

GENERAL SYNOD

PRIVATE MEMBER'S MOTION: GIRL GUIDES' PROMISE

Background note from the Secretary General

Introduction

1. Information from Girlguiding UK on the changes made the Girl Guide Promise is available at:

http://www.girlguiding.org.uk/news/welcoming_more_members_with_ou.aspx

http://www.girlguiding.org.uk/about_us/key_information/promise_faqs.aspx

2. In summary, the organisation decided to conduct a 'Promise Consultation' between 4 January 2013 – 3rd March 2013 to determine whether to drop references to God, Queen and country. The consultation took place after a rise in the number of concerns expressed by members that they were struggling to understand and to commit to the Promise in an increasingly diverse culture.
3. Over 44,000 responses were received. Girlguiding has not published an analysis of the responses but has said that they showed a preference for a single Promise rather than alternative versions. The Trustees concluded that they should give weight to the broad range of beliefs both in members and potential members. Reference to God (and also to country) was removed. The changes are the eleventh in the wording of the Promise since the organisation began.
4. Commenting on the statement, Chief Guide, Gill Slocombe has said:

‘The updated Promise, which continues to emphasise the spiritual development we offer, will open up the guiding family to many potential members. ‘We hope the new wording will help us reach out to girls and women who might not have considered guiding before, so that even more girls can benefit from everything guiding can offer.’
5. The updated Promise came into operation on 1st September 2013. All new members who wish to make the Promise and adults in particular roles such as Leader or Commissioner are now required to use the new wording. Existing members and adults in particular roles are not required to renew their Promise with the updated wording.
6. It remains possible for girls (and adults in some roles) to join the organisation without making the Promise. Each individual does this at a point of their choosing. Apart from some of the highest awards (and the leadership requirements) not having made the Promise does not preclude them from taking part in the full programme.

Church Engagement with Guiding

7. Many Girlguiding Units are Open Units sponsored by churches (Anglican and other). The form of sponsorship varies according to the type and amount of sponsorship the sponsoring body is able to offer. The terms of sponsorship are discussed by the sponsoring body and the local Commissioner and an agreement is drawn up and signed. Open sponsored units are open to all girls or young women who wish to join.
8. In accordance with the Guiding Manual, all members are encouraged to take part in the religion or faith of their family or community. However, attendance at any act of worship as a part of guiding activities is seen by the Guiding Movement as part of the spiritual development of the individual member and is a voluntary activity.

Action by the Church of Ireland

9. At its most recent (September 2013) meeting of the Standing Committee of the Church of Ireland, it was resolved to convey the following statement to Girlguiding Ulster and Girlguiding UK:

‘The Church of Ireland wishes to convey to Girlguiding Ulster and Girlguiding UK the high value it places on their work with children and also partnership between the Church and Guiding through the provision of premises, leadership and other support.

‘However, we are deeply concerned that, as of 1st September 2013, all new members and leaders will be expected to make a new promise: “To be true to myself and develop my beliefs”, replacing the previous promise to “love my God”. We regard the words in the promise “To be true to myself” as falling far short of Christian values and therefore cannot support this promise being used.

‘We request that Girlguiding Ulster and Girlguiding UK, as soon as possible, provide its many children and leaders from a Christian background the option to make a promise to serve God.

‘In addition, we request that no Church of Ireland based Guiding unit compel its new members to make this new promise containing the wording “to be true to myself”.’

Church of England comment

10. A letter from four Church of England bishops appeared in the Church Times in January 2013 encouraging people to write in to the Guides and Scouts given the importance of the issues raised by their respective consultation exercises. At the same time the Communications Office issued a briefing note which said ‘it is the role of the Church of England to defend the exercise of faith, especially where it is being squeezed.’

William Fittall
Secretary General
January 2014