

Boy Scouts affirm "traditional values" despite opposition



By PAT ROBINSON
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The Boy Scouts of America, recently under fire from local organizations, school boards, and charitable funders and facing public concern over its ouster of openly gay Scout leaders, has reaffirmed its view that no avowed homosexual can serve as a role model, and that duty to God is not merely an ideal, but an obligation. The statements led to the conclusion that gays, lesbians, bisexuals, agnostics and atheists are unwelcome as members or leaders in the organization.

According to a resolution issued last month, the Boy Scouts of America restated their beliefs.

"The national officers agree that 'conduct of both Scouts and Scouters must be in compliance with the Scout Oath and Law' and that 'membership is contingent upon one's willingness to accept the values and standards espoused by the Boy Scouts of America.'"

In the Boy Scout Oath, members promise to "do my duty to God and my country," "to obey the Scout Law" and "to keep myself... morally straight," among other items. In the Scout Law, a scout is required to be "reverent," which is defined in a BSA fact sheet as being "reverent toward God," "faithful in his religious duties," and respectful toward the beliefs of others.

Later in the statement the organization acknowledged

the conflict between national and local interests, but rejected the concept of independent action by local councils.

"The national officers reaffirm that, as a national organization whose very reason for existence is to instill and reinforce values in youth, BSA's values cannot be subject to 'local option' choices, but must be the same in every unit, therefore the national officers recommend that the National Executive Board affirm that the Boy Scouts of America shall continue to follow its traditional values."

Mark Noel, who founded the New England Coalition for Inclusive Scouting after he was ousted from the BSA for being an openly gay Eagle Scout, expressed frustration with the organization's determination to enforce its conservative views on local councils through this announcement.

"This puts several New England Boy Scout Councils in a very awkward position," Noel said. "Several councils, such as in Vermont and in Boston, have been touting their 'new' non-discrimination policies to parents, community leaders, and funding organizations for the past few months. But not one of them has ever been successful at enforcing these policies. Of the six million people in the BSA right now, not a single one is openly gay, atheist, or agnostic. And now these Councils that have been trying to allay concerns about the discriminatory environment in the scouts have just been publicly overruled

by their National Headquarters."

Scott Cozza, president of Scouting for All, agrees with Noel. "It is ironic that the BSA core value of respecting diversity is not practiced within the organization," he said. "And it is a shame that the BSA National Office is turning a deaf ear to its own members."

"Scouting for All and its supporters salute the bravery of the councils in standing up to the National Office," continued Cozza. "It is no small thing to risk getting kicked out of an organization you love. But denouncing bigotry and prejudice is really what the Scout Oath and Law are about. These councils recognized that and did the right thing."

"If the BSA wants to continue to symbolize bigotry,"

said Cozza, "let it do so, but without the support of Americans and individual Scout Councils who oppose bigotry and discrimination. To this end our organization will continue to work for change by asking the United Way to adhere to their anti-discrimination standards, and by asking that public schools not allow the BSA to recruit in our schools until they include all of our children in a democratic fashion. We will also work to ensure that local and national government agencies — including the White House — really rethink their support of an organization that leaves our gay and atheist children behind as well as gay and atheist leaders. Scouting for All also urges President Bush to step down as the Honorary President of the BSA. He stated in his State of the

Union Address, 'to leave no child behind.' Let's see if our President will stand by his own words."

Despite the statement affirming its "traditional leadership values," the Boy Scouts of America's official Web site claims the organization "respects diversity": "In Support of Diversity: We hope that our supporters will continue to value the Boy Scouts of America's respect for diversity and the positive impact Scouting has on young people's lives." The Scout Law contains several references to respecting others, regardless of age, position, or differing beliefs.

Likewise, the web site states a goal for the United Way "to realize Scouting's value to the potential, dignity, and worth of all people, regardless of their background."

There is no evidence of specific information barring "homosexuals, atheists, and agnostics" from joining at the sections of the official web site where most parents would be looking for guidance regarding membership.

The Boy Scouts of America is one of the largest youth-serving organizations in America, serving over five million young people between 7 and 20 years of age. ▼

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