

Boy Scouts of America: Why the Proposed Policy Change Matters
*A statement by the Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison,
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Western culture is at a crucial moment in history. After 103 years of existence, the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) may vote to change drastically its membership policy. For those who may be unaware, the BSA, in recent months, has discussed allowing both gay Scouts and Scout leaders into its organization. Recently, however, the BSA has changed its course. Now the vote will determine only whether to include openly homosexual Scouts as members.

LCMS leaders have been carefully monitoring the proposed BSA policy changes. When news of the proposed change was made public, I sent a letter to BSA, imploring its leadership not to make the proposed policy change. And even though the initial proposal to focus on Scout leaders has been shelved, I believe the current proposal still has unknown implications for the future of BSA as well as LCMS support and involvement. The proposed change will highlight sexuality, which has not been and should not be a matter of focus for Scouts. I suspect it will make it more challenging to care for young people struggling with same-sex attraction and perhaps open our churches to legal action.

This vote matters to the LCMS. The proposed change in BSA policy on values and membership to include openly homosexual Scouts adversely affects, even supersedes, the authority of the local pastor and congregation by allowing and promoting a moral position that we as LCMS Lutherans believe is against the will of God and in opposition to Holy Scripture.

This vote matters because, if enacted, the proposed change to BSA policy on values and membership will cause a crisis of conscience for our church leaders, pastors, parents and congregations. Even if the decision of values and membership remains at the local level, Scouts from troops sponsored by congregations of the LCMS will be affected because, as part of the scouting program, they also participate at regional and national scouting activities.

This vote matters because, for more than a century, scouting has sought to uphold moral values at a level greater than that of general society. The capitulation now to societal pressures would mar the long and honorable history of the Boy Scouts to honor the natural law of God, which at least for now, is still reflected in the current scouting membership policy.

For these reasons, I and some 25 other Protestant church leaders have signed onto a statement, copied below, that implores BSA not to change its policy, noting that, “In our current culture, it’s more important than ever for our churches to protect and provide moral nurture for young people and for the Scouts.” The statement will be released in conjunction with its delivery to the BSA office and before the organization’s vote, which will take place May 24.

I share this with you today because it is difficult to know which of our LCMS BSA members will be part of the 1,400 members who will vote on the policy change later this month. I am hopeful that all of you will share this information with those in your congregation who are involved with BSA and even those in your community who will cast votes later this month.

As the church awaits the BSA vote, we still have much to do. We repent, and we pray. We confess Christ and elevate marriage among us. We do what the church does best: We bear witness to Christ, show mercy to those in our midst — including those challenged by same-sex attraction — and care for all in our life together.

Pastor Matthew C. Harrison
President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Statement

We strongly support the Boy Scouts of America current prohibition on open homosexuality and retaining it without revision. Nearly 70 percent of BSA troops are hosted by churches and religious institutions. Upholding traditional morality is vital for sustaining this partnership, for protecting Scout members, and for ensuring BSA has a strong future. A proposal from the BSA board to prohibit “discrimination” based on “sexual orientation or preference” for BSA members potentially would open the Scouts to a wide range of open sexual expressions. In our current culture, it’s more important than ever for our churches to protect and provide moral nurture for young people and for the Scouts. We implore members of the upcoming BSA Council to affirm the BSA’s present policy, which the U.S. Supreme Court has affirmed, and which has served BSA well.

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