



February 11, 2012

Updated National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM) Position Statement on Girl Scouts USA (GSUSA)

Refer to January 2011 Position Statement for Additional Background

Preface

NFCYM “serves those who serve the young Catholic Church” and advocates for the teachings and values of the Catholic Church in all arenas, including and especially, the challenge of Pope John Paul II to evangelize culture. In light of the new evangelization, NFCYM’s policy and approach in relating to secular and public organizations and institutions is one of advocacy through engagement and dialogue. **It is estimated that several hundred thousand Catholic girls and women are involved in Girl Scouting. As such, they are a significant constituency within Catholic youth ministry and the Catholic Church, deserving of our support and advocacy.**

NFCYM Principles and Approach

These principles guide our work:

- **Advocacy:** NFCYM takes seriously its role as an advocate for the values and teachings of the Catholic Church in the secular arena. As such, we promote a comprehensive approach to youth ministry and for the involvement of young people in the Catholic faith community.
- **Engagement:** NFCYM believes that the evangelization of culture is only possible through direct and regular engagement with society, organizations, and institutions. Separation and isolation only widen the gap of ignorance, fear, and distrust, yielding little benefit for the church and young people we serve.
- **Dialogue:** NFCYM is committed to regular patterns of direct and respectful communication; building relationships of trust; and serious discussions where issues are identified and solutions and responses implemented.

Current Issues

Several issues have arisen in the past two years that have caused some leaders and organizations to question the relationship between GSUSA and the Catholic Church, and between the GSUSA and NFCYM, through our National Catholic Committee for Girl Scouts and Camp Fire (NCCGSCF).

In 2010, a fundamental accusation was raised that GSUSA had taken an intentional position contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church on marriage, abortion, contraception, and sexuality. In 2011 and 2012 the accusations continued.

Our practice as an organization is to investigate, understand, and then, if necessary, challenge such matters by going directly to the sources involved. As a result, NFCYM has been in direct contact with GSUSA leadership and has engaged in substantial conversation characterized by mutual respect and shared goals.

Also, with this matter, NFCYM has met with, and is in ongoing communication and consultation with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Results of Dialogue

NFCYM has met with GSUSA, including their new CEO, Anna Maria Chavez, who has committed to continued dialogue. This has resulted in:

- GSUSA’s commitment to strengthening their relationship with faith communities and honoring the religious principles in their program resource material. Therefore, changes have recently been made to GSUSA’s print and web program content as a result of the issues of concern raised by NFCYM and others. In addition, a thorough review of all GSUSA program resources is in process by GSUSA.
- The national staffs of both organizations having committed to promote positive intersections of our youth development programs and strongly encouraging relationship-building at the local level.
- Communication strategies that more quickly and successfully address accusations and communicate factual information.

Serving Those Who Serve the Young Catholic Church

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National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM) and Girl Scouts USA (GSUSA)

Position Update: January 28, 2011

Background

Several issues have arisen in the past two years that have caused some leaders and organizations to question the relationship between GSUSA and the Catholic Church and the GSUSA and NFCYM, through our National Catholic Committee on Girls Scouts and Camp Fire (NCCGSCF). This position update identifies the main issues and the official NFCYM and GSUSA responses based on our mutual communications, knowing that not all issues affect every diocese or council.

The formal relationship between GSUSA and the Catholic Church dates back to 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. In 1988 the Secretariat for Laity and Family Life was assigned to serve as liaison to GSUSA.

In 1982 the NFCYM was incorporated as a ministry organization, which included the 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 Camp Fire units. Building on the relationship created through USCC, the NFCYM entered into a plan of cooperation with GSUSA in 1997, through our NCCGSCF. 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 1997 Plan of Cooperation was updated in 2005 and includes a grievance process for when issues arise and recommendations for strengthening communication between GSUSA leadership and youth ministry leadership at the parish, diocesan, and national levels.

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

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FAQs

E-mail your questions about the NCCGSCF, religious recognition programs, or adult involvement.

Note: Each diocesan Catholic Committee for Girl Scouts and Camp Fire seeks to work closely with their local Girl Scout council; providing training for adults wishing to work on the religious recognitions, retreats, and Days of Reflection for Catholic girls, retreats for Catholic adults, resources for troops in need of their faith's view on social issues, and opportunities for the troops to be part of their parish's total youth ministry program.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS

Does GSUSA have a relationship with Planned Parenthood?

