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ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS

OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

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February 18, 2016

Dear Priests, Scout Leaders and Faithful of the Archdiocese.

For several years, the Archdiocese of St. Louis, along with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, has been investigating concerns regarding Girls Scouts USA (GSUSA). These concerns also extend to the parent organization of GSUSA, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS). They include, but are not limited to:

1. WAGGGS' continued promotion of contraception and "abortion rights" on behalf of its girl members, the majority of whom are minors
2. Financial contributions from GSUSA to WAGGGS, based on number of registered GSUSA members
3. GSUSA resources and social media highlight and promote role models in conflict with Catholic values, such as Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan.
4. Organizations that GSUSA promotes and partners with are conflict with Catholic values, such as Amnesty International, Coalition for Adolescent Girls, OxFam and more. This is especially troubling in regards to sex education and advocacy for "reproductive rights" (i.e. abortion and contraceptive access, even for minors)

In November of 2014, the Catholic Youth Apostolate issued a letter of concern to pastors and the faithful of the archdiocese regarding these issues. Since then, GSUSA and Girls Scouts of Eastern Missouri (GSEM) have tried to downplay and distance themselves from these issues; however, we continue to have more questions than answers. We have been in dialogue with these groups and have voiced our concerns on numerous occasions.

In addition, recent concerns about GSUSA and their position on and inclusion of transgender and homosexual issues are proving problematic. Our culture is becoming increasingly intolerant of a Catholic worldview regarding these issues. While Catholics are called to treat all people with compassion and mercy, we must at the same time be mindful of whom we allow to teach and form our youth and the messages they present. Because local Girl Scout troops are chartered with GSEM, not the parish, any authority on policy and teaching resides with GSEM rather than with parish leadership. In addition, given the fact that the Girl Scout program is a secular organization, they are not obliged to uphold the teachings of our faith.

For many years, Girls Scouts has been a valuable resource in teaching our young Catholic girls leadership skills and helping form them as Christian leaders. I know that we have many faithful Catholic Girl Scout leaders who make sure that these troubling elements of the Girl Scout program are not brought into the troops at our parishes. I wish to thank each of you for your time and commitment to building up the girls of our archdiocese into strong Catholic women of virtue and faith.

It is, however, becoming harder to assure these same results from the Girl Scout program. Girl Scouts is exhibiting a troubling pattern of behavior and it is clear to me that as they move in the ways of the world it is becoming increasingly incompatible with our Catholic values. *We must stop and ask ourselves - is Girl Scouts concerned with the total well-being of our young women? Does it do a good job forming the spiritual, emotional, and personal well-being of Catholic girls?*

Concerns are also continuing to surface with Boy Scouts of America (BSA). While the new BSA leadership policy currently offers some protections to religious organizations, I continue to wonder in which direction this once trusted organization is now headed.

In “Renewing the Vision,” the US Bishops’ framework for Youth Ministry, we read: “*All ministry with adolescents must be directed toward presenting young people with the Good news of Jesus Christ and inviting and challenging them to become disciples*” (page 10). While I am certain that many dedicated leaders are fulfilling this mandate within their troops, I continue to be concerned of messages at odds with our faith that our youth are receiving from GSUSA and the organizations that they partner with.

I take all of these concerns very seriously. Therefore, I am asking each pastor that allows Girl Scout troops to meet on parish property to conduct a meeting with troop leadership to review these concerns and discuss implementing alternative options for the formation of our girls. Our primary obligation is to help our girls grow as women of God. Several alternative organizations exist, many of which have a Catholic or Christian background. For more information on each of these organizations and a more detailed listing of ongoing concerns, please visit [archstl.org/scouting](http://archstl.org/scouting). I ask that you carefully study each organization and strongly consider offering one of these programs in your parish instead of Girl Scouts.

Effective immediately, I am disbanding the Catholic Committee on Girl Scouts and instead forming a Catholic Committee for Girls Formation that will be charged with ministry to all girls in various organizations. While continuing to serve our Catholic girls involved in various scouting programs, this committee will also reflect our ongoing commitment to educating and forming all young women.

I am aware that many of our young women are active in Girl Scouts and any action taken against the organization affects them first. To aid in this process, the Catholic Youth Apostolate is available to offer assistance in helping your parish. They are continuing to strategize new Catholic formation programs to address the spiritual, emotional and personal well-being of all Catholic girls.

Know that you and the youth of our Archdiocese remain in my prayers,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert J. Carlson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Robert J. Carlson  
Archbishop of St. Louis