

## Bishop responds to decision to allow gay youth in Boy Scouts

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Leaders in Catholic Scouting encourage careful, prayerful reaction to the Boy Scouts of America's recent decision to lift a ban on accepting openly gay youth as members.

The BSA's national council voted May 23 at its meeting in Texas to lift the long-standing ban on accepting gay youth as members, but retained a ban on gay adult leaders.

The 1,400 member council voted to change the bylaws to read "No youth may be denied membership in the Boy Scouts of America on the basis of sexual orientation or preference alone."

It goes into effect Jan. 1, 2014.

[Catholic News Service reported a statement by the BSA](#) that said the decision to study and change the policy came after "growing input from within the Scouting family" and a long review called "the most comprehensive listening exercise in Scouting's history."

Bishop Robert E. Guglielmo, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' liaison with the National Catholic Committee on Scouting, attended the meeting and said the decision was not surprising, especially in light of national trends that show more acceptance of gay people and issues such as gay marriage.

"We're going to have to find a way to work with this," he said.

The important thing, Bishop Guglielmo said, is for the Church not to abandon Scouting, noting the positive impact it has on the character and moral development of so many young people.

Some Catholic activists have already called for parents to pull their sons out of Scouting and for the Church to form its own youth organizations that combine the activities of Scouting with strict adherence to Church teaching. A mass exodus would be a mistake. Bishop Guglielmo stressed that Scouting has many strengths and many Catholic families have deep roots in the organization.

"We have half a million Catholic Scouts in this program and they're not all going to transfer out of it," he said in an interview with The Miscellany. "If we pull away, we're going to have Catholic kids in a movement where there is no reflection of their faith. We need to remember that the movement has a lot to offer."

According to BSA membership data, 70 percent of the 100,000 chartered Scouting units in the U.S. are sponsored by faith-based groups. There are 8,397 Catholic-chartered units.

Bishop Guglielmo said the new policy, as written, can be considered acceptable by Church standards because it still stresses the fact that sexual activity of any kind is not compatible with Scout values.

"We need to stress that Church teaching says that the homosexual inclination and attraction itself is not immoral, but what is immoral is any sexual conduct outside marriage," Bishop Guglielmo said. "The Church states that everybody is called to live a chaste life."

In a statement released on May 24, the NCCS said they have adequate time to study its effects, which it will do before determining how the change will impact Catholic chartered Scout units and activities.

"In doing so, we will work within the teachings of our Catholic faith and with the various local bishops and their diocesan Scouting committees," the statement said.

The NCCS echoed Bishop Guglielmo's perspective on Church teaching and emphasized the importance of showing respect for everyone regardless of sexual orientation.

“The Catholic Church teaches that people who experience a homosexual inclination or a same sex attraction are to be treated with respect recognizing the dignity of all persons,” the NCCS statement read. “The Church’s teaching is clear that engaging in sexual activity outside of marriage is immoral. Individuals who are open and avowed homosexuals promoting and engaging in homosexual conduct are not living lives consistent with Catholic teaching. “

Bishop Guglielmone said the faithful, whether or not they are involved in Scouting, can discuss this issue in a loving, Christ-like way with others by simply emphasizing Church teaching on sexuality and the sanctity of marriage. He said the discussion is important because many people, including youth, already have contact with gay men and women in daily life.

“People should be honest about what church teaching is,” the bishop said. “All sexual activity outside marriage is contradictory to Church teaching and has never been considered acceptable, and that is not going to change.”