, others, and for God.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Mr. Tim McNamara at 269-903-0139 or [tmcnamara@diokzoo.org](mailto:tmcnamara@diokzoo.org).

Asking God's blessing upon you, the Girl Scouts of the United States of America, and all those precious souls that enter into Girl Scouts seeking to become the best young women they can be, I am

Faithfully yours in Christ,

*+ Paul J. Bradley*

Most Rev. Paul J. Bradley  
Bishop of Kalamazoo

PJB/lmi/tmm