

Southern Baptists Condemn Boy Scouts' Policy on Gays

The Southern Baptist Convention on Wednesday voted overwhelmingly to voice opposition to the Boy Scouts of America decision to admit gay members, saying that homosexual conduct is contrary to a scout's oath to do his duty to God.

The Southern Baptists, the nation's largest protestant denomination, approved a non-binding resolution expressing opposition to the policy at its annual convention in Houston. The resolution requires no action by member churches, with churches left to decide individually whether to stop sponsoring scout troops.

Some other U.S. religious leaders are severing their relationships with the Boy Scouts of America, saying they will no longer permit scout troops to meet at their churches.

The Boy Scouts has deep ties to churches all over the country, with about 70 percent of the group's more than 100,000 units chartered by faith-based organizations.

Some 108,000 Boy Scouts in nearly 4,000 units are sponsored by Baptist churches, according to the Boy Scouts website.

It is "ungodly and unacceptable," for young boys to be exposed to homosexuality, Wes Taylor, pastor at Tabernacle Baptist Church in Newport News, Virginia, said during the debate at the annual convention. "I am very sad to say that it seems as though (Boy Scouts) are moving away from the principles they were founded upon."

The Boy Scouts of America decided on May 23 that no youth may be denied membership based on sexual orientation alone. The organization still prohibits openly gay adult leaders.

Some of those attending the Southern Baptist conference said the denomination should embrace gay members of scouting, arguing that churches should seek to guide them toward a more Christian life.

One pastor argued that a young boy who claims to be gay is most likely the victim of abuse or otherwise needs guidance, and that the church or scouts should not abandon him.

“Such a boy needs our love,” said Charlie Dale, pastor of the Indian Springs First Baptist Church in Indian Springs, Alabama. “So let’s bring him in and show him what real Biblical manhood is about.”

The Southern Baptist resolution urges churches that decide to continue with the Boy Scouts to work toward the reversal of the new membership policy and to advocate against any change in leadership and membership that “normalizes sexual conduct outside of the biblical standards.”

The Southern Baptist Convention has more than 45,000 churches and church-type missions with nearly 16 million members nationwide, according to the group’s website.

A representative from the Boy Scouts was not immediately available for comment on the resolution.

The resolution calls on churches that decide to sever ties with the Boy Scouts not to abandon their ministry to young boys and to consider expanding a “Royal Ambassadors” ministry, a Southern Baptist missionary organization to develop “godly young men.”

The resolution also declares “our love in Christ for all young people regardless of their perceived sexual orientation.”

Some religious organizations have accepted the Boy Scouts’ new policy. The Mormon Church, the largest sponsor of scouting troops nationwide, with about 430,000 youth members, expressed

support for permitting gay scouts. The United Methodist Church, the second-largest sponsor, also plans to continue its role in scouting.

The national scouting committee for the Catholic Church, the third-largest sponsor of scouting troops, has noted that the policy change on gay members does not take effect until next January, providing “adequate time to study its effects.”

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