

# **Southern Baptists to Vote on Boy Scouts' Gay Policy**

The Southern Baptist Convention, the nation's largest Protestant denomination, was expected to vote on Wednesday on a resolution expressing disapproval of the Boy Scouts' new policy allowing openly gay members.

While the Southern Baptists have left the decision to cut ties with the Scouts to individual congregations, some 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.

Those relationships have been tested by the Boy Scouts' May 23 decision that no youth may be denied membership based on sexual orientation alone. The organization still prohibits openly gay adult leaders.

The Southern Baptist resolution, made public Wednesday morning and due to be voted on by delegates later in the day, 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 resolution says homosexual conduct is contrary to a scout's oath to do his duty to God.

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.

Deron Smith, director of public relations for the Boy Scouts, said in a statement the organization has "deep respect" for the Southern Baptist Convention, and that the Scouts' new policy was not about endorsing homosexuality. Scouting policy prohibits sexual activity, homosexual or heterosexual, by youths of scouting age.

"This change allows scouting to be more compassionate in its response to a young person who expresses a same-sex attraction but is not engaging in sexual activity, by no longer calling for their automatic removal from the program," Smith said.

The Scouts believe the policy is "fully consistent" with how Southern Baptists respond to young people in their congregations, he said.

The Southern Baptist 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 the policy change on gay members does not take effect until next January, providing "adequate time to study its effects."

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*Reporting by Amanda Orr; Additional reporting by Colleen Jenkins; Editing by Mary Wisniewski*

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