

ARTICLES

Scouting's future secure, more relevant than ever

Any notion that Church is parting ways is rumor

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What's the future of Scouting in the Church? Are the anchoring principles of the Boy Scouts of America — which began its association with the Church nearly a century ago — still relevant? And how can parents and priesthood leaders help LDS boys succeed in Scouting?

Church News staff writer Jason Swensen recently talked Scouting with Young Men General President Elder F. Melvin Hammond of the Seventy.

Church News: *Can you comment on the ongoing relationship between the Church and the Scouting program?*

Elder Hammond: I think there's no question that at this period of time the relationship between the Church and Scouting is on solid ground. We have had a great relationship with Scouting.

We understand the challenges Scouting is having and we see that all around us. Most of it has to do with the gay issue. Another factor that we're facing almost constantly now is the idea of "duty to God" — The Scout Oath, On my honor, I will do my duty to God and my country. There are challenges on that basis.

A number of years ago a committee was formed, of which I was a part, to look at the stance of Boy Scouts of America with regard to those two negative issues that I just mentioned. The committee came back with three resolutions that simply said: "We still support emphatically the timeless values of Scouting. If there are councils that want to violate those timeless values then, in effect, we just will not charter them. We won't renew their charter. Of course they have the freedom to do what they want, but if they do it they won't be part of Scouting.

CN: *There are rumors that the Church is planning to part ways with the Scouting program. Can you address that?*

Elder Hammond: It's a pure rumor. I think the rumor arose out of the creation and implementation of the [Church's Aaronic Priesthood] Duty to God program. The Duty to God program



Elder F. Melvin Hammond, Young Men General President, discusses role of Scouting in the Church from his office.

Photo by Jeffrey D. Allred

was not meant in any way to diminish Scouting in the Church. It was meant to complement Scouting and they work hand-in-hand beautifully. One of the primary reasons for the Duty to God program was to pick up the slack for a boy after he gets his Eagle Scout award. And, of course, the Scouting program is a national program. The Duty to God is an international and a national program.

CN: How can being a good Scout better prepare a young man to fulfill his Aaronic Priesthood duties?

Elder Hammond: I don't think there is anything that does more for a boy to develop in him a manly character than Boy Scouts of America. It teaches him endurance and skills that he really can't get any other place. As a boy goes through his quorums in the Aaronic Priesthood, the Scouting program is a wonderful activity arm that strengthens him. Not only physically but mentally and, unitedly with the priesthood quorum, spiritually. They are very compatible. A good Boy Scout, in my opinion, becomes a better priesthood bearer.

CN: Have you seen a correlation between an LDS boy's success in Scouting and subsequent success in the mission field and future Church callings?

Elder Hammond: We have seen that. It is, without question, a benefit for a young man to go through the Scouting program. Boys who earn their Eagle Scout Award almost always are better missionaries and know what it means to stick to something. We find very few young men that weaken in the mission field who have been Eagle Scouts.

Certain missions of the Church have some interesting and challenging environmental and social problems to deal with. We've found Boy Scouts are truly prepared. Cooking their own meals, even on an open fire in some places. Dealing with the lack of sanitary facilities. Scouts just seem able to cope with these things because they've been trained in them.

CN: What can parents and Aaronic Priesthood leaders do to help their sons and quorum members succeed in Scouting?

Elder Hammond: The success of any boy in almost any program has a great deal to do with what parents and priesthood leaders do to help him. There are very few self-starters in this world — but there are a lot of young men that, with encouragement, really excel.

If a parent will get behind a boy in Scouting and in the Duty to God program he will succeed. If he doesn't have that help — that wonderful help from parents — then it's a more difficult road for him.

If parents don't help, then priesthood leaders have to pick up the slack, and thank goodness that we have wonderful priesthood leaders that are willing to do that. But, oh, for great parents who will get behind a boy and encourage and help him. Would that every boy had that.

CN: Scouting has been around for many decades. During that time, our society has changed much. Do you feel Scouting is still relevant in today's ever-shifting world?

Elder Hammond: I certainly do. The Scouting program started in the Church in 1913. We were the first charter organization in Boy Scouts of America. Certainly things have changed. Times have changed. Computers have come into existence. Video games have come into existence. But I still believe that every young man enjoys some sort of outdoor experience. Most of them thrive on it. I've often said that Duty to God and Scouting have a niche for every boy, no matter what his interests are. There are now merit badges that will challenge him with mental and skill-type orientations that fit computers. I think every boy, every single one, can find a place in Scouting and certainly in the Duty to God program if he is given the opportunity.

CN: So those principles embraced in, say, the Scout Oath and Scout Motto also remain relevant?

Elder Hammond: Maybe more than ever before. I support them and the boys support them. I went to a Jamborall a few months ago in Blackfoot, Idaho. Those boys — there were about 12,000 of them — marched out in that fairground carrying the flag of the United States of America. They were singing and marching. They were so filled with love and the desire of activity. It was a great day for them.

[Recently] I was in Virginia at a Boy Scout encampment. A bunch of boys said 'Come and go horseback riding

with us.' They didn't know that I was an old cowboy from Montana. So I went horseback riding with them for about 40 minutes. They had the time of their lives. They did things that were related to the scriptures [that] strengthened them in every way. I've never had a better time than I did with those boys.

At the conclusion of the interview, Elder Hammond added a postscript:

The young men of the Church are the treasure of the Church — the young men and the young women. Whatever it takes, if we can save our boys and make them men and raise them up with standards and character. That's what this Church and these programs are all about.