

# Participation in Scout-type Organizations for Boys:

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR LCMS CHURCHES AND INDIVIDUALS

### Background

On May 23, 2013, the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) announced a policy change admitting homosexual youth to scout programs, effective Jan. 1, 2014. At the same time, the BSA re-affirmed its long-standing policy of not allowing openly homosexual men to serve as scoutmasters or leaders in any capacity. The specific language used in the addition to the BSA's membership standard is that "no youth may be denied membership in the Boy Scouts of America on the basis of sexual orientation or preference alone."

Many Scouts, Scout leaders and churches that sponsor Scout troops reacted negatively to the BSA decision. A number of individual leaders, who had been distressed by the willingness of the Scouts even to consider changing their policy, went forward with plans to establish an alternative organization. On Sept. 6-7, 2013, some 1,200 interested individuals gathered for the formation of that alternative group, named Trail Life USA (TL). The leaders of TL have established a strongly Christian alternative to the BSA, which is now chartering member groups through local congregations.

LCMS President Matthew Harrison corresponded with BSA leaders on several occasions during the process leading up to the change in the membership standard and thereafter. Most notable were letters sent to Wayne Brock, Chief Scout Executive, on March 5, 2013, and again on June 27, 2013. President Harrison strongly discouraged any change in the membership standard in his March letter, noting that "the proposed change will highlight sexuality, which has not been and should not be a matter of focus for Scouts." In the June letter, he noted that the BSA decision seemingly endorses "a specific moral position" — namely, the idea that sexual orientation or preference is a morally neutral matter. He also asked whether the long-standing BSA assurance that "the authority of the local pastor and the congregation in any phase of the program affecting the spiritual welfare of Lutheran men and boys in Scouting" was still in effect. In order to allow for further discussion, Harrison asked for a meeting with Brock and BSA leaders.

The BSA gladly welcomed this request, and a meeting took place on Aug. 22, 2013, with representatives of the LCMS and the BSA, including President Harrison and Brock. Two weeks later, LCMS representatives also attended the Inaugural National Leadership Convention of TL in Nashville, Tenn., on Sept. 6-7. In addition, LCMS leaders have conferred with attorneys seeking their suggestions with regard to the legal ramifications involved in the consideration of these matters pertaining to the BSA change in policy. The following pages offer observations and specific considerations for churches and parents as they consider scout-type programs for their boys.

### Boy Scouts of America — Observations

The BSA website ([www.scouting.org](http://www.scouting.org)) provides information pertaining to its May decision.<sup>1</sup> The following observations, however, while based somewhat on these FAQs, is more substantially based on the August face-to-face meeting with BSA leaders. In advance of that meeting the BSA shared a document titled "Fact vs. Fiction," which seeks to clarify its decision and answer what it views as inaccurate portrayals of it.<sup>2</sup> In person, BSA leaders stated to LCMS representatives that turmoil within the BSA, rather than outside pressures, led to the change in the membership standard. Internal debate heightened as the result of a California incident in which Ryan Andresen, who had completed the requirements for the Eagle Scout Award, was removed from Scouting after admitting that he was homosexual. Reaction to that specific BSA decision on the basis of sexual orientation alone was strongly negative within Scouting. Scout leaders, however, believe the decision was unavoidable given the previous policy understanding.

Brock explained the resulting change in policy as akin to a church not excluding a person with homosexual orientation from spiritual care and involvement in the church so long as the individual did not advocate that the church repudiate its understanding of sexual morality or work against the church's teaching. Indeed, he stated that the BSA conferred with a number of church leaders from various denominations that believe homosexual activity is sinful, asking whether they would allow young men who are struggling with their sexual identity to fully participate in church life. The leaders affirmed that they would not refuse ministry to such boys. Scout executives portray the BSA change, therefore, to be fully consistent with the desire to be open to as many boys as possible, to encourage morality and duty toward God without defining either in specific ways (a task left to sponsoring organizations — mostly churches), to oppose any advocacy for political or social groups within Scouting, and to oppose sexual activity — whether homosexual or heterosexual — by Scouts.

