

August 2000

P. Karl Rowley, Executive
Mt Diablo Silverado Council, BSA
800 Ellinwood Way
Pleasant Hill, CA

Robert Cross, MDSC President
1340 Treat Blvd., Ste. 200
Walnut Creek; CA 94596

Dear Bob and Karl,

First Congregational Church of Berkeley (FCCB) has sponsored Troop 5 for 85 years. We at FCCB are proud of this rich tradition of Scouting, and we are keenly aware of the important role that Troop 5 has played in the lives of boys from our own congregation and our wider community of Berkeley. In 85 years, FCCB has seen the positive impact of Scouting in generation after generation of boys and young men. We hope Troop 5 can continue to play this role for generations to come.

Because we have had such a strong history of Scouting at FCCB, we are particularly pained by the current discriminatory practices of the Boy Scouts of America. Discrimination based upon sexual orientation is inconsistent with the values and tradition of both FCCB and Troop 5. In April of 1995, after a careful process of prayer and study, our congregation voted to adopt an Open and Affirming Statement. It is both a public statement of values and a guidepost within our own congregation. It reads,

We, as a diverse body of believers seeking to live in the light and image of God in Christ, do affirm: that every person has worth as a special and unique creation made in God's image; that in the Spirit of love, openness, and inclusiveness we, welcome persons of every sexual orientation, race, nationality, ability, age, and gender to participate fully in all aspects of our Church's life and ministry; that as agents of reconciliation and wholeness, we embrace justice and seek to support all who suffer discrimination or who are disenfranchised from the religious community; that in light of the Gospel we will continue to comprehend and appreciate more fully our differences and gifts; that through grace our love for God and neighbor may flourish.

Our Open and Affirming statement reflects values shared by FCCB and Troop 5. We do not exclude people for membership or leadership based upon sexual orientation. Because of the conflict we feel with the current discriminatory practice of the BSA, and because of the negative impact this practice has had on our ability to attract public support and membership for Troop 5, we cannot keep silence on this issue.

Together with the Reorganizing Committee for Troop 5, we propose a meeting with you to discuss the commissioning of a Task Force within the Mt Diablo Silverado Council to begin dialogue on this subject. The goals of such a meeting are summarized in the attached letter from the Troop 5 Reorganizing Committee.

Thank you for your attention to this important concern. We look forward to

meeting.

Sincerely,

Sarah Conning
Moderator

Patricia de Jong
Senior Minister

August 2000

Sarah Conning, Moderator
Patricia de Jong, Senior Minister
First Congregational Church of Berkeley
2345 Channing Way
Berkeley, CA 94704

Re: FCCB dialogue with MDSC re BSA Scouting
policies of discrimination re sexual orientation

Dear Sarah and Pat,

The Reorganizing Committee of FCCB's Troop 5 would encourage a meaningful dialogue with Mt. Diablo Silverado Council regarding the proud sponsorship by First Congregational Church of Berkeley of our Troop 5 - that relationship, we are told, is one of the longest single-sponsored troops in California and perhaps in all of America.

First Congregational Church has a steadfast history of being open and affirming regarding all persons' God gifted rights to be free of persecution and discrimination. As our FCCB historian I have been happily able to relate to our members, as an example, that during the dark days of the Second World War when many California churches and public institutions were shunning the Japanese Americans and condemning them to "relocation camps" (and Scouting had "Japanese Troops" even in Berkeley for "those youth"), FCCB was a singular place of refuge that opposed that type of discrimination and protected our Japanese citizens. In hindsight FCCB, that had been condemned at the time, is often referred to now with pride for the position we took then that was so much opposed by the popular culture of the day.

Similarly, throughout our history we have been open and affirming that one's sexual orientation has absolutely no bearing either on one's excellence in leadership within the church, the community, one's profession, in Scouting, or other) or the role model for youth that can be provided as the highest standard of people who are "physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight." Our Scouts, including our Eagle Scouts, all have understood that sexual orientation was irrelevant to one's faith and dignity.

As you also know, we strongly affirm that all youth movements have no room for pedophiles or those who are members of or support groups such as National Man and Boy Lovers Association (NMBLA). Fortunately, Boys Clubs, Girls Clubs, Campfires, Girl Scouts all deal with pedophilia as it should be dealt with - any overt proselytizing or inappropriate conduct is the basis for immediate exclusion from the program.

