

UMC to pay \$30 million in historic Boy Scout settlement

by [Sam Hodges](#) in the [January 26, 2022](#) issue



The United Methodist Church plans to contribute \$30 million toward a fund for former Boy Scouts who suffered sexual abuse by Scout Leaders. If the Boy Scouts' bankruptcy plan is accepted and the fund is established, it will be the largest sexual abuse settlement in US history. (Photo by Mike DuBose, United Methodist News)

Negotiators for the United Methodist Church have reached a settlement for the denomination to pay \$30 million as part of the Boy Scouts of America's bankruptcy reorganization plan.

UMC congregations in the United States have long been sponsors of Boy Scout and Cub Scout troops, and the \$30 million is to be paid over three years into a trust fund for survivors of Scouting-related sexual abuse.

All US annual conferences of the denomination are being asked to make a commitment to raise the necessary funds, church leaders said.

The settlement, announced on December 21, 2021, comes after months of negotiations, and the overall bankruptcy plan still must be approved by a federal bankruptcy court.

UMC leaders said the settlement they reached meets key objectives, including bringing healing and support to survivors and absolving local UMC churches that sponsored or chartered BSA troops from abuse claims involving Scouting activities.

In a Zoom call about the settlement, leaders emphasized the denomination's commitment to survivors.

"We are deeply sorry for the harm that has been caused to good people through Scouting and particularly through ministries of Scouting in United Methodist churches," said Greater New Jersey Conference bishop John Schol, who has played a leading role in representing the denomination in the bankruptcy matter.

Steven Scheid, director of United Methodist Men's Center for Scouting Ministries, said the settlement commits the denomination to meeting with survivors, hearing and sharing their stories, and working to boost safety in Scouting programs and other youth work.

"If we're to be the body of Christ in the world today, it's our obligation to be a part of the healing that happens," Scheid said.

The more than 9,000 UMC congregations in the United States that have a history of chartering Scouting troops are among the parties voting on whether to approve the BSA bankruptcy plan.

The United Methodist Ad Hoc Committee oversaw negotiations with lawyers for the BSA and other key parties. Committee members stressed that under UMC polity, they do not have authority to obligate individual UMC conferences to participate in the financial settlement.

Rather, each conference is getting a request based on the number of abuse claims filed against its congregations. Annual conferences will decide for themselves whether and how to follow through. Schol and others maintained that the settlement represents the best approach for survivors and local churches.

“We could have been looking at many times that [\$30 million] amount” if abuse cases were tried in the courts, said George “Buzzy” Anding, Louisiana Conference chancellor and Ad Hoc Committee chair.

Schol noted that of the \$30 million, \$2.5 million will, under the settlement terms, go toward funding legal work needed to make sure UMC-related abuse claims filed in state courts are ultimately resolved by payments from the survivors’ fund.

With its future threatened by abuse-related lawsuits, the BSA filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in February 2020, seeking to reorganize and carry on.

The BSA reorganization plan has gone through a number of versions, but the heart of it remains a fund that would compensate some 82,000 former Scouts who say they were sexually abused by adult leaders and others.

With contributions from the BSA, local Boy Scouts councils, insurance companies, and chartering groups, the fund was at \$2.6 billion even before the UMC settlement. If approved, the plan will represent the largest sexual abuse settlement in US history.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had been the largest chartering organization before cutting ties with the BSA. The LDS Church agreed in September 2021 to contribute \$250 million to the survivors’ fund.

Schol said advice will be coming soon for local churches about their relationships with Scouting troops.

“We all hope that the church and BSA will continue to serve young people in programs that grow young people and keep young people safe from harm,” he said.
—United Methodist News Service