No, Girl Scouts of the USA does not have a relationship or partnership with Planned Parenthood. Parents or guardians make all decisions regarding program participation that may be of a sensitive nature. Consistent with that belief, GSUSA directs councils, including volunteer leaders, to get written parental permission for any locally planned program that could be considered sensitive.

The Girl Scout law does not reference God any longer.

This is not true. The leaders are informed that the girls may use the word God or whatever their religion's name for God is, e.g., Jehovah, Allah, Buddha, etc.

The sale of Girl Scout cookies goes to support abortions and/or Planned Parenthood.

This is not true. The sale of Girl Scout cookies supports the councils and troops that sell them.

Girl Scouting does not promote Christian values.

This is not true. Read the [position paper](#) that explains the GSUSA commitment to Christian values within Girl Scouting. Girl Scouts promotes the girls' achievement of their individual faith's recognitions and encourages them to proudly wear the medals on the front of their vests.

American Heritage Girls may not participate in the

ABOUT RELIGIOUS RECOGNITION PROGRAMS

Are there any specific procedures that must be followed to begin these programs?

You must notify your [diocesan Catholic committee](#) or the diocesan office of youth ministry before you begin. Each diocese administers the program separately and in order to receive the medals, you must follow their guidelines. [Only an authorized purchaser may purchase medals and patches for your diocese.](#)

May I photocopy the workbooks?

No, the workbooks are copyrighted. A workbook should be purchased for each participant.

What grade corresponds to each workbook?

The following are the suggested grades

- *Family of God* workbook—grades 2-3
- *I Live My Faith* workbook—grades 4-6
- *Mary, the First Disciple* workbook—grades 7-10
- *The Spirit Alive* workbook—grades 9-12

How long does it take to complete a workbook?

On average it takes:

- A minimum of three to six (3-6) months to complete the *Family of God* workbook
- A minimum of three to six (3-6) months to complete the *I Live My Faith* workbook

ABOUT RELIGIOUS RECOGNITION PROGRAMS

I have old copies of the *Family of God* books (pre-2004), *Marian Medal* book (pre-2006), and *The Spirit Alive* book (pre-2004). May I continue to use them?

Yes, the old copies may be used. They will not be exchanged by the NFCYM for the newer books. However, it would be better to use the newer editions of these books (*Family of God* ©2004, *Mary, the First Disciple* ©2006, and *The Spirit Alive* ©2004) as they are more contemporary, content has been updated, and the books are visually appealing.

How do I order the workbooks?

Click on [Online Store](#) in the navigation bar (above the logo box) and place your order by using your Visa, MasterCard, or Discover (American Express is not accepted) credit card. If paying by check follow the steps of the online store until you reach the page that gives your billing and shipping addresses and the total for your order that includes the shipping costs. Print this page and mail it to the NFCYM along with your check. You may also order books through your diocese. Please contact them for their current ordering policies.

How do I purchase the medals and patches?

Only authorized diocesan purchasers are allowed to purchase the medals and patches. Contact your diocesan Catholic committee or diocesan office of youth ministry for this information. The diocesan offices of youth ministry and links to them are located on our [the NFCYM website](#).

Catholic religious recognition programs.

This is not true. Youth in the American Heritage Girls program may earn the medals as youth in other programs. The AHG is proud to offer their participants the opportunity to earn a religious award/medal based upon individual denominational beliefs/affiliations.

- A minimum of one school year to complete the *Mary, the First Disciple* workbook
- A minimum of one school year to complete *The Spirit Alive* workbook

How much are the books?

Currently, the NFCYM charges \$4.45 each for the workbooks (all levels) with separate shipping and handling charge. The shipping and handling charge is determined by our [online store](#) and is based upon actual UPS charges or USPS charges. You may also order books through your diocese. Please contact them for their current charges.

Does the workbook come with a leader's guide?

The leader's guide is part of the workbook (not a separate document) for the *Family of God* and *I Live My Faith* workbooks. A separate document is available for the *Mary, the First Disciple* and *The Spirit Alive* workbooks respectively. The separate leader's guide (*Mary* and *The Spirit Alive*) is shipped free with an order at a ratio of one (1) free leader's guide per every five (5) workbooks purchased. Otherwise, the leader's guide may be purchased at a cost of \$2.00 each. You may also order the leader's guide through your diocese. Please contact them for their current charges.


Where do I send the medal application forms?

