

Position Statement and Background
The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM)
and
Girl Scouts USA (GSUSA)

Preface

In any significant collaborative relationship, organizations should periodically review the purpose and processes of that relationship. Several issues at the GSUSA Council and parish youth ministry levels have led to dialogue between the leadership of the NFCYM and GSUSA. This position paper will identify the main issues and official NFCYM and GSUSA responses based on NFCYM and GSUSA communications, knowing that not all issues affect every diocese or council. Direct quotations from official inter-organizational communication are referenced.

Position Statement

The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry appreciates the long association with Girl Scouts USA and is proud of its collaboration in the education and formation of Catholic young women. We affirm the work of the Girl Scouts in preparing young women to be mature and responsible citizens in the world.

Concerns have been raised about materials utilized in some Girl Scout programs which address health and sexuality issues. As part of its mission to serve Catholic youth, the NFCYM is committed to present to all youth, men and women, the full breadth and beauty of Catholic moral teaching about the dignity of the human person. Human sexuality is a constitutive part of this human dignity gifted to each person by God. The human person must exercise this gift in the spirit of Christian chastity appropriate to one's state in life.

In the teaching and promotion of these values parents are the first and primary teachers of the faith. Youth ministers, Girl Scouts USA and all other collaborating partners are expected to respect the primary role and responsibility of parents. This requires that parents have prior knowledge and consent when matters of human sexuality are presented to their children.

NFCYM expects its collaborating members to support Catholic parents and youth ministers in the promotion of Catholic moral teaching among Catholic youth. We believe that this statement enables the Girl Scout program to fulfill their intent to fully respect and yet remain responsive to the varying beliefs of individual girls and their families.

History

The formal relationship between GSUSA and the Catholic Church dates from at least 1914 when Cardinal Gibbons endorsed the work of Girl Scouts and their relationship with the Catholic Church. In 1975 a formal plan of cooperation was signed between the Representative for Youth Activities in the Department of Education at the United States Catholic Conference and GSUSA.

This relationship was more fully formalized in 1988 by Archbishop John May, president of the United States Catholic Conference, assigning the Secretariat for Laity and Family Life to serve as liaison to GSUSA.

In 1982 the NFCYM was incorporated as a ministry organization which included the National Catholic Committee on Girl Scouts and Campfire (NCCGSCF) as a constitutive member and GSUSA as a collaborating member. The NFCYM assumed all responsibility for Catholic religious recognition programs serving Girl Scout and Campfire units.

Building on the relationship created through USCC, the NFCYM entered into a plan of cooperation with GSUSA in 1997, through our National Catholic Committee for Girls Scouts and Campfire. This plan highlights the role of GSUSA in providing information on religious recognition programs developed by NFCYM to all councils and troops and the need for continuing dialogue to assure respect for Roman Catholic religious practices and teachings and Girl Scouting's basic principles.

“The members of the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, National Catholic Committee for Girl Scouts and Camp Fire and Girl Scouts of the United States of America are united by a belief in God. We understand that the motivating force in Girl Scouting is spiritual and that through a relationship with Girl Scouting, each girl is encouraged to become a stronger member of her own religious community. The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry believes that the programs made available through the National Catholic Committee for Girl Scouts and Camp Fire encourage and enhance each girl's individual religious instruction in becoming a faith-filled Christian woman. The Roman Catholic Church and Girl Scouts of the United States of America recognize that religious instruction is the responsibility of parents and religious leaders.”

(NFCYM and GSUSA Plan of Cooperation 1997)

There is a significant history to the relationship between the Catholic Church and her agents for youth ministry and Girl Scouts USA. This is a relationship that needs to be continually affirmed and strengthened.

GSUSA Structure

Issues have arisen at the local level and there is some confusion about the role and relationship between local Girl Scout councils and the national office for GSUSA.

