



MICHIGAN AREA

**THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

1011 Northcrest Road • Lansing, MI 48906-1262  
(517) 347-4003 • email: [bishop@michiganumc.org](mailto:bishop@michiganumc.org)

DAVID ALAN BARD  
RESIDENT BISHOP

JENNIFER BROWNE  
CLERGY ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP  
[jbrowne@michiganumc.org](mailto:jbrowne@michiganumc.org)

July 20, 2021

Re: Boy Scout Units Chartered by Local United Methodist Churches

Dear Michigan United Methodists:

We write this letter with heavy hearts.

#### Personal Background

I am the Bishop of the Conference. As a youth, I was active in Boy Scouts in my home state of Minnesota. I attained the rank of Life Scout before summer jobs and other activities prevented me from continuing with the scouting program. But I have fond memories of campouts, friendships and learning skills that I still use. I even preached my first sermon on a Boy Scout camping trip.

I am the Chancellor of the Conference. I became an Eagle Scout in 1980 with my troop in Des Moines, Iowa. Both of my sons are also Eagle Scouts with Troop 205 in Kalamazoo, Michigan. I learned leadership skills and independence through scouts, and experienced many adventures that would not have been available to me otherwise. And my boys are better people because of scouting.

#### BSA Current Reality

The Boy Scouts of America is overwhelmed with potential liability exposure from sexual assault allegations nationwide. The BSA has filed for bankruptcy protection. Under both proposed plans that the BSA has suggested as a way to continue after the bankruptcy, they are leaving their Chartered Organizations out on a limb by themselves. The Chartered Organizations are the local churches, schools, and civic groups that sponsor or host a Scout Troop, Pack, Crew, or other unit. The details of these plans are still being played out, but the BSA is placing all our United Methodist Churches who have ever been involved in scouting in a very difficult position.

Despite their consistent past assurances that they held enough insurance to cover their chartered organizations in case of injured scouts, we now know that the BSA did not have enough or sufficient insurance. The local churches are at risk of having to pay significant sums to victims to compensate them for the damages they suffered at the hands of some scout leaders. In addition, the local churches will have to pay for the cost of their own attorneys to defend those claims. All of this is because the BSA did not fulfill their promise to have enough insurance to protect the local churches.

#### Future Relationship with the BSA

We are recommending that local churches change their relationship with their scouting units.

**If your local church currently charts a scout unit**, we recommend that you **NOT** renew that chartering agreement when it is up for renewal or re-chartering this fall. Instead, we recommend one of two options, the choice of which is up to you.

1. Tell the local scout council that you will NOT renew that chartering agreement but will only extend the current agreement until December 31, 2021.
2. Tell the local scout council that you will NOT renew that chartering agreement but will enter into a Facilities Use Agreement with their unit until December 31, 2021. This will act similar to a lease allowing the scout unit to use your space, but they will be responsible for everything else, including the selection of leaders.

After December 31, 2021, we should be in a better position to see how the future will unfold. Once a BSA plan is approved by the bankruptcy court, we will know better how to proceed.

**If your local church does not charter a scout unit at this time**, we recommend that you **NOT** consider chartering a unit until the bankruptcy case is finalized and we have an understanding of how The United Methodist relationship with scouts will continue in the future.

We understand that these suggestions are dramatic, but we think them to be the prudent course of action currently. We want to protect our local churches from costly litigation.

## Final Thoughts

We know the value of scouting. It has played a very large role in the mission and ministry of The United Methodist Church for a very long time. But the BSA is not proving faithful to The United Methodist Church as they are leaving us without the protections that they promised. We simply cannot continue the relationship with the BSA as it has existed in the past. Until we know how the BSA will be organized and operate in the future, we must make some changes. Hopefully, we will be able to continue our long connection with scouting in a more robust way in the future, but we need to make some changes today to protect our congregations.

May God Smile on You,

David A Bard

Bishop David A. Bard

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew J. Vorbrich". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and "V".

Andrew J. Vorbrich, Chancellor