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May 12, 2005

Dear United Methodist Pastor,

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I come to you today with information and an important request related to scouting in our churches. The Registration Service of the Boy Scouts of America has instructed local councils to immediately terminate all charter agreements with public schools and government agencies that charter traditional scouting units and to transfer these units to nongovernmental entities. If a scout unit in the area of a United Methodist church is seeking a new chartering organization, I ask that the church consider honoring the scout unit's request.

Background

In 1999, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) sued the federal government and others (*Winker v. Chicago School Reform Board of Trustees*) to compel public schools and government agencies to cease chartering traditional scouting units – Cub Scout packs, Boy Scout troops and Venturing crews. In 2001, the Chicago School Reform Board of Trustees issued a directive that required schools to withdraw from any scout charters. In a November 2004 partial settlement agreement with the ACLU the Department of Defense 'warned' military base commanders overseas that they were not to charter scouting units.

Because scouting has enjoyed and benefited from the excellent relationship with many chartering public schools and government agencies, it was decided by BSA that these faithful parties should not be subjected to litigation for their support of scouting. Accordingly, BSA councils and districts have been directed to transfer government chartered scouting units to nongovernmental organizations such as religious institutions like the United Methodist Church and civic organizations.

How United Methodist churches may help

There are no legal restrictions on the BSA in terms of what private institutions to look for chartered relationships. Almost any group willing to accept the program can charter a traditional unit. The United Methodist Church is one such group.

Currently, the UMC charters 12,200 BSA units comprising 392,000 youth meeting in 7,200 UM churches, making us the second largest sponsor of the BSA in the world.*

Additionally, as of December 31, 2004, 5,217 UM churches sponsored just one scout unit, i.e., a Cub Scout pack, a Boy Scout troop, or a Venturing crew (age 14-20, coeducational). While that is good, we encourage churches to sponsor the full scouting family: pack, troop and crew.

I know of no better way to reach out to the youth of a community than through the local church's scouting program. The benefits are lasting and may include the following:

- 1) Bring youth into the life and ministry of the church
- 2) Bring young adults (parents of scouts) into the life of the church
- 3) God-centered program that the church may utilize as a ministry
- 4) Scout service projects may beautify and enhance church property while building character and spiritual traits in young people
- 5) Church growth.

Surveys taken over the years indicate that 50% of the youth who meet in UM church-sponsored scouting units come from unchurched families. What a potential for making disciples!

Churches should contact the District Scout Executive in their area for information and a point of contact for those school or government-chartered units that need a replacement chartering organization.

Also, our Office of Scouting Ministries, GCUMM, is prepared to assist you in the area of ministry resources and training. Call 615-340-7149 or email lcoppock@gcumm.org.

Thank you in advance for your prayerful support and consideration of this very important matter.

In Christ,



Bishop William W. Morris, Interim General Secretary
General Commission United Methodist Men

cc: Judge Carl E. Stewart, Chair, Scouting Ministry Committee, GCUMM
Gil Hanke, President, GCUMM
Robert Powell, President, United Methodist Men Foundation
Glenn Wintemberg, President, National Association of Conference Presidents
Bob Chase, President, National Association of United Methodist Scouters
Larry Coppock, National Director, Office of Civic Youth-Serving
Agencies/Scouting Ministries

bc: Jurisdictional presidents and scouting coordinators

*as of December 31, 2004