

Keeping the Promise

Scouting & Girlguiding Promise Consultations

Background

- Both Girlguiding UK and UK Scouting are currently conducting consultations into their new members' 'Promise'. They are independent of each other and the two consultations are intrinsically different but both potentially noteworthy for the Church.
- UK Scouting is consulting about developing a membership Promise for atheists, which closes on **Thursday 31st January 2013**.
- Girlguiding UK is consulting about the Promise currently taken by all its members, to enquire whether to drop references to God and the Queen in the oath. It closes on **Sunday 3 March 2013**.
- Both consultations are open to non-members as well as members and can be completed online and via post.
- "Keeping the Promise" asks those with links to uniformed organisations in the Church and other interested parties to complete the consultations with a view to the retention of the reference to God and the Queen.

Church Engagement

While there is no formal link between the Church and uniformed organisations, many parishes across the country have close links to their local groups. Uniformed organisations routinely meet on church premises, parade services are a part of the regular worshipping life of many parishes, volunteers for groups often come from parish churches whilst for churches themselves their work with the uniformed organisations forms an integral part of the engagement with young people. It is also worth noting that for Guiding, many units across the country are 'sponsored' by their local church. Open sponsorship indicates a close link between the church and the unit but allows girls of any faith or no faith to join.

Founding principles of Scouting & Guides

Robert Baden-Powell founded the Scout movement as a youth organisation (with boys as 'Scouts' and girls as 'Guides'), holding that spirituality and a belief in a higher power were key to the development of young people. When creating the Scouting method, Baden-Powell was adamant that there was a place for God within it.

In Scouting for Boys, Baden-Powell wrote specifically about Christianity: “We aim for the practice of Christianity in their everyday life and dealings, and not merely the profession of theology on Sundays”. After the Scout movement began to grow rapidly around the world, his writings and speeches allowed for all religions. He continued to emphasise that God was a part of a Scout's life.

When asked where religion came into Scouting and Guiding, Baden-Powell replied: “It does not come in at all. It is already there. It is a fundamental factor underlying Scouting and Guiding.”

Why Should the CofE get Involved ?

As mentioned above there is a continuing relationship between many uniformed organisations and their local parishes. More formally it is the role of the Church of England to defend the exercise of faith, especially where it is being squeezed. Speaking at a Multi Faith Reception at Lambeth Palace in February 2012, Her Majesty the Queen put it this way:

“The concept of our established Church is occasionally misunderstood and, I believe, commonly under-appreciated. Its role is not to defend Anglicanism to the exclusion of other religions. Instead, the Church has a duty to protect the free practice of all faiths in this country ... the Church of England has created an environment for other faith communities and indeed people of no faith to live freely. Woven into the fabric of this country, the Church has helped to build a better society — more and more in active co-operation for the common good with those of other faiths.”

Action

1. Through the Diocesan Communications Directors to access the Church communication networks to alert parish members and clergy to the two consultations.
2. To encourage Guide/Scout members, leaders and other interested Church members to respond to the consultations.

UK Scouting

The Press Office of UK Scouting says it has no evidence that people are being turned away from joining the scouts because of the commitment to God articulated in the promise. Indeed over the past ten years the number of young people joining the scouts has increased and there is currently a waiting list. In the Sunday Times in 2011 Wayne Bulpitt, the UK Chief Commissioner, said: “We have absolutely no plans

to make changes to our Scout Promise. Scouting has been offering development opportunities to young people from across the United Kingdom for over 100 years within the framework of our Promise and Law.'

However the organisation is now conducting a consultation to ask members (and non-members) whether an alternative version of the Scout Promise should be developed for "atheists and those unable to make the existing commitment".

The Chief Executive of Scouting UK set out his argument here: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/9719079/Time-for-a-Promise-that-atheists-can-keep.html>

Action

- This consultation ends on **31 January 2013**.
- The online survey can be accessed from this page: <http://members.scouts.org.uk/fundamentals/?pageid=2944>
- Those wanting to comment into the process via email should email: fundamentals@scouts.org.uk

Girlguiding UK

At the beginning of January Girlguiding UK launched a consultation which runs until 3 March 2013.

Girlguiding has approximately half a million members. The organisation covers a range of age groups: Rainbow (age 5-7), Brownies (7-10) and Guides (10-15) and Rangers/Young Leaders (14+).

Six years ago Girl Guides Australia removed "God" from their Promise.

In the Q&A accompanying the consultation Girlguiding UK say:

"Q: Girl Guides Australia removed the reference to God from their Promise in 2012 – will you be doing this?"

A: This is an open consultation with no pre-determined result. Spiritual development is one of six aspects of the holistic development of girls and young women that we focus on, alongside social, emotional, moral, intellectual and physical development. We understand that there is a broad mix of feelings in relation to this aspect of the

current Promise, which is why we want to hear from as many people as possible ... and especially the girls!”

Action

1. This consultation ends on **3 March 2013**.
2. Guides and parents of Guides are especially encouraged to respond, but views from all interested parties are welcome. Complete the form here: http://www.girlguiding.org.uk/news/promise_consultation_now_open.aspx

Please feel free to distribute this briefing paper and encourage members of Churches to respond to the consultations.