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# Glass ceilings: the Boy Scouts and the Catholic church

Mike Sweitzer-Beckman | Jun. 6, 2013 Young Voices

I am admittedly not a Boy Scout. I joined the Scouts in elementary school and lasted for about a week. It was my first time camping, and I tried to like eating beans out of a can for a meal. I didn't like wearing jeans as a kid, and wearing sweatpants prevented me from wearing the Scouts' belt buckle, part of the official uniform. Not wearing jeans became irreconcilable, so I left the Scouts after that camping trip.

In truth, I just wasn't an outdoorsman, but in adulthood, I recognize so many deficiencies I might not have if I stuck with the Scouts for longer (and found some comfort in denim). I'm sure I'd be better at identifying birds and trees and handier when it comes to home projects that involve more than a hammer and screwdriver. My cousin is just wrapping up high school, and Scouts has been a formative experience for him. I now see how much of a social and creative function a den provides, including giving boys something constructive to do by learning how to react in home fires or bonding with others over how fast a derby car travels. Scouts has been a big part of my cousin's life, just as participating as an altar server at his local Catholic parish.

I was relieved when the Boy Scouts of America voted to allow gay Scouts to remain in their troops. I wouldn't want my cousin or any of his friends to be removed from the Scouts if he were to come out as gay. The chairman of the National Catholic Committee on Scouting said [1] this stance on openness to gay members in Scouts is not in conflict with Catholic teaching, citing the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

However, the Scouts did not go far enough, voting to maintain the status quo on not allowing gay Scouts to participate as troop leaders. To me, it's a double standard: We'll accept you when you're a boy, but once you grow up, it's our way or the highway. Richard Gaillardetz speculates in a May 31 piece [2] for *NCR* that this is because of the not-so-public but "unsubstantiated belief that homosexuals are more prone to sexual abuse of children than are heterosexuals." He may not be far off in his assessment. It seems this mismatched policy would imply there is a hope that boys would outgrow homosexuality or that maturity would lead them to realize they are not gay. Similar to the bishops' "Always Our Children [3]," there is a "love the sinner, hate the sin" approach, but not a complete respect for the idea that sexual orientation is not something a person chooses. There is a glass ceiling for how far gay Scouts can go before they have to chart their own path outside of the organization.

It's disheartening to see so many Catholic leaders encourage pulling away from the Scouts because of this new policy. This Huffington Post article [4], for example, has anecdotes from a Catholic pastor in Washington state and a Catholic bishop in Virginia discouraging the policy.

When reflecting on this, I think of my cousin, the Scout and altar server. His younger sister currently serves as an altar server, allowable in their diocese but certainly not in all churches and dioceses in the United States. (Lincoln, Neb., comes to mind as a diocese that does not allow female altar servers.) Fortunately, she's currently in a place where she is able to nurture this leadership role. However, much like gay boys who participate in the Scouts, she will only be able to go so far in her leadership roles in the Catholic church. The priesthood remains closed to her in every diocese.

One thing the Scouts and the church can certainly agree on is having glass ceilings for certain members based on identity categories. With Pope Francis bringing a breath of fresh air to the Vatican through his emphasis on financial ethics [5], perhaps there is a certain humility being emulated at the top. We may be seeing it trickle down as a new sense of welcoming enters the Vatican, and perhaps some of these glass ceilings will be shattered to allow those who feel called to a role to play that role.

[Mike Sweitzer-Beckman helped launch the blog youngadultcatholics-blog.com [6] in 2008. He also blogs at sweitman-solutions.com [7] about technology.]

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