“As for governance, 315 Girl Scout councils govern specific geographic areas and deliver program to girls. Just as each U.S. diocese is autonomous, so are the councils independent corporations and therefore, the governance of each council is autonomous with the support of the national organization. (As previously stated) we believe the local councils are the best judges of the needs of the girls in their regions. Although this structure allows us to be responsive to girls and their families, it also requires a high level of local input. And, even as I imagine there might often be diversity among parishes within a diocese, I can assure you that many of our councils must serve and be responsive to a variety of communities and issues within individual regions. I also want to make you aware that each

council is subject to a Council Performance Assessment to ensure they adhere to best policies, practices and procedures as established by the national organization.”

Kathy Cloninger, Chief Executive Officer, (GSUSA May 2005)

Therefore, local councils have a fair degree of autonomy in determining to which issues affecting young people they respond and the resources and partnerships utilized.

Further, the local council also charters the troops. Therefore, the parish serves as a host and not a chartering agent for Girl Scout troops, unlike Boy Scouts.

Girl Scout Councils and Specific Issues

Concerns have been raised about materials utilized in some Girl Scout programs which address health and sexuality issues. GSUSA communication supports the primary role of parents in providing informed consent and approval on the dissemination of all materials.

“GSUSA policy is not to take a stand on or advocate for or against any issue regarding a girl’s health and sexuality, especially outside the confines of Girl Scout programs. We also believe that parents have the primary responsibility for the safety and well-being of their girls within the context of Girl Scout programs. These policies enable the Girl Scout program to fully respect and yet remain responsive to the varying beliefs of individual girls and their families. Importantly, when a council or troop offers programs that address many of these issues, they are offered with the fully informed consent of the parents or guardians of the girls who choose to participate.” (GSUSA May 2005)

The role of parents in reviewing and assenting to materials and programs is reinforced.

“Since participation in any and all Girl Scout programs is determined by securing permission from a girl’s parent or legal guardian, all materials used in the program are disseminated to girls by the adult partners in our programs and are available for parental review.” (GSUSA May 2005)

Girl Scout Councils and Collaborative Partners

Local councils are expected to determine how to deliver the Girl Scout program in their area. Councils choose which collaborative partners will provide the best program and print resources for the needs of the young people in their councils.

A specific concern has been raised about Planned Parenthood and the public perception that GSUSA has a formal relationship with Planned Parenthood.

“To clarify a question that has been raised about such community relationships, monies from Girl Scouts at the council and/or national level are not now and will not be given to any outside organization that advocates on issues regarding private decisions to be made by a girl and her family. Specifically, no monies collected by Girl Scouts for any purpose, including our girls’ cookie sales, will be given to Planned Parenthood or any other organization that advocates on these issues.” (GSUSA May 2005)

Local Girl Scout Councils partner with many organizations, including Catholic dioceses, in order to respond to the specific needs of young people.

Girl Scout Governance

A specific concern has been raised about local council adherence to national policies and guidelines and the challenge created by a separately incorporated council structure. This might lead to quality control issues.

“... each council is subject to a Council Performance Assessment to ensure they adhere to best policies, practices and procedures as established by the national organization.” (GSUSA May 2005)

In any organization there are certain to be issues where local implementation is not fully in line with national policies. The Council Performance Assessment is GSUSA’s official process for monitoring local council implementation.

Grievance Process

Questions or concerns about local issues are ideally handled at the local level whenever possible.

“Girl Scout councils take immense pride in their record of responsive communication with the publics we serve. Should community members have an issue to discuss on any aspect of the Girl Scout program, they have only to call the local council to be informed of the process. We recommend the troop leader be contacted so the specifics of any issue can be discussed and then given time to assess the situation to determine if further information or recourse is desired. If so, an individual should contact the Executive Director (ED) or CEO of the council which oversees the troop in question. Generally, The ED or CEO will require 1-3 business weeks to review or assess the situation and provide feedback. Should further review or feedback be necessary, they can call the national office at 212-852-8000, and they will be directed to the Council Services Consultant who oversees the specific council. Inquiries can be expedited if the caller has all of the details of the issue at hand, including the troop number, the troop leader’s name, and a summary of communications to that point. Regardless of the time it takes—up to three business weeks to get a final result—all parties can rest assured they have had input into the process.” (GSUSA May 2005)

This value is reinforced in the NFCYM/GSUSA Plan of Cooperation.

