

## **100 years of Catholic scouting**

*Up-and-coming girls scouting group aims to form Christian leaders*

WESTERN WASHINGTON

**BY KEVIN BIRNBAUM**

Ever heard of the American Heritage Girls?

Probably not. In which case, you're missing out: Learning about space exploration, the sections of an orchestra and changing a tire; canoeing and camping and marching in Fourth of July parades; trips to a spa and a Carmelite monastery; father-daughter dinners and mother-daughter teas; stocking care packages for troops in Afghanistan, making sandwiches for the homeless, and gathering blankets for a women's shelter — all these activities and more are on the agendas of the AHG troops chartered by Blessed Sacrament Parish in Seattle and Holy Redeemer Parish in Vancouver.



*From left: Grace Feucht, Arielle Pinzone, Brianna Giacomini and Suzanne Bell, members of American Heritage Girls Troop 360 at Holy Redeemer Parish in Vancouver pose with the gifts they wrapped for the troop's adopt-a-family project last fall.*

*PHOTO COURTESY AHG TROOP 360*

Oh, and learning about the Catholic faith.

### **Forming Christian leaders**

AHG was founded in 1995 by a group of Protestant parents in Ohio as an explicitly Christian alternative to the existing scouting organizations for girls. The troops at Blessed Sacrament and Holy Redeemer — now in their third and fourth years, respectively — were started by parents who wanted the latitude to incorporate their Catholic faith and values into a traditional scouting experience for their daughters.

Both troops meet two nights a month and each comprises about 30 mostly elementary-school-age girls, though the program can accommodate kindergartners through high schoolers. Meetings begin with a flag ceremony, followed by some catechesis and then breaking off into groups to work on merit badges or service projects. The girls wear uniforms like any other scouts, but their formation has a different emphasis.

“We want to help these girls to become servant leaders like Christ was ... so that when they’re adults and they go out into the world, whether they’re volunteering somewhere or they’re the CEO of a company, they have the skills they need to not just be a leader, but to be a Christian leader and to make a difference in the world,” said Jamie Kohler, one of the parent leaders of the Holy Redeemer troop.

AHG is still a small movement: There is only one other troop in Washington state, and nationwide there are only about 6,000 American Heritage Girls, a drop in the bucket compared to 2.5 million Girl Scouts.

But it is growing: A new Catholic AHG troop is in the works in Everett, and the Archdiocesan Catholic Committee on Scouting is working to increase awareness of the group.

“I am very committed to getting the word out about American Heritage Girls, because it is such a fine program,” said ACCS Chair Julia Fogassy. “It really provides wonderful formation for young women.”

### **100 years of Catholic scouting**

But AHG is only one of several scouting groups active in the Archdiocese of Seattle.

This year marks the centennial of Catholic scouting in the United States. Boy Scouts of America was incorporated Feb. 8, 1910, and the first Catholic Boy Scout troop, at a parish in St. Paul, Minn., wasn’t far behind.

Over the years, other scouting groups — for boys and girls — have sprouted up, and though the number of scouts has steadily declined since its peak in the early 1970s, scouting remains a vibrant force in America. As of 2008, for instance, BSA boasted 2.8 million youth participants, including nearly 300,000 involved in 9,400 troops chartered by Catholic parishes and organizations.

In the Archdiocese of Seattle, there are 2,867 young people in 97 Cub Scout packs, Boy Scout troops and co-ed Venture crews sponsored by parishes or Knights of Columbus councils, said Deacon Roy Harrington, assistant chaplain of ACCS. They are mentored by 1,150 adult scouting leaders.

### **Scouting as youth ministry**

One of the goals of the archdiocesan scouting committee is to promote scouting as a viable form of youth ministry.

“From the perspective of the National Catholic Committee on Scouting, scouting is youth ministry,” said Deacon Harrington, noting that Boy Scouts can earn religious emblems for knowledge and practice of the Catholic faith.

“A good Catholic unit is closely tied to the life of the parish” and volunteers its services for projects around the church, he added.

“I always recommend scouting pretty much to every parent,” said Father Jacob Maurer, chaplain of ACCS and himself an Eagle Scout. Boy Scouts helps build confidence and encourages young men to make their own commitment to their faith, he said.

It’s the well-rounded approach of scouting programs like Boy Scouts and American Heritage Girls that most impresses Fogassy. Her youngest son, who has dyslexia, is home-schooled with a curriculum based in Boy Scouts. He is wrapping up work to become an Eagle Scout.

“If I had my druthers and I were a teacher, let’s say, in a Catholic school, I would just turn it into a scouting program and there’d be the best of all possible worlds,” she said. “You have the values, you have the activities, you have the breadth of subject matter, you have the physical, you have the spiritual — it’s just everything. I’m sold on it.”



*Deacon David Rapp gives Communion to a member of Boy Scout Troop 10 at Camp Meriwether in Oregon in August 2008. Troop 10 is chartered by Visitation Parish in Tacoma.*

*PHOTO COURTESY JULIA FOGASSY*

## MORE INFORMATION

For more information about Catholic scouting in the Archdiocese of Seattle, e-mail Julia Fogassy at [julia@seattleaccs.org](mailto:julia@seattleaccs.org).

### American Heritage Girls Creed

As an American Heritage Girl, I promise to be:

**Compassionate** – Understanding others in fellowship, empathy, kindness, and caring. Respect others' opinions and emotions.

**Helpful** – Willingly serve others.

**Honest** – Always tell the truth and keep my promise.

**Loyal** – True to God, family, friends, community and country.

**Perseverant** – Continuing to strive toward a goal despite obstacles.

**Pure** – Keep my mind and body pure.

**Resourceful** – Wisely use my time, materials and talents.

**Respectful** – Honor my country, be obedient to those in authority and courteous to all.

**Responsible** – Accountable for my own actions. Reliable in all situations.

**Reverent** – Faithful and honoring to God. Respectful to the beliefs of others.

### Boy Scout Oath and Law

#### Scout Oath

On my honor, I will do my best

To do my duty to God and my country;

To obey the Scout Law;

To help other people at all times;

To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight.

#### Scout Law

A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.