

Girl Scouts CEO says group working with bishops on questions

Maria Pia Negro | Jun. 5, 2012

WASHINGTON -- Girl Scouts of the USA is working with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops "to answer some questions they have," the organization's chief executive officer said May 30.

Anna Maria Chavez, a Catholic who has been the Girl Scouts CEO since last November, made the comments during a luncheon address at the National Press Club.

She said the Girl Scouts does not take a position on "issues that we're being alleged to take positions on," such as birth control and sexuality, adding that the organization only focuses on the leadership development and growth of millions of young women.

GSUSA, as it's known, has 3.2 million girl and adult members. About 500,000 Catholic girls and adults in the U.S. are involved in Girl Scouts.

Some claim the Girl Scouts promotes Planned Parenthood and its advocacy of birth control and abortion. Others have complained that some printed material distributed to Scouts contained references that countered the Catholic Church's teachings; the books were reprinted after Catholic leaders complained about the content.

Criticism of the organization has surfaced off and on over the past several years and earlier this year made the rounds again on the Internet.

At the luncheon, Chavez said she welcomed the opportunity to set the record straight and dispel recent "myths and misconceptions" about the century-old organization that, she said, were fueled by social media.

"Girls Scouts USA does not have a relationship with Planned Parenthood," she said.

At a mid-March meeting, the U.S. bishops' Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth discussed criticism of the Girl Scouts and its "possible problematic relationships with other organizations."

In a March 28 letter to his fellow bishops, committee chairman Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of South Bend-Fort Wayne, Ind., said some questions may need to be answered at the national level and others at the local level.

But he also said the committee "affirmed the good service" Catholic Girl Scouts have provided and continue to provide to their communities and to the church.

Bishop Rhoades said that among other actions, the committee wants to develop a resource bishops can share with priests, youth ministers, pro-life directors, educators and others in their diocese on Catholic identity for troops and guidance for parents.

The National Catholic Committee for Girl Scouts USA and Camp Fire USA, which has ministered to the Catholic girls in Girl Scouts for decades, addressed criticisms of the Girl Scouts on the website of the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, www.nfcym.org.

Robert McCarty, executive director of the federation, which includes the Catholic Scouting committee among its members, told Catholic New Service in an April interview that the claim the Girl Scouts has a relationship with Planned Parenthood arose from a statement the previous CEO made in 2004, in which she listed the organization as one of many groups with whom the Scouts maintained a relationship.

"That," McCarty stressed, "was eight years ago, and, that has changed."

In January, Chavez came to Washington from New York, along with the chair of GSUSA's board of directors, to meet with McCarty.

She told CNS in April that conversations with different dioceses have strengthened the organization's long-lasting partnership with the Catholic Church.

"Working closely together, we will continue to provide girls with the courage, confidence and character they will need to make our world a better place," she said.

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