



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on May 13, 2017

## Mormon Church Cuts Ties With Boy Scouts — Sort of ...

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints — the Mormons — has announced that it will pull over 180,000 older teens from the Boy Scouts of America (BSA), as it transitions to its own internal scouting-style program. While denominational leaders insist that the move has nothing to do with the BSA's decision to allow openly homosexual scout leaders, as well as boys who self-identify as homosexual, at least one observer has said he believes the issue was a contributing factor. "The church is wedded very much to traditional gender roles and they see the Boy Scouts of America increasingly move away from that," said Matthew Bowman, a Mormon scholar and history professor at Henderson State University in Arkansas. "That means they have come to see it as less of a hospitable place."



Although the loss represents a small percentage of the 2.3 million young people enrolled in Boy Scout programs, the BSA has been losing members steadily over the past several years as it has made policy changes at odds with the traditional values embraced by longtime faith-based partner organizations. Among the major conservative Christian denominations that have experienced a mass-exodus of its members and congregations from scouting programs are the Southern Baptist Convention and the Assemblies of God, which have turned instead to such wholesome, faith-based organizations as the [Royal Rangers](#) (sponsored by the Assemblies of God) and [Trail Life USA](#), organized in part by individuals and groups who had previously been involved in traditional Scouting programs. Launched in 2013, the Trail Life USA said on its website that its goal "is to be the premier national character development organization for young men which produces Godly and responsible husbands, fathers, and citizens."

As for the Mormon Church, a statement from LDS headquarters explained that instead of BSA Varsity and Venturing programs, activities for young men throughout the denomination "will focus on spiritual, social, physical and intellectual goals outlined by the Church. These activities are designed to be fun and meaningful and provide opportunities for personal growth and development."

A statement on [mormonnewsroom.org](#) added that in most LDS congregations across the U.S. and Canada, "young men ages 14-18 are not being served well by the Varsity or Venturing programs, which have historically been difficult to implement within the church." The statement added that the change "will allow youth and leaders to implement a simplified program that meets local needs while providing activities that balance spiritual, social, physical and intellectual development goals for young men."

While the present decision only impacts teens fourteen years old and older, observers say it is only a



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matter of time before LDS leadership pulls children ages eight to thirteen from BSA programs as well.

A complete break from the BSA organization will be difficult to accomplish, however, because of the LDS Church's ties to the organization, which stretches back more than one hundred years. Nearly one in five Boy Scouts in the United States is a Mormon, according to Salt Lake City's *Deseret News*. Additionally, noted the Mormon-aligned newspaper, "Since 1931, an LDS apostle has served on the BSA's National Executive Board." And "LDS Church President Thomas S. Monson, who holds Scouting's highest honor — the Silver Buffalo Award — has been a member of the BSA National Executive Board for 47 years."

In 2013, just as the BSA was transitioning its policy to accept homosexual participants and Scout leaders, the LDS Church hosted an extravagant production at its 21,000-seat Salt Lake City auditorium to commemorate 100 years of Mormon partnership with the Boy Scouts.

The Associated Press noted that becoming an Eagle Scout, the BSA's highest award, "is an especially proud badge of honor within Mormon culture. Many Utah lawmakers list it on their resumes."

For its part, the BSA released a statement in response to the LDS move, saying: "Although thousands of youth and leaders who participate in Venturing crews nationwide embrace and support the program, we recognize that not all programs are a perfect fit for all partners. We anticipate that many youth from the LDS Church will continue to participate in Scouting beyond the age of 14 as young men work to earn the Eagle Scout rank."



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