The medal application forms are to be completed by the youth and adult advisor. Once completed, they should be sent to your [diocesan office of youth ministry](#) or diocesan authorized representatives. Do not mail to the NFCYM office, this slows down the awarding of the medals.

For further details regarding the religious recognition programs, contact:

- Your parish
- Your diocesan committee on Catholic scouting and Camp Fire
- Your diocesan office of youth ministry
- Your [regional representative](#) on the National Catholic Committee for Girl Scouts and Camp Fire (NCCGSCF). The regional representatives, their telephone number, and an email link (if given to the NFCYM) for them are located on [our website](#).

Is there a paper brochure to order from?

There is a paper brochure but all orders must be placed online using the [NFCYM Online Store](#). Download brochure  7.46MB.

Current Issues

In 2010 several issues arose concerning GSUSA triggered by a March meeting at the United Nations where GSUSA supposedly distributed inappropriate materials on human sexuality and a campaign was begun to have the Catholic Church and all her agencies sever ties with GSUSA. These issues included the GSUSA relationship with the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) and the GSUSA relationship with Planned Parenthood, both of which called into question GSUSA's position on providing resources and programs on human sexuality. The fundamental accusation is that GSUSA distributes materials reflecting an official stance contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church on marriage, abortion, contraception, and sexuality.

Our practice as an organization is to investigate such matters by going directly to the sources involved so we contacted GSUSA and several of those who had made accusations concerning the UN meeting. In a March 16 e-mail to NFCYM membership we shared the GSUSA response to the UN meeting, which included in part:

"The Girls Only Workshop was hosted by GSUSA, UNICEF's Working Group on Girls, Girls Learn International, and The Grail. The meeting was only open to the girls and participating sponsors. The girls received a copy of the only document they were working on, titled *The Girls Statement*. No other documents were given to the girls as part of the event. The room in question was also used to host other events over the course of the multi-day conference. Prior to our girls entering the room, we did not 'sanitize' the room to ensure that no trash or other items were left behind. GSUSA was not contacted by C-Fam regarding its initial story to discuss the facts of this event. Had they applied these basic journalistic standards, the true details of this event would have been reported."

NFCYM was satisfied with the GSUSA account of the UN meeting. However, the accusations about the UN meeting served to spur a multitude of articles, e-mails, and phone calls. Coupled with ongoing concerns about GSUSA's relationship with Planned Parenthood, NFCYM leadership arranged a meeting with GSUSA leadership in Washington, DC in November 2010. NFCYM staff, Joan Treacy from NCCGSCF and NFCYM's Board of Directors, and Sr. Eileen McCann from the Secretariat for Family, Laity, Women and Youth at USCCB met with three national GSUSA leaders with a two-part agenda:

1. To identify and clarify the critical accusations about GSUSA's relationship with Planned Parenthood and their advocacy of resources contrary to Catholic teachings on human sexuality, family and marriage;
2. To review the relationship between NFCYM and GSUSA in the promotion of our religious recognitions programs.

At that meeting we asked for an official statement clarifying their relationship with WAGGGS and Planned Parenthood and their approach to education in human sexuality. Their December 3 statement emphasizes the primacy of parents in all matters concerning human sexuality and denies any formal relationship with Planned Parenthood.

This statement reinforces our 2005 Plan of Cooperation, where it is written:

“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.”

Many Catholic Girl Scout leaders are feeling torn between their commitment to Girl Scouting and their commitment to their Catholic teachings because of the real or perceived relationship between GSUSA and organizations like Planned Parenthood. The NFCYM approach to this complex issue has been one of engagement, rather than detachment or withdrawal. NFCYM, through NCCGSCF, needs to stay connected to GSUSA not only because thousands of Catholic girls and Catholic adult leaders are involved in scouting, but because Girl Scouting—like Boy Scouting—provides excellent character development for young people through their programs. NFCYM can only influence secular organizations by staying in relationship with them . . . by being at the table.

In addition to releasing their public statement, GSUSA has taken two other actions:

1. On Thursday, January 27, GSUSA conducted a conference call with their council executives to assist them in working more closely with faith based organizations. NFCYM sees that as a significant action in promoting our religious recognition programs.
2. GSUSA has agreed to a follow-up meeting between their national leadership and NFCYM leadership this summer to continue to review and access our relationship and the critical issues.

NFCYM will continue to closely monitor any new issues that arise and, through our NCCGSCF, continue to engage GSUSA leadership in their active support of NFCYM religious recognition programs.