Unfortunately, in our opinion, BSA is still caught in an ancient misunderstanding (not uncommon to those that are uneducated in the reality of the research on the issue) with a policy that equates homosexuality or bisexuality with pedophilia - even though studies with which we are familiar confirm that pedophilia violations are most often related to folks who present as heterosexual, rather than homosexual or bisexual.

We know that this is a difficult issue for Scouting, but while we strongly support

almost all that Boy Scouts of America offers today's youth, we also feel that BSA's blind exclusion of membership and leadership by persons of bisexual or homosexual orientation robs BSA and the youth of America of some of the finest leadership ... and promotes a prejudicial stereotyping that is foreign to both what BSA and America stand for.

We cannot disagree with the US Supreme Court's recent decision that any private group has the legal right to exclude any group it decides it wishes to exclude (Girl Scouts excludes boys, some women's service groups exclude men, some men's groups exclude women, etc.). But it seems morally inconsistent with BSA's historical teachings (and clearly contra FCCB's religious principles) to discriminate for membership based solely on sexual orientation, rather than inappropriate conduct.

Many of our FCCB leadership are and/or have been active in Scouting - as youth and as adults - so we are and have been deeply supportive of Scouting as a whole. Hence this feeling strongly of the desire to address (from those of us within Scouting) the need to change BSA's discriminating practices. As you know, BSA's discriminating practices have caused a growing number of churches and school districts and communities (including our own Berkeley community leadership) to exclude Scouting from using public facilities ... and made it much harder to find places for Scouting to meet and ways to recruit new Scout families, and also harder to raise funds to support Scouting as a growing number of businesses and fund raising institutions such as United Way exclude Scouting due to its discriminatory practice. See the 28 August New York Times for a lead article on the national implications such discriminatory practices are producing as fund sources are pulling away from BSA.

Our own Troop 5 has strongly felt that type of rejection, due to BSA's discrimination, even though our own Troop 5 has always been open and affirming of its members and leadership.

The purpose of this letter, then, is to request, on behalf of the Troop 5 Reorganizing Committee, a meeting between our FCCB leadership and Mt. Diablo Silverado Council to discuss this issue and to ask that a Task Force be commissioned within Mt. Diablo Silverado Council to begin a positive, constructive, dialogue on this subject.

We do not know what the outcome product of that dialogue might be; we firmly believe that the process cannot but strengthen Scouting. God's miracles often emerge from a constructive process where deep felt feelings can be honestly and openly exchanged and people of good faith work together, with God's guidance, to seek a stronger solution.

We also believe that we, as a long time BSA sponsor, are not only entitled to such a dialogue, but have a duty to propose and participate in a positive dialogue, so that hopefully together we can discuss all the implications of the current BSA policy in a positive fashion, and perhaps come to some consensus on where this should all go. This could be anything from a reaffirmation of, the current policy to Mt. Diablo Silverado Council formally requesting that there be agenda'd for next year's National Meeting (which we understand will be in Boston in May) - a review of the national BSA policy as may seem to be appropriate once the work of the Task Force is done.

MDSC's Task Force review might also suggest, consistent with our Faith, either changing the current national policy... or at least affirm fully a unit/sponsor option policy so that units and sponsoring organizations may reflect the Faith ethics of those organizations. If some faiths choose to discriminate and exclude members due to their particular practices they may be entitled to do so, even if we at FCCB disagree. But similarly, we at FCCB, and other charter organizations of similar Faith systems, should be able to equally clearly enunciate our option, without fear of violating some Scouting policy and thus resume our respected and responsible role within our own communities - with Scouting units free of the discrimination that others may elect to practice.

As we understand it, BSA welcomes suggestions and input from all its sponsors and members and prides itself on the joint evolution through those discussions of a stronger, more responsive, Scouting program for the youth of today and tomorrow. This seems an exciting chance for Mt. Diablo Silverado Council to take a leadership role in this area.

May we request, then, that a meeting be set up with you as FCCB leadership and with MDSC towards the objective of setting up a Task Force within Mt. Diablo Silverado Council to discuss these issues seriously and in a positive fashion - a Task Force comprised of a wide range of views - for the betterment of all.

Yours in faith,

James M. Spitze, Chair
FCCB's T-5 Reorg. Committee
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cc: Jim Conning (T-5's Scoutmaster), and members of FCCB's T-5 Reorg. Committee:

Wayne & Jutta Collins, Bob Helliesen, Rev. David Parks-Ramage, Bob Scanlon, Randy Summers, Brian D. Thiessen, and Moe Wright (for FCCB's Ministry of Outreach)