

## Culture

### **Conservative Alternative to Girl Scouts Building Membership**

By Jason Pierce  
CNSNews.com Staff Writer  
April 17, 2002

**(CNSNews.com)** - The Girl Scouts of America, 3.7 million strong, have in recent years made the use of the word "God" optional in the Girl Scout Promise and have adopted a neutral stance toward homosexuality, unlike the Boy Scouts of America, a group that bars homosexuals from serving as scout leaders.

Convinced that the Girl Scouts no longer reflects traditional values, Patti Garibay of Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1995 developed an alternative organization -- the American Heritage Girls. The group started with only 100 girls from the Cincinnati area, including surrounding areas in Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana, but today has swelled to 1,200 members.

Now, the [American Heritage Girls](#) are looking to expand nationwide, and have already staked a claim in Santa Rosa, Calif. and Abilene, Kan.

Garibay said she was motivated to leave the Girl Scout organization when the group decided it would take no position on homosexuality.

"That was a red flag for myself, because I had been a Girl Scout leader for 13 years, and was very involved," Garibay said. "As a Christian woman, I was saying, 'boy what is going on here? This doesn't sound right.'"

Garibay said she and some other parents began to investigate the other changes that officials from the Girl Scouts of America were pushing.

"We realized in 1995 that we weren't going to be able to change much with our local council, much less with our national council, so it was time to start something new," Garibay said.

Among the first decisions made by Garibay and other organizers of the American Heritage Girls was to create a Christian-inspired oath for the girls: "I promise to love God, Cherish my family, Honor my country, and Serve in my community."

Garibay said religious faith is essential to teaching the girls about values.

"We are based on Judeo-Christian values, non-denominational," Garibay said. "Our troops are all chartered by churches, or private schools, civic groups; therefore they own the program, just like the Boy Scouts.

"That way, if they would like to put an emphasis on a doctrinal kind of belief, they can do so," she said.

The American Heritage Girls rely on members and friends of the organization for financial support.

When asked whether the group is open to taking money from the government or organizations like the United Way, Garibay said: "No. And it's not easy not doing that."

"That would defeat our purposes if we did, because we would be tied to non-belief systems," she said.

Garibay said the American Heritage Girls are much like the Girl Scouts, in that girls work toward merit badges, have ranks, and do service projects. Many American Heritage Girl activities are based in the outdoors, in order to teach the girls outdoor survival skills like horseback riding, canoeing and the building of campfires.

But American Heritage Girls are also taught traditionally feminine skills, like sewing, cooking, and laundry as well.

"Yes, we do say these are skills you are going to need ladies, and you might as well learn them," Garibay said. "We believe the girls should be happy in whatever choice they make in life, and that homemaking is just as honorable a profession as being a lawyer.

"We are certainly not putting chains on these girls, saying this is all you can do," she said.

In July of 2001, Alexis Ranniar, a spokeswoman with the Girl Scouts of America, said that in some areas of the country, depending on community norms, the scouts "may offer educational workshops on topics in human sexuality." said Ranniar. Those topics "are discussed from an informative, rather than an advocacy view," Ranniar added.

However, since Garibay believes it is the parents' responsibility to discuss sexual matters with their children, her organization does not address such issues, with the exception of helping girls understand Christian, abstinence-based programs.

"We don't believe that you teach people about sexual function without morality," Garibay said.

"We believe that it is important to have a moral foundation when you are doing character building with kids, and that is where we are concerned that the Girl Scouts have fallen away to moral relativism," Garibay said. "There is no foundational belief that says it is right or wrong.

"We have an emphasis on service, but also on importance of a spiritual belief, of religion in your life, or the importance of family, and the importance of honoring and serving your country," she said.

Ellen Christie Ach, a spokeswoman with the Girl Scouts of America, refused to comment about the American Heritage Girls or the policy differences between the two groups.

[\*\*E-mail a news tip to Matt Pyeatt.\*\*](#)

[Send a Letter to the Editor about this article.](#)