

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered Down

Tuesday, November 17, 2020

A Prayer for Scouting — A Prayer for the Wounded

Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. —Titus 2:6-7

One of the highlights of my life has been the dozen or so years that I spent in leadership in the Boy Scouts of America, and seeing my four sons through the program. Scouting is an exemplary organization which for over a hundred years has been building boys into men. Their program is broadly inclusive, instills character and leadership, strengthens families and communities, and is a lot of fun, and I am always glad to put in a good word for Scouting. It also appears that Scouting could use a kind word these days as it is in the midst of a bankruptcy and the deadline is upon them for lawsuits to be filed against the organization. Thousands of lawsuits are being filed regarding the abuse of boys in the program by leaders, and as the Scouts are in and out of the headlines these days, it is not looking like much of an exemplary organization.

So why am I praising the Scouts highly when so many have been terribly harmed? Let me begin by stating the obvious, that the sexual abuse of a child is a completely horrid and inexcusable crime deserving full punishment for the perpetrator. Child abuse is beyond heartbreaking, and such abuses did occur in the Scouting organization. It is just as important that we look at the history behind our present sad day, and the nature of child abuse. As any expert will agree, all organizations which gather children will attract child abusers. Whether it be a sports league, a Sunday school, a summer camp or a school, there are abusers who will try to make their way into that group, and children have come to harm in ALL these kinds of groups over the years. While the abuse of children was always known to exist, most thought of it as extremely rare and therefore not worthy of major attention. It was in the 1980s that there finally arose an awareness of the actual prevalence and extent of this terrible crime, and youth organizations then began crafting responses to this plague. Scouting, realizing the scope and importance of the matter began implementing a full and thorough response.

I began working with the Scouts twenty-five years ago, and from the start I was nothing short of amazed at the anti-abuse measures which they were taking. Scouts as young as second grade were receiving video and book training in awareness, safe practices and danger signs. These instructions and discussions continued all through

a scout's career. Leaders were subjected to background checks and learned several safe practices such as "two deep leadership," meaning that no leader was to be alone with a scout, and if a leader was not willing to cooperate with these rules, they were not welcome in Scouting! Stated simply: **I have never seen an organization so concerned and responsive to the problem of child abuse as the Scouts!** On this matter they stand head and shoulders above all other youth organizations that I have ever known.

So why is Scouts in the mess it is presently in? Many (perhaps most) of the lawsuits filed against Scouting for abuse are related to events prior to the anti-abuse measures of the last thirty-five years. As the abuse of children has become much better known and less taboo a topic of discussion (and Scouts has played a role in creating this new attitude) more people are stepping forward, speaking out, and often filing suit. Boy Scouts of America is also a large target and more likely to be sued than many smaller, less organized groups, church related clubs, or youth organizations that may no longer be in existence.

This is a sad time for Scouting and their future is much in question, and what can be said in the face of it all? A few thoughts come to mind.

1. Give thanks that we live in a different world than we did forty years ago. It is a safer age to be a child in a youth organization or school, and Scouts had a large influence in that positive change.
2. Pray for the victims of child sexual abuse. The scars are often lifelong. Pray that those harmed receive the ongoing support and guidance that they need, and pray for those who have been violated and have still kept it a dark secret.
3. Pray for fair and just settlements. Pray that the legal settlements provide the care needed for the traumatized.
4. Pray for the ongoing safety of our children. The new measures against child exploitation have been a great help, but there shall always be abuse.
5. Pray for Scouting. It is a great organization with so much to offer.

In these glum days of COVID it seems that we don't need another sad concern brought to our attention, but this is the crisis before us and it deserves our concern and prayers. It is upsetting to see Scouting's good name be stained, and I suppose that it has always had its detractors. Many years ago, a wise old scouter assessed the situation well when he told me that "Scouts has long been in the no-man's land of the culture wars. The liberals disdain us for not avidly championing all their causes and for encouraging religious faith. Conservatives distrust us as we affirm so many faiths,

and peace churches see us as too much like the military.” Scouting has travelled an often-rough road. Let us pray for their continued journey and ministry to youth, and let us remember those youth who still feel the pains of their abuse.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

Jesus, our brother and friend, look with kindness and compassion on those who were sexually abused. You see the lost child within still crying alone in the darkness where the hidden wounds of childhood still hurt, and make them afraid. When they feel abandoned, give them hope, when they feel ashamed, give them comfort, when they feel unloved, give them faith, when they feel betrayed, give them peace. In the power of your resurrection may love triumph over fear, light shine in the darkness, and the long reign of terror be ended. —Tracy Hansen