

The Rev. Thomas C. Jackson

Alameda, CA

Sunday, May 5, 2013

Dear Leaders of the Alameda Council:

Soon Alameda Council President Toby Anderson and Commissioner Rick Lewis will have the opportunity to vote for allowing gay boys to be full members of Boy Scout troops and speak in strong support for allowing gay and lesbian adults to serve as Scout leaders.

As an individual who is an Eagle Scout, a former Scoutmaster, and a priest at Christ Episcopal Church here in Alameda, I call on you to support these changes. Until this change is made, we will not be able to support the Boy Scouts of America.

Recently the leader of one of your packs asked if the Cub Scout group could relocate to our church. The congregation's governing board held a full and lively discussion on his request before deciding - by a large margin - that we could not host the pack without violating our pledge to live as a Christian community. For much of the discussion, I argued in support of letting the boys meet in our church. I thought back to my days as a Cub and Boy Scout: to the ways I benefited from campouts and hikes and merit badges and activities. But as parish leaders spoke, I realized that what I saw as a great program for boys is now a source of division that hurts rather than helps young men. Some of the strongest opposition to the pack came from parents who simply did not want their straight children to think excluding gay kids was ever acceptable. Their concerns led to the overwhelming rejection of the pack's request.

In the months since our vote, America's Scouting movement has repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to harm young men by expelling them or refusing to recognize their achievements simply for being gay. Expelling - or denying an Eagle Award - to a Scout for being gay does an unacceptable level of damage to both the individual Scout and the straight boys in his Troop. There is no way our church - or any truly Christian church - could support a group of adults who do this kind of damage to the very young men they purport to serve.

This is not the Boys Scouts I remembered from my youth as I worked to become an Eagle Scout in Baltimore, Maryland. Our days together were marked by Troop 35's commitment to support the growth and development of every boy enrolled as a Scout. In 1966 I became Eagle Scout #77 of Troop 35. Recently the troop honored Eagle Scout #335 and there are more Eagles-to-be in training. That troop's commitment to personal growth and achievement is diametrically opposed to the values of adult leaders who are willing to do inestimable harm to boys in the name of enforcing their own personal values on the Scouting movement.

Our church, our city, and the Scouting program of my youth were all built on a principle of doing no harm to young people. I hope and pray we will soon be able to see the Alameda Council as partners in preparing our young men for life in 21st century America.

Sincerely,



The Rev. Thomas C. Jackson