

Church explores other scouting groups after Boy Scouts revoke charter

by [Catherine O'Donnell](#)

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SEATTLE (RNS) The pastor of a United Methodist Church said her congregation is exploring other scouting affiliations now that the Boy Scouts of America revoked the congregation's charter for refusing to dismiss a gay Scout leader.

"We are a Reconciling Congregation, open to all," said the Rev. Monica Corsaro, pastor of Rainier Beach United Methodist Church, referring to the church's commitment to welcome people of all sexual orientations. "The Boy Scouts say they respect religious beliefs, but in this situation, it does not."

Corsaro said the troop would continue with Scoutmaster Geoffrey McGrath, 49, who is a gay member of the church. The church, which has 100 members, may decide to affiliate with groups such as Camp Fire or the Baden-Powell Service Association, or it may continue a scouting program independent of other groups.

"We may invent our own program, as we have skills and experience," McGrath said. "Maybe let the kids design their own uniforms."

The Boy Scouts declined an interview, instead offering a written statement saying the church did not agree to terms of the Boy Scouts charter, so "it is no longer authorized to offer the Scouting program."

The statement adds that the Boy Scouts have identified a new chartered group and are contacting parents and leaders to let them know.

Last year, the Boy Scouts' national council voted to allow gay Scouts into troops, saying no youth would be denied membership "based on sexual orientation or preference alone." But the group maintained its ban on gay leaders.

Jesse Pacem, a spokesman for Scouts for Equality, said that policy is unfair.

"Discrimination is not consistent with the Scout oath and Scouting laws," he said.

Corsaro and McGrath said they have instructed a lawyer to try to "reopen communication" with the BSA.

As a young man, McGrath became an Eagle Scout with his twin brother. He has a master's degree in social work and is a software engineer for United Parcel Service. He and his husband have been a couple for about 20 years.

McGrath was part of a church and neighborhood committee seeking after-school activities for young people. The troop and its affiliated Cub Scout pack are the result of a partnership among neighborhood leaders, a Presbyterian church in the area and Rainier Beach United Methodist.

Fifteen boys aged 7 to 17 belong. They include boys who are immigrants, non-Christians or children of gay parents.

The revocation letter came as a shock, McGrath said. "Tough as it was to receive the notice myself, I really feel awful to see this happen to the kids. It's hard to understand."