News



Girl Scouts sing during a welcoming ceremony for the Peace Light upon its arrival at John F. Kennedy International Airport in Jamaica, N.Y., from Vienna Dec. 4, 2022. In an Oct. 28, 2024, message, Archbishop Dennis Schnurr announced the Cincinnati Archdiocese would discontinue its partnership with the Girl Scouts of the USA due to the national organization's "impoverished worldview regarding gender and sexuality" conflicting with Catholic teaching. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz, CNS archive)

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The Archdiocese of Cincinnati has announced it will discontinue its partnership with the Girl Scouts of the USA due to the organization's "impoverished worldview regarding gender and sexuality," which conflicts with Catholic teaching.

In a message dated October 2024 posted to the archdiocesan website, Archbishop Dennis M. Schnurr said the decision was made "in consultation with the archdiocesan Presbyteral Council and Deans, and with the recommendation of key archdiocesan leaders."

The archbishop has instructed archdiocesan pastors to phase out their parishes' partnerships with the Girl Scouts of the USA and Girl Scouts of Western Ohio over a 14-month period beginning in November and ending in December 2025.

In a statement emailed to OSV News Oct. 29, the Girl Scouts of Western Ohio said that it was "deeply disappointed by this decision, as are thousands of Girl Scouts and dedicated volunteers across our council who value both their Catholic faith and the Girl Scout Leadership Experience."

By the end of 2025, "every Girl Scout troop operating on any Catholic campus" within the Archdiocese of Cincinnati must "convert to an American Heritage Girls troop" or "find another location at which to meet" or "disband" altogether, said the archdiocesan message.

Founded in 1995, the Cincinnati-based American Heritage Girls has emerged as an explicitly Christian alternative to Girl Scouts, with troops in all U.S. states as well as in 15 countries worldwide. The program has five levels: Pathfinders, ages 5-6; Tenderhearts, ages 6-9; Explorers, ages 9-12; Pioneers, ages 12-14; and Patriots, ages 14-18. AHG describes its program as one "dedicated to the mission of building

women of integrity through service to God, family, community and country."

"AHG is openly Christ-centered and dedicated to helping girls respond to God’s call to grow in purity, service, stewardship and integrity," said the archdiocese. "Moreover, AHG expressly believes that every person is made in the image of God. The organization and its values are perfectly aligned with Catholic youth ministry."

The archdiocese, however, noted that "most, if not all, of the Girl Scout troops associated with Catholic parishes and schools in the archdiocese have not participated in anything objectionable." It said the decision "is not a reflection on any of the local troop leaders," whom the archdiocese said "have promoted and modelled what it means to be a faithful Catholic woman through both troop activities and pursuit of Religious Awards."

In addition, the archdiocese said that "parents have the right and responsibility to make moral choices on behalf of their minor children," as "it is not the place of the Church to make such decisions."

At the same time, said the archdiocese, "the Church does, however, have a responsibility to form consciences and educate the faithful on possible dangers," encouraging parents to "carefully consider" findings by both the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the archdiocese itself on the Girl Scouts "in order to make informed prudential decisions."

A timeline of events leading up to the archdiocese's move to part ways with the Girl Scouts, included by the archdiocese in its message, maps out an increasing divergence between the Girl Scouts and the Catholic Church on issues of human sexuality.

The archdiocese cited a 2012 inquiry into the Girl Scouts launched by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops regarding concerns about the organization's relationship with Planned Parenthood and the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts; its policy on matters pertaining to human sexuality, contraception and abortion; and its programmatic materials and content. Following conversations between the USCCB's Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth and Girl Scouts leadership, the bishops issued guidelines intended to inform and aid diocesan bishops in discerning a path forward regarding the Girl Scouts, with local chapters and their presiding bishops to mutually agree to parameters for Catholic troops.

In 2016, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and the Western Ohio Girl Scouts agreed to a five-year memorandum of understanding. Upon its expiration in 2021, archdiocesan staff reexamined Girl Scout materials and identified "concerns previously not identified about a growing advocacy, both at the national and local levels, for sexual and gender ideologies contrary to the Catholic understanding of the human person and moral teaching of the Church," said the archdiocese.

