

NFCYM Resource on Catholic Girl Scouting March 4, 2016

The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM) takes seriously its responsibility to advocate for the teachings and values of the Catholic Church in the secular and interfaith arena. This role includes organizational relationships, partnerships, and cooperative efforts with universities, organizations, corporations, government, and other faith denominations. This responsibility extends to NFCYM's long-standing relationship and commitment to Girl Scouts USA (GSUSA) and Catholic Girl Scouting in the United States. Scouting is understood as a powerful dimension of Catholic youth ministry.



The charge to actively engage the secular culture in order to bring about transformation and conversion is strongly conveyed in the documents of Vatican II and subsequent papal teachings.

“As sons and daughters of God, we are called to communicate with everyone, without exception.” And: “How I wish that our own way of communicating, as well as our service as pastors of the Church, may never suggest a prideful and triumphant superiority over an enemy, or demean those whom the world considers lost and easily discarded. Mercy can help mitigate life’s troubles and offer warmth to those who have known only the coldness of judgment. May our way of communicating help to overcome the mindset that neatly separates sinners from the righteous. We can and we must judge situations of sin—such as violence, corruption and exploitation—but we may not judge individuals, since only God can see into the depths of their hearts. It is our task to admonish those who err and to denounce the evil and injustice of certain ways of acting, for the sake of setting victims free and raising up those who have fallen. The Gospel of John tells us that “the truth will make you free” (Jn 8:32). The truth is ultimately Christ himself, whose gentle mercy is the yardstick for measuring the way we proclaim the truth and condemn injustice. Our primary task is to uphold the truth with love (cf. Eph 4:15). Only words spoken with love and accompanied by meekness and mercy can touch our sinful hearts. Harsh and moralistic words and actions risk further alienating those whom we wish to lead to conversion and freedom, reinforcing their sense of rejection and defensiveness.”

*From Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 50th World Communications Day:
Communication and Mercy: A Fruitful Encounter*

All the baptized and her agents, are to build and to be the kingdom of God in the world. To absent our Catholic voice from the table only weakens our capacity to engage and influence. The NFCYM understands that the church is not of the world although it is in the world (Lumen Gentium 13, Gaudium et Spes {GS} 3) and that we engage culture through “sincere and prudent dialogue” (GS 21). Dialogue requires personal respect for others, even if they are in error (GS 28). Moreover, the church “is willing to assist and promote” institutions that depend on “her and can be associated with her mission” (GS 42). The church, and by extension the NFCYM, seeks but one goal, “to carry forward the work of Christ” because “Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served” (GS 3).

It is estimated that there are over five hundred thousand Catholic Girl Scouts in the United States. The NFCYM gives voice to these girls and women through the National Catholic Committee for Girl Scouts and Camp Fire (NCCGSCF), which is under our auspices. Through years of committed



dialogue and the reinforcement of shared goals for adolescent development, faith identity and values, and service, NFCYM and GSUSA have fostered a strong national partnership that we encourage local dioceses and Girl Scout Councils to emulate.

In June 2015, Pope Francis met in a private audience with representatives of the International Catholic Committee on Guiding, which unites national associations of Girl Guides (Scouts). Members of the United States delegation included among others, Ms. Kathleen Carver, Associate Director, NFCYM, and Ms. Anna Chavez, CEO, GSUSA. He offered what is perhaps a model for engagement even when there is disagreement (for some, girl guiding/scouting programs may not share the fullness of the church's teaching on marriage, family, or right to life). He engaged the leaders warmly and affirmed the places where there was agreement in mission and values, even while he articulated with clarity those areas in the church's teaching where disagreement with some girls' programs may exist. He listened to the participants and encouraged them to be even stronger in their work of transformation.

He noted: "Here too, the role of educational associations such as yours, that address young girls, is absolutely essential for the future, and your teaching must be clear on these issues. We are in a world where we see the spread of ideologies contrary to nature and God's design for the family and marriage. It is therefore a question not only of educating girls in the beauty and greatness of their vocation as women, in a just relationship recognizing the difference between man and woman, but also to take on important responsibilities in the Church and in society. In some countries where women are still in a position of inferiority, or even exploited and mistreated, you certainly have a significant role to play in promotion and education."

In the United States, it is unfortunate, and to the detriment of Catholic girls, their families, and leaders, that misinformation is allowed to negatively impact the work of evangelization and solid pastoral practice. For girls in scouting programs, the Catholic Religious Recognitions, developed by the NFCYM and supported through GSUSA, offer Catholic girls and their families the opportunity to explore and deepen their Catholic faith through the scouting experience. For some, especially those who may not regularly participate in a Catholic parish, the sacraments, or celebrate the faith in their homes, it is a unique opportunity for outreach and evangelization.

Simply put, If the Catholic Church wishes to help scouting on all levels to unambiguously attest to the values of our Catholic faith, such a transformation cannot happen without respectful dialogue and mutual cooperation. Walking away from scouting is not the answer. The NFCYM recommends the following steps for bishops who have questions regarding Catholic Girl Scouting:

1. Convene a meeting between diocesan officials and local Girl Scout Council representatives
2. Develop a formal Memorandum of Understanding between the diocese and the local Girl Scout Council [<http://www.catholicreligiousrecognitions.org>]
3. Support a diocesan committee for Catholic Girl Scouting [including Camp Fire USA, American Heritage Girls, etc.]
4. Appoint a diocesan chaplain for Catholic Girl Scouting
5. Promote Catholic Religious Recognition Programs for Girl Scouting
6. Foster the formation of Catholic Girl Scout leaders within the context of a comprehensive approach to Catholic youth ministry
7. Consult with the NFCYM and USCCB on youth ministry and Girl Scout related matters