“Areas of disagreement should be resolved at the local level whenever possible; however, if a substantial grievance cannot be resolved locally, the grievance should be channeled through the diocesan youth ministry leader and the local Girl Scout Council executive director to the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry/National Catholic Committee for Girl Scouts and Camp Fire and Girl Scouts of the United States of America.” (NFCYM and GSUSA Plan of Cooperation 1997)

There are several steps in the grievance process.

- Concerned parents and parish leaders meet with local troop leaders to address issues.
- If necessary, the next step is for parish leaders to meet with the local council officials. Ideally, the diocesan director for youth ministry, or designate, will be informed about any grievance situation, included in all communication, and present for discussions as appropriate or deemed necessary.
- The third step includes the diocesan director of youth ministry meeting with the local Girl Scout Council executive. Diocesan directors of youth ministry will utilize their own Catholic Committees on Girl Scouting and Campfire, as appropriate.
- If issues are not able to be resolved at the local level, the NFCYM is contacted by the diocesan director of youth ministry and discussion is pursued with GSUSA.

Ways to Strengthen Communication

The NFCYM encourages diocesan directors of youth ministry to be proactive in contacting GSUSA Council leadership and in developing clear processes for communication.

Where appropriate and necessary, local dioceses and Girl Scout Councils should meet to develop a specific plan of cooperation, based on the national model. Such a plan might include the following:

- Diocesan directors of youth ministry should meet with their bishop to ascertain the bishop's hopes, concerns, and desired outcomes so that a relationship with Girl Scouts enhances the Church's ministry to young people.
- Dioceses should create Catholic Committees on Girl Scouts and Campfire (and Boy Scouts, as well), under the auspices of the diocesan director of youth ministry as the agent for the bishop, or a diocesan designate. Such committees could include a representative from the local Girl Scout and Campfire Council. Annual joint meetings between diocesan Catholic committees and the local council leaders would improve communications.
- Local councils should invite the diocesan director of youth ministry and/or parish coordinators of youth ministry to serve as consultants to the council on appropriate committees, especially those considering new resources and programs.
- Parish coordinators of youth ministry should serve on troop committees, representing the pastor, where the parish serves as a troop sponsor.

Further, the NFCYM, through the National Catholic Committee on Girls Scouts and Campfire, will meet annually with the appropriate GSUSA representatives to ensure communication at the national level.

July 26, 2005

May 10, 2005

Mr. Bob McCarty
Executive Director
National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, Inc.
415 Michigan Avenue, N.E. Suite 40
Washington, DC 20017-4503

Dear Bob,

Much has happened since we last had correspondence. We at Girls Scouts of the USA join the chorus of well wishers in the election and installation of Pope Benedict XVI. Our warmest regards to you and your organization on what will surely be fulfilling years to come.

In the past months, we have been busy in Girl Scouting as well. I have been leading an organization-wide look at our future strategies to serve girls, well into the next century. We commit to continuing to be the preeminent organization for girls in this country and to address the ever growing and diverse needs of those girls. It is a quest that I know you understand, and, as always, we look forward to our work together.

I want to respond to our ongoing conversation about the important and complex issues facing the girls we serve, including those regarding health, body image, sexuality and safety. I also want to reiterate the points made about the issues we have already discussed and then address several specific processes about which you have asked.

At Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA), I oversee a Movement whose mission is to inspire girls with the highest ideals of character, leadership, patriotism and service. We have always been appreciative of the support of the Catholic Church and its diocesan parishioners; and we have been proud to partner with you to serve girls and to inspire their growth and development. It is a relationship that is very meaningful to us and to the girls we serve.