A new memorandum, developed with input from a moral theologian, was proposed by the archdiocese in 2023, requesting the Girl Scouts to "cease promotion of activities, resources, badges and awards repugnant to Catholic teaching," the archdiocese said.

A counter-memorandum offered by the Girls Scouts "failed to address the fundamental concerns of the archdiocese," and at an April 2024 meeting between archdiocesan and Girl Scout leaders, "it became clear that there was no apparent path forward," said the archdiocese.

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The archdiocese noted several specific examples from the Girl Scouts of "objectionable materials" and "promotion" that conflict with Catholic teaching on human sexuality, which holds that homosexual acts are "intrinsically disordered" and the inclination itself is "objectively disordered," while stressing that same-sex attracted persons must "must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity."

The church stresses that those experiencing same-sex attraction, like Christians in every state of life, are called to live chastely through prayer and sacramental grace, drawing on "the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom" as they pursue holiness.

In March 2023, the U.S. bishops' doctrine committee issued a 14-page statement declaring that surgical, chemical or other interventions that aim "to exchange" a person's "sex characteristics" for those of the opposite sex "are not morally justified," as they counter the "fundamental order and finality" of "the human person, body and soul, man or woman."

The doctrine committee acknowledged that "many people are sincerely looking for ways to respond to real problems and real suffering," but affirmed that "any technological intervention that does not accord with the fundamental order of the human person as a unity of body and soul, including the sexual difference inscribed in the body, ultimately does not help but, rather, harms the human person."

In contrast, said the archdiocese, the Girl Scouts offer several initiatives that promote "sexual orientation" and "gender identity," such as the "Diverse. Inclusive. Together." patch for "Cadettes" (members in grades six to eight) that features a "social identity wheel" conversational activity on "heterosexual ... LGBTQ ... boy, girl, gender non-binary, transgender, intersex" and "cisgender" terms.

An "LGBTQ+ Pride Month Fun" patch, said the archdiocese, "encourages the use of key terms and definitions from the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network," an advocacy group that focuses on K-12 educational policies. The patch requirements also recommend reading materials from GLSEN's book lists, documentaries and films (some rated R) "about "LGBTQ+ history," and "participation in LGBTQ+ Pride celebrations."

At present, said the archdiocese, the decision is limited to the Girl Scouts as it "addresses the specific findings for GSUSA and GSWO and the inability to find a mutually acceptable path forward for partnership with Girl Scouts."

In the statement it provided to OSV News, the Girl Scouts of Western Ohio said it had been "in conversation" with the archdiocese's Office of Youth Ministries over the past two years, with which it has "had a strong working relationship for many years.

"We remain open to a mutually respectful dialogue, and we hope that the Archdiocese will return to the conversation so we can continue to work together to support the beneficial role each plays in developing youth and supporting families in our communities," said the Girl Scouts of Western Ohio.

On its webpage, the organization states that it serves "more than 28,000 girls in a 32-county area throughout western Ohio and southeast Indiana, with the support of nearly 11,000 dedicated volunteers."

In an FAQ page on its website, Girl Scouts of the USA says that it "does not take a position or develop materials" on the issues of "human sexuality, birth control, and abortion," and that it "does not have a relationship or partnership with Planned

Parenthood."

The organization also states that "placement of transgender youth is handled on a case-by-case basis, with the welfare and best interests of the child and the members of the troop/group in question a top priority.

"That said, if the child is recognized by the family and school/community as a girl and lives culturally as a girl, then Girl Scouts is an organization that can serve her in a setting that is both emotionally and physically safe," says the organization.

Girl Scouts of the USA says on the same FAQ page that although it is "a secular organization that refrains from teaching religious or spiritual beliefs or practices," it "supports girls from all backgrounds and beliefs" and believes "the motivating force in Girl Scouting is a spiritual one."

Along with American Heritage Girls, which Schnurr endorsed in August, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati provided a list of other approved scouting organizations that includes the Federation of North American Explorers, Scouting America (formerly the Boy Scouts of America, with the name change effective in February 2025 reflecting the inclusion of girls in all its youth programs), Trail Life USA, and the Troops of St. George.

A link on the list to the Girl Scouts has been redirected to the archdiocese's October 2024 message announcing Schnurr's decision.