

“To Do My Duty...”

A Statement from the Merit Badge Center

The Merit Badge Center, Philippines appreciates the opportunity to provide its comment to questions of the general public, specifically to the Scouts and Scout Leaders of the Philippines. Our comment focus on the role we believe Scouts should take in the current political turmoil our country is going through, with an in depth look into the Movement's nature.

Scouting as a Movement; Members as Individuals

As a Movement, Scouting must stay true to its principle of being a non-political movement.¹ The Movement takes a neutral stance towards issues and prohibits itself from aligning with any political figure, parties, or expression. This non-political stance however does not prohibit its members from taking their own stand on political issues affecting our nation. Also, it does not prohibit the Movement from encouraging its members to be involved. Scouting does not completely separate itself from the political realities of our country as it considers itself as a social force that aims to educate its members to develop into responsible and contributing members of society.²

The irony in Scouting's principle has a very simple explanation. A Scout's duty to his country mandates that he be concerned with what is happening and must take a stand and be involved. However, the Movement educates its members to take an independent stand on the matter avoiding the influence of others. Here is where the Movement's neutrality comes into the picture as it does not seek to influence the stand of its members on the various issues of our nation. Scouting is not a collective thought; its focus on the individual is central to its program. The founder of Scouting, Robert Baden-Powell, wrote that:

“Danger lies in the people becoming accustomed to having their own minds made up for them without any exercise of their own judgment or conscience in the process”³

Scouting educates its members to be concerned about matters happening around them and to take a stand on issues. It is an educational process of educating its members to independently make up their own minds. The Movement recognizes its role in this educational process and the importance the Movement's neutrality to the success of this process.

This idea clearly explains how the founder distinguishes between “to educate” and “to instruct” when he wrote the most important object in the Boy Scout training:

¹ World Scout Bureau. Fundamental Principles of Scouting (Geneva: World Scout Bureau, 1989), p. 2.

² World Scout Bureau. The Essential Characteristics of Scouting (Geneva: World Scout Bureau, 1998), p. 28.

³ Robert Baden-Powell, Scouting and the Youth Movement, 1929.

*"to educate; not to instruct, mind you, but to educate, that is, to draw out the boy to learn for himself, of his own desire, the things that tend to build up character in him"*⁴

Within this great paradox, Scouting, as a Movement will and ceaselessly remain neutral. Leaders of the Movement should prohibit themselves from expressing their personal views as it may possibly be misinterpreted as representative to the view of the Movement. Scouts and Leaders are not prohibited to air their stand on the matter concerning politics; so long as it is clear that it is their own view.

The involvement of members of Scouting, as individuals, with political issues, groups, or expression, is not without condition however. It is important to note that as members of the Movement, their involvement and adherence to a particular political view or expression should not conflict with the values they have dedicated themselves to within Scouting.⁵

Making an Objective Stand for Ourselves

*"If we thumb our noses at our moral duty to others and our duty to country, we should not be surprised by people around us not meeting theirs. Society's norms are established by individuals like us getting involved...unless individual people become active in fulfilling their duty to God and country, we should not be surprised when our country and its people do not make good decisions and maintain moral behavior."*⁶

It is important to realize that our system of government is based on precedence. A judge in a court of law makes decisions based on *stare decisis* or the established norm based on past judicial decisions. As such, our government justifies its actions through the actions of their predecessors, and it will try to test and push the limit of what it can do or get away with. Allowing or even tolerating any form of corruption and injustice only means that we are allowing future occurrences or variants of such. It is therefore our obligation, and not our right or privilege, to stand against such injustice that violates our values as a people.

*"The first time any man's freedom is trodden on, we're all damaged."*⁷

*"With the first link, the chain is forged. The first speech censored, the first thought forbidden, the first freedom denied, chain us all irrevocably."*⁸

The Scout Oath mandates that a Scout do his best to do his duties to God, Country, Others, and Self. He should not idly standby when corruption, injustice, and moral degradation is running amok within our government. He himself should not participate in these institutionalized sins of our nation as it gravely violates his values as a person and obligation as a citizen.

⁴ Robert Baden-Powell. [Aids to Scoutmastership](#), 1920.

⁵ World Scout Bureau. [The Essential Characteristics of Scouting](#), p. 29.

⁶ Randy Pennington and Marc Bockmon. [On My Honor, I Will: Leading with Integrity in Changing Times](#) (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 1995), p. 73.

⁷ Star Trek: The Next Generation. "The Drumhead" Season 4 Episode 21. Patrick Stewart as Captain Jean Luc Picard. April 29, 1991.

⁸ Star Trek: The Next Generation. "The Drumhead" Season 4 Episode 21. Patrick Stewart as Captain Jean Luc Picard Quoting Judge Aaron Satie. April 29, 1991.

My belief is that the values of Scouting require us to stand even if it means going against the policies of the Movement itself! It is vital to the survival of any philosophy or educational process that it allows self-examination and re-examination, and that it is willing to reconstruct itself when its fundamental principles makes such a reconstruction to be necessary.

In the 1970s, Catherine Pollard, tried to register to be the Scoutmaster of her son's Boy Scout troop due to the fact that no fathers were willing to take the job. The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) rejected her application on the basis that only men can fully serve as a role model for boys. She then sued the BSA for its policy of reserving the position of Scoutmaster exclusively for men. Unfortunately for her, the Connecticut Supreme Court ruled in favor of the BSA in 1987 saying that the BSA is not subject to the Public Accommodation Law. However, in 1988 the BSA National Executive Board reviewed the national policy and made a unanimous decision to remove gender restrictions from its policy.⁹ The BSA has shown that re-evaluation is necessary to keep an institution true to its commitment. It took more than ten years to get it done, despite it being a seemingly losing battle.

It is important to note the values of Scouting do not allow us to disrespect the people whose opinion or decision differs from our own or what we believe is right. In the case of Catherine Pollard, she did not go against the decision of BSA by still taking on the title of Scoutmaster despite the rejection of her registration.

"A Scout follows the rules of his family, school, and troop. He obeys the laws of his community and country. If he thinks these rules and laws are unfair, he tries to have them changed in an orderly manner rather than disobeying them. Obedience must be guided by good judgment. If someone tells you to cheat, steal, or do something else you know is wrong, you must say no. Trust your own beliefs and obey your conscience when you know you are right."¹⁰

We must realize as well that we cannot simply determine our stand based on hastily determine conjectures. It is important that we base it on facts as the values of Scouting demands it. While information will always be incomplete and may not always be the truth, a Scout must have constant vigilance and be discerning of the information that we receive. We must make educated discernment to separate facts from hearsay, using intuition and rational thought.¹¹

Our stand should be firm by basing it on facts and good judgment, but not to be narrow-minded by refusing to subject it to re-evaluation as new information becomes available. It should also be representative of our values as a person and as a Scout.

May the Great Scoutmaster be with us all.

⁹ Boy Scouts of America. "Legal Issues Website". <<http://www.bsalegal.org/teaching-157.htm>>. N.D.

¹⁰ Boy Scouts of America. The Boy Scout Handbook, 11th Edition (Irving, Texas: Boy Scouts of America, 1998), p. 50.

¹¹ John C. Maxwell. The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader: Becoming the Person Others Will Want to Follow (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1999), p. 47.

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