As you can imagine, with more than 3 million girl members, the Girl Scout program is provided to girls from an increasingly diverse group of cultures, spiritual beliefs, ethnicities and social environments. For example, our initiatives in Hispanic communities, Muslim communities, Asian-American communities and others reach out and embrace the cultural issues that affect these girls as they seek to build their own futures in this country. We also have a model program in 28 states to serve girls with mothers in prison. Called Girls Scouts Beyond Bars, this program allows girls to have meaningful activities with their imprisoned mothers and reinforces the family ties that will provide a strong foundation for their future. And we offer a complementary pilot program in juvenile detention

centers to help these girls salvage the family life and educational direction they miss and need to succeed.

Girl Scouting affirms that one of the motivating forces in our Movement is a spiritual one; we also realize that each girl will integrate her Girl Scout experience into her family's own personal faith beliefs. As such, GSUSA policy is not to take a stand on or advocate for or against any issue regarding a girl's health and sexuality, especially outside the confines of Girl Scout programs. We also believe that parents have the primary responsibility for the safety and well-being of their girls within the context of Girl Scout programs. These policies enable the Girl Scout program to fully respect and yet remain responsive to the varying beliefs of individual girls and their families. Importantly, when a council or troop offers programs that address many of these issues, they are offered with the fully informed consent of the parents or guardians of the girls who choose to participate.

To clarify a question that has been raised about such community relationships, monies from Girl Scouts at the council and/or national level are not now and will not be given to any outside organization that advocates on issues regarding private decisions to be made by a girl and her family. Specifically, no monies collected by Girl Scouts for any purpose, including our girls' cookie sales, will be given to Planned Parenthood or any other organization that advocates on these issues.

Bob, you asked some specific questions about disseminating program materials, governance processes that affect quality assurance at the council level and how a local community member might communicate with or query the Girl Scout organization on a particular issue.

Let me address program materials first. Since participation in any and all Girl Scout programs is determined by securing permission from a girl's parent or legal guardian, all materials used in the program are disseminated to girls by the adult partners in our programs and are available for parental review.

As for governance, 315 Girl Scout councils govern specific geographic areas and deliver program to girls. Just as each U.S. diocese is autonomous, so are the councils independent corporations and therefore, the governance of each council is autonomous with the support of the national organization. As previously stated, we believe the local councils are the best judges of the needs of the girls in their regions. Although this structure allows us to be responsive to girls and their families, it also requires a high level of local input. And, even as I imagine there might often be diversity among parishes within a diocese, I can assure you that many of our councils must serve and be responsive to a variety of communities and issues within individual regions. I also want to make you aware that each council is subject to a Council Performance Assessment to ensure they adhere to best policies, practices and procedures as established by the national organization. This is why I continue to believe that local councils can best

determine how to deliver the Girl Scout program in their area with the collaborative partners that are available to them.

Girl Scout councils take immense pride in their record of responsive communication with the publics we serve. Should community members have an issue to discuss on any aspect of the Girl Scout program, they have only to call the local council to be informed of the process. We recommend the troop leader be contacted so the specifics of any issue can be discussed and then given time to assess the situation to determine if further information or recourse is desired. If so, an individual should contact the Executive Director (ED) or CEO of the council which oversees the troop in question. Generally, The ED or CEO will require 1-3 business weeks to review or assess the situation and provide feedback. Should further review or feedback be necessary, they can call the national office at 212-852-8000, and they will be directed to the Council Services Consultant who oversees the specific council. Inquiries can be expedited if the caller has all of the details of the issue at hand, including the troop number, the troop leader's name, and a summary of communications to that point. Regardless of the time it takes – up to three business weeks to get a final result - all parties can rest assured they have had input into the process.

As we have discussed before, both GSUSA and the Catholic Church share a proud commitment to our communities, to our youth, their families and to a future where young people can walk toward their dreams with confidence, safety, strength and character. We know you share our concern with nutrition, fitness, safety, financial literacy and building social and educational skills, as well as our mutual goal to encourage each individual girl to engage in her faith. We also know we both will continue to serve the girls throughout Catholic dioceses with quality programs that meet these goals, consistent with the desires of individual families and local communities.

Bob, I again thank you for the support you and the NFCYM continue to provide to our organization. I look forward to our work together in the years to come and to combining forces to better serve our communities in the future.

Best regards,

Kathy Cloninger
Chief Executive Officer