The representatives of the BSA stated that they sought legal counsel not only from the firm that has represented them for years in litigation (Hughes Hubbard & Reed), but also from others. Opinions varied with regard to potential effects of a change in policy, including whether the change would effectively nullify the Dale decision. (The case of *Boy Scouts of America vs. Dale* was a June 28, 2000, Supreme Court decision that affirmed the right of the BSA to exclude an openly homosexual man, James Dale, from Scout leadership on the grounds of free association.) Because of the variety of opinions, BSA leaders determined that legal counsel could not form the basis for their decision and instead acted on the basis of what was best for Scouting. In order to determine

1 One page from the website is of particular interest. "Membership Points of Clarification" seeks to answer questions about the decision and its impact on Scouting — especially for churches and individuals: [www.scouting.org/sitecore/content/MembershipStandards/Resolution/FAQ.aspx](http://www.scouting.org/sitecore/content/MembershipStandards/Resolution/FAQ.aspx).

2 The document does not appear at [www.scouting.org](http://www.scouting.org), the national website, but is available on the BSA Northwest Suburban Council website: [www.nwsc.org/flyers/factvsfictionmembershipstandards.pdf](http://www.nwsc.org/flyers/factvsfictionmembershipstandards.pdf).



what that would be, the BSA engaged in an extensive “listening exercise,” which included extensive sampling of opinions from Scouting councils, leaders and individuals, correlated with age, location and other factors. After the survey, the decision was left to a vote by the National Council’s voting delegates (some 1,400 individuals), which endorsed the change by a 60 percent margin.

BSA leadership denies that it was secretly supportive of any “gay rights agenda” or that the decision was the result of financial coercion from corporate sponsors or wealthy donors. Rather, they explained the process they followed with the eventual decision as an honest attempt to balance compassion for individual kids with a strict code of sexual restraint. In addition, BSA leaders expressed their conscientious desire to enable Scouting to move forward without being decimated by controversy over an issue that has polarized American society. Whether that goal will be achieved remains to be seen.

It may be helpful to briefly review an earlier period in the relationship between the LCMS and the BSA — the 1930s and ’40s. Several aspects of that earlier history are significant today. Largely due to LCMS pressure to diminish quasi-religious elements in Scouting at that time, the BSA became more explicitly neutral in its religious emphases. It sought to allay concerns from churches like ours that had objected to such BSA aspects as its membership oath; the presence of certain semi-religious rituals that smacked of nature worship or evoked Native American practices, beliefs and ideas; and mandatory attendance at joint worship services. Most importantly, the BSA assured the Synod that sole spiritual authority over what would be taught and practiced in the realm of religion and morality belonged to the sponsoring church alone. The end result was a more consciously “hands-off” approach by the BSA to matters of religious teaching and moral definition. Section 1 of the BSA Charter describes this by declaring that the BSA “is absolutely nonsectarian in its attitude toward ... religious training.” As a result, in 1944 the LCMS removed restrictions on involvement in the BSA by its members and left such participation to the discretion of local churches and individual church members.

BSA representatives reflected that “hands-off” concern in their explanations of the policy shift. They see their decision as a way to maintain as broad an appeal as possible — preserving Scouting as a positive force for as many young people as possible by answering internal concerns revolving around mandatory expulsion for no reason other than an admission of same-sex attraction. Hence their desire is to be neutral on the question of the morality of same-sex attraction. Second, the representatives assured LCMS leaders that nothing would change in terms of the spiritual authority lying entirely with the sponsoring church, and they stated their willingness to create a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the LCMS to that effect.

## ***Boy Scouts of America — Specific Considerations***

We should note first that the LCMS has a clear and certain understanding of sexual morality, based on the Word of God. The teaching of our church on the matter of homosexuality is unambiguous. Prior to the 1970s, there was virtually no consideration on any level in western society that homosexual orientation and behavior should be viewed as “normal” or morally acceptable or equivalent to heterosexuality. The “law of nature” itself — the simple norm that male and female bodies were designed for each other — was virtually unquestioned. However, in the 1970s when the so-called “Gay Rights Movement” first came to public attention, the LCMS spoke publicly against it. At its 1973 convention, the LCMS stated its scriptural conviction that homosexual behavior is “intrinsically sinful” (Res. 2-04). Since then, the LCMS has reaffirmed that position numerous times in convention resolutions, CTCR reports and other public statements.

Therefore, in considering a responsible course of action within the current societal climate, it is necessary to restate the obvious, namely, the Synod’s commitment to continue to uphold its biblical, moral conviction regarding the normalcy and sanctity of heterosexual marriage with the consequent call to sexual purity for all people (e.g., Gen. 1:27–28; 2:23–24; Ex. 20:14; Matt. 5:27–32; 19:1–12; Rom. 1:24–27; 1 Cor. 6:9–10; see also AC XXIII; AC XXVII; Ap XXIII 7–13; SA III.XI; SC I 11–12; SC Table of Duties; LC I 199–221).

At the same time, threats to these basic truths of what God intends for His human creatures in the realm of sexuality and marriage should not deter us from attention to the central truth and task of the Christian Church — “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:18–20). So while the LCMS dare not compromise the biblical understanding of human sexuality and marriage, neither should it ignore that such truth — as one aspect of the divine Law — is the way God prepares us to receive the saving promise of forgiveness, life and salvation in the reconciling work of Christ Jesus.

This perspective is directly relevant to the questions raised by the Scouting decision. To the narrow question of whether any child, regardless of questions about sexuality, should be excluded from the church’s outreach and ministry, the answer is obvious. Of course, Christians will want to open their hearts to every person and welcome all people to hear the Gospel of life and salvation. Therefore, President Harrison, in his letter explaining the LCMS’ dismay over the BSA decision, stated the following:

Let me first emphasize that the dismay of LCMS leaders and members was in no way based on antipathy toward homosexual individuals or those who are struggling with their sexual orientation. LCMS Scout troops do



not ask about sexual orientation when they recruit members. There is no LCMS Scouting policy that would forbid a troop from accepting a boy even if he were to make known his same-sex attraction. Decisions about individual membership are made locally on a case-by-case basis.

Even as the LCMS seeks to minister to all people, it also understands the importance of preserving a full understanding of the Law of God, so that every person, regardless of individual sinful inclinations and actions, will know that the universal need for forgiveness and redemption applies to him or her as an individual. For this reason, it is important that the BSA has reaffirmed its agreement that for LCMS chartered troops, the responsibility for what is taught in matters of spirituality and morality lies with the church alone. It is not objectionable that a boy who admits to same-sex attraction, who under the old policy would immediately be denied further membership in the BSA, can now continue to participate. However, the commitment to uphold “no advocacy” and/or “no sexual behavior” must be genuine and enforceable by a chartering congregation as well as the BSA itself.

The MOU between the LCMS and the BSA is a critical component in this matter. Concern for precise, careful language in the MOU is not pedantic, but of practical significance. The terminology of the new BSA membership standard and in many follow-up explanations from the BSA is imprecise. For example, in the revised membership standard and in numerous statements explaining it, the expression “sexual orientation or preference” is used. While sexual orientation would typically be understood to indicate a matter that an individual has not chosen or purposefully enacted for himself, sexual preference may well indicate a personal decision and a moral affirmation of that sexual orientation.

To be satisfactory to the LCMS, the MOU needed to explicitly protect the LCMS’ understanding that its willingness to welcome the participation of a boy struggling with same-sex attraction is not an endorsement of any morally neutral understanding of homosexuality. The LCMS troop must have the authority to determine whether a scout is engaging in advocacy for a social or political perspective, such as a “gay rights” agenda or anything else. In other words, ultimate control of membership in an LCMS-chartered troop must belong to the congregation, not the BSA. The MOU needed to state that LCMS congregations that sign charters with the BSA may rely on the stipulations of the MOU. These are necessary protections for any church that intends to continue participating in the BSA. Doctrinally, they protect the teaching of the LCMS regarding human sexuality and the Gospel of forgiveness in Christ. They also help to protect the congregation and the Synod from potential litigation that might attempt to connect willingness to participate in BSA as a sign of inconsistency in the congregation’s or the Synod’s position pertaining to human sexuality.<sup>3</sup>

3 It is necessary to state categorically that the reader should not construe this as legal counsel. The LCMS continues to consult attorneys regarding the best ways to protect our churches from legal challenges that may result from the rapid changes in cultural attitudes and case law occurring at present. Implications of the recent Supreme Court decisions against the Defense of Marriage Act and California’s Proposition 8 are only beginning to be discovered.

As noted above, the BSA has given assurances that the membership standard change was invoked in order to allow for participation in Scouting rather than to endorse a position regarding the moral status of same-sex relationships. The credibility of those assurances is, of course, a matter that must be considered as congregations seek to decide whether they will continue in Scouting. Many individuals and groups long associated with Scouting are leaving the BSA. Others are staying. It is worth noting here that the Church of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) and the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) have not withdrawn from Scouting. While the LDS is not a Christian denomination and the RCC is a church with which the LCMS has significant doctrinal differences, both groups hold strongly traditional understandings of homosexuality — both teach that homosexual activity is immoral. Both groups have deemed the membership standard change as acceptable because it affirms only an openness to participation in Scouting by a boy with same-sex attraction, but does not allow for same-sex activity or advocacy.

In many cases, the decision whether to be involved in Scouting will not be congregational, but personal. Although the Synod does not keep records of this, it is obvious that many LCMS Boy Scouts and Scout leaders are active in troops that are not chartered by LCMS churches. With respect to the matter of sexual morality, conscientious individuals will, therefore, need to consider the character and leadership of the specific troop where their son participates. As noted, BSA leaders assured LCMS representatives that churches are free to hold and teach the conviction that homosexual behavior is immoral. They emphasized that no advocacy of a pro-homosexual agenda is allowable. However, the freedom of religious groups to determine the moral stance that will be taught within their troop is a two-edged sword. Yes, a church sponsoring a troop may teach the biblical position on homosexuality, but a church also is free to teach that homosexuality is morally neutral or even godly. Some no doubt will do so, since some troops are sponsored by church bodies that are actively pro-LGBT.<sup>4</sup>

The future of the BSA is uncertain on several levels. As the following sections will note, many individuals and churches have already committed to TL, the newly established national alternative to the BSA. TL will be an institutional challenge to the BSA. Legal challenges also are likely. Although there are no current civil suits from within or without Scouting against the BSA and the stance they have taken, there should be no assumption that the new BSA membership standard will prevent them, since it still holds a policy forbidding homosexual adult leaders. In addition to civil litigation, legislative challenges also are possible. California, for example, is considering stripping the BSA of its tax-exempt status because it does not allow openly homosexual adult leaders.

Finally, we should be aware that together with many potential benefits of Scouting, there also is a pervasive hazard, namely the moral and religious nonsectarian approach that Scouting, necessarily, has adopted. Since the duty to God and being

4 With respect to this, see *Concord: Newsletter of ReconcilingWorks* | *Lutherans for Full Participation*, vol. 34:1, Spring 2013, 1, 6, 7. The newsletter is put out by an ELCA group supportive of LGBT priorities.





“morally straight” are only minimally defined, a form of operative “agnosticism” results in the realms of spirituality and morality. The BSA as an organization can make no claim to know God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit — and so the organization has LDS and Muslim troops in its membership. Similarly, it cannot any longer lay claim to the knowledge that heterosexuality is morally normative for humanity. There is always a danger that such vacuousness will itself become both a moral position and a theology.

A common civil religiosity is beneficial and societally necessary in many ways, but the church should always recognize that civil religion is an undependable ally — if it is an ally at all. Moral consensus is breaking down dramatically in the U.S. The same is true in terms of theological consensus, which is shrinking among “churches,” to say nothing of society in general. Civil morality today goes little beyond a consensus that people with different moral convictions should not kill each other. As such, tolerance becomes the only real virtue. Moreover, the theology of civil religion is, frequently, nothing more than recognition of some kind of spiritual force at work in the world. Hence, if Scouting is to be valuable, it must be supplemented with genuine, truthful moral and theological content. Any conscientious LCMS participation in Scouting, whether by its churches or individually, must be aware that our highest loyalty is to the one God we trust, know, confess and serve in Christ Jesus.

## Trail Life USA — Observations

Trail Life USA is an organization that is in formation with a goal to enable boys to “Walk Worthy” (its motto). TL’s leadership is entirely comprised of former members of the Boy Scouts of America who were displeased both with the recent change in the membership policy of the BSA allowing avowed homosexual boys and — prior to that — with the decision even to entertain a change in position.<sup>5</sup> On its website, TL describes itself and provides vision and mission statements ([www.traillifeusa.com/who-we-are/](http://www.traillifeusa.com/who-we-are/)):

Trail Life USA is a Christian adventure, character, and leadership movement for young men. The K-12 program centers on outdoor experiences that build a young man’s skills and allow him to grow on a personal level and as a role model and leader for his peers. Living the Trail Life is a journey established on timeless values derived from the Bible.

**VISION** Our vision is to be the premier national character development organization for young men which produces Godly and responsible husbands, fathers, and citizens.

**MISSION** Our mission is simple and clear: to guide generations of courageous young men to honor God, lead with integrity, serve others, and experience outdoor adventure.

<sup>5</sup> It was made clear that, for many of the leaders of TL, the decision to reconsider the membership standard was the signal that led to the conclusion that an alternative organization was needed.

TL seeks to be an alternative to the Boy Scouts in helping boys to become honorable men, but one with a specifically Christocentric identity. At present, the chartering members of TL will all be Christian churches.

TL’s National Leadership Convention was striking in its character — having the feel of a religious convocation, together with a praise band playing for the opening session and during transitions throughout the event. The assembly sang hymns or Christian songs as part of the opening and during devotions. The prevailing ethos of the organization was one of Evangelical Christianity, even though there was a contingent of Roman Catholics — less than 100 of the 1,200 attending.

TL’s Christ-centered character is particularly evident in its “Statement of Faith and Values,” borrowed in whole from American Heritage Girls (AHG).<sup>6</sup> TL will be open to any boy, regardless of religious convictions, but leaders are required to sign the faith statement, which affirms the Trinity, the authority of the Scriptures and obligations of purity, service, stewardship and integrity, among other things (see [www.traillifeusa.com/who-we-are/values/statement-of-faith-values/](http://www.traillifeusa.com/who-we-are/values/statement-of-faith-values/)). An oath and creed for the organization are planned, but have not yet been finalized.

TL holds to standards of behavior and morality as biblically defined and so repudiates “any sexual activity outside the context of the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman.” At the same time, there is no explicit rejection of membership by a boy who would admit to same-sex attraction. Rather, “within these limits, we grant membership to adults and youth who do not engage in or promote sexual immorality of any kind, or engage in behavior that would become a distraction to the mission of the program.”<sup>7</sup>

The actual program that TL will use both parallels and also seeks to improve on the BSA program. It extends the age for participation from kindergarten through age 25. The involvement of fathers is emphasized throughout the program, but mothers and women appear to play a role only in the earliest years of the program plan. TL’s program maintains a cohesive approach to the entire unit throughout grade school, middle school and high school, with only a single charter required for all the levels. At the same time, it provides specific age-appropriate breakdowns: Woodlands Trail (for K-Grade 5), Navigators (Grades 6-8), Adventurers (Grades 9-12) and Guidon (a co-ed group for 18- to 25-year-olds).

<sup>6</sup> AHG is a “Girl Scout-type” group with a Christ-centered mission that is “dedicated to building women of integrity.” AHG’s statement of faith is serving, at least provisionally, as the statement of faith for TL. It has existed for nearly two decades and is an established presence in some LCMS churches. Although it seeks to work with any “Christ-centered” church, AHG’s leadership has proven its willingness (and even eagerness) to work within the doctrinal distinctiveness of specific churches such as the LCMS, showing high respect for churches with firm doctrinal convictions. The relationship with and respect for AHG within TL is a hopeful sign for the future direction of TL. See [www.ahgonline.org](http://www.ahgonline.org).

<sup>7</sup> With regard to their approach to youth membership, TL and BSA are more similar than dissimilar, with the most significant difference being BSA’s explicit acceptance of a boy (or girl) with same-sex attraction.



The program is still developing but because of the heavy influence of Evangelical theology, it may be helpful to provide some brief observations regarding the program specifics that are available.

Woodlands Trail is broken down into two-year increments. The prayers and objectives for the curriculum's six component parts — Focus, Fingers, Fun, Family, Forest Badge and Faith — are generally unproblematic, but the first and last components reflect an Evangelical perspective both in some of the objectives and in the suggested prayers that LCMS churches would need to modify.

The Navigators level reflects the BSA Star level with emphasis on teaching skills. An aspect of this program is an option for fathers and sons to use *Manhood Journey*,<sup>8</sup> which would require careful use and some modification.<sup>9</sup>

Adventurers involves many options as the TL boy advances with the highest goal being the Freedom Award (equal to Eagle Scout). One religious requirement must be satisfied for the Freedom Award. As an option for that, a *Youth With a Mission*<sup>10</sup> experience is one suggestion. For a civic requirement, a TeenPact<sup>11</sup> week is suggested. Both organizations are thoroughly Evangelical in identity. However, TL leaders are open to churches establishing their own materials and programs to satisfy such requirements.<sup>12</sup>

Guidon is a co-ed program intended for college-age students and is similar to BSA Venturing. Minimal adult leadership is required since these scouts are adults. This program appears to be only minimally developed at present.

In terms of legal strategy, TL seems committed to emphasizing its Christian identity as a way to establish firm First Amendment

8 *Manhood Journey* is an Evangelical Bible study that provides a sort of “how-to” for manhood in five steps — an approach that invites a Law-oriented approach to the Word of God. While not “unusable” for Lutherans, they would need modifications and some solid Law-Gospel distinction. See [www.manhoodjourney.org](http://www.manhoodjourney.org).

9 TL will use P.R.A.Y. materials as one component of its program, just as the BSA, Girl Scouts and AHG do at the present time. The P.R.A.Y. program combines Bible study and service projects. Its materials tend to be denominationally neutral in terms of doctrinal issues that divide churches. See [www.praypub.org](http://www.praypub.org).

10 Youth With a Mission (YWAM) is an Evangelical organization intent on evangelizing, mobilizing and equipping Christian youth in response to the Great Commission. It offers involvement for youth in short- and long-term mission engagement. YWAM's identity is shaped by its commitment to the Lausanne Covenant. It also will be a partner group for TL in fulfillment of the religious achievement component of its awards. See [www.ywam.org](http://www.ywam.org).

11 TeenPact is an overtly “evangelical Christian leadership program” with which TL will partner to provide one option for the religious achievement aspect of higher awards, such as the Freedom award (roughly equal to Eagle Scout status). TeenPact's statement of faith is emphatically anti-sacramental (Baptism and the Lord's Supper are “not to be regarded as means of salvation” and is incompatible with Lutheran teaching.) See [www.teenpact.com](http://www.teenpact.com).

12 One exclusive option for a few boys (1-3 percent) is an intense Troop called the Vanguard, for dedicated boys, including those inclined toward ministry. The Vanguard Troop is owned and directed by Trail Life USA, not the chartering church. Vanguard includes advanced leadership training and activities — much of which is akin to pre-seminary teaching. While such overt encouragement toward the ministry is welcome, both the curricular approach and the predominant Evangelical ethos of Trail Life suggest that participation by Lutheran boys would provide personal and theological formation that are not conducive to Lutheran pastoral vocations.

protections. Richard Mathews, former general counsel for the BSA who left after the BSA membership standard change, is now providing legal counsel for TL.

## Trail Life USA — Specific Considerations

As noted above, Trail Life USA is highly representative of American Evangelicalism. The worship “style” of the meeting, the prayers, comments from almost every speaker, theological statements, associations and relationships — all of these factors reflect an Evangelical identity. Any LCMS church considering a charter or any LCMS parent considering involving a son in TL should be well aware that Evangelical thinking and practices will be unavoidable. The likelihood that any LCMS presence would constitute only a slim minority makes it challenging to consider how at larger TL events — camp-outs and so forth — the LCMS could provide an alternative to the Evangelical worship service that will no doubt be the norm. Certainly, some of the materials and programs by organizations that TL will be partnering with — TeenPact is a prime example — are simply unusable by a Lutheran organization with any concern for biblical and confessional orthodoxy.

However, TL also is a work in progress. Its leadership has displayed a desire for and a willingness to listen to responses and concerns from individuals and churches that are considering involvement. Leaders such as John Stemberger and David Servin have conferred with the LCMS and expressed their recognition that TL must be respectful of the distinctiveness of different Christian churches and traditions. TL's goal is to be Christian, but not denominationally specific, and both men welcomed suggestions from the LCMS on how to eliminate obstacles to LCMS involvement and also how specific materials and programs could be used by boys in the program. For example, LCMS-sponsored mission trips would be recognized in place of involvement in YWAM and LCMS-prepared Bible studies and teaching materials would be welcome for use by TL.

## Conclusion

The LCMS has taken no formal position, something that could be done only by convention resolution, with regard to scout-type organizations for decades. In the case of the Boy Scouts, the LCMS did not formally endorse the BSA, but stated only that it does not consider involvement to be divisive of its fellowship — congregations were free to decide whether or not to charter troops and parents could freely allow their sons to participate or forbid them, according to conscience and local circumstances.<sup>13</sup> That position has not changed, although the LCMS may well reconsider the question of the Boy Scouts at any future convention and would likely do so if the implementation of the new membership standard proves to be an impossible obstacle to doctrinal integrity.

A somewhat similar approach seems to be in order regarding TL. At present, it would be premature to wholly approve or condemn the organization. Its concerns are consistent with those of the LCMS in many ways. Nonetheless, it, too, poses a challenge for a

13 See, for example, LCMS, 1944 *Convention Proceedings*, p. 257.



church that seeks to be biblical and confessional. The challenge posed by the BSA is obvious: its consistently “nonsectarian” stance means it is in perennial danger of encouraging religious syncretism and moral relativism. TL is subject to neither of those tendencies, but an uncritical involvement in TL could be just as problematic for any confessional Lutheran, for he or his congregation could easily be drawn into a theological perspective that is anti-sacramental, Arminian in its view of conversion and legalistic in its understanding of sanctification.

It would be premature and uncharitable to say that Lutheran churches and individuals cannot be involved in TL without compromising doctrine or practice — especially because of the willingness of TL leaders to respond to our theological concerns. At the same time, we cannot recommend this organization without adding a qualification that congregational leadership be proactive in discerning the theological content of program offerings.

Any church considering a charter or any parent considering involvement in either the BSA or TL ought to proceed with prayerful caution and careful pastoral involvement and guidance.

---

