

## Girls being forced to choose between God and the Brownies, Church leaders warned



Church of England general Synod to debate whether imposing a single Girl Guide promise, without reference to God, is allowing 'rank discrimination' against Christians on Church premises

Young girls are being forced to choose between God and the Brownies, the Church of England's ruling body has been told.

The decision to drop references to God from the movement's traditional pledge of allegiance and expel anyone who refuses to adopt the new version, amounts to "rank discrimination" against Christians, Muslims and followers of other faiths – often taking place inside church halls, according to opponents.

The attack on the new oath, which came into force in September, is contained in papers being sent to almost 500 members of the Church's decision-making General Synod which meets in London next month.

Instead of promising to "do my best, to love my God" members of the Guides and Brownies now pledge to "be true to myself and develop my beliefs".

The Scouts also recently introduced a new secular pledge to enable atheists to become full members but retain the traditional wording for those who wish to use it.

One Guide group which meets in a parish church in Jesmond, Newcastle, is already in the process of being expelled from the movement for insisting on retaining the old promise.

Meanwhile in Northern Ireland, the Church of Ireland has given its blessing to local groups resisting the change imposed by the UK headquarters.

Now members of the Church of England's Synod are being asked to add their voices to a protest against the change.

The Synod is to devote time to debate a private member's motion tabled by Alison Ruoff, a senior member, which brands the decision to have a single secular oath as discrimination against believers.

In a briefing paper distributed by Church House, Mrs Ruoff said: “Most Guide units meet in church premises and for all these units to now be banned from being able to say in the promise that I ‘love my God’ cannot be right.

“Of course many secular organisations use church premises but in this case there has been imposed from Girlguiding HQ an outright ban after over a century of use of ‘loving God’.”

While many members accept the change, many others are “extremely upset, disappointed and worried”, Mrs Ruoff wrote.

“Muslim girls are quite content to say ‘love my God’,” she added.

“From a wholly Christian perspective, how can a Christian girl or leader revert to the new promise?

“They are being forced to choose between faith and Girlguiding.”

She continued: “The Scout movement have retained their ‘old’ promise, to love God, as well as having a secular promise.

“Why therefore should the Guiding movement not be allowed to have choice?

“It is rank discrimination against the girls of this wonderful youth movement.”

A spokeswoman for Girlguiding UK said: "Girlguiding’s new promise warmly welcomes girls of all faiths, and none.

"The updated wording grew out of an extensive consultation with nearly 44,000 people.

"During this consultation, our members made it clear they wanted to retain one promise as this is what unifies all girls of all backgrounds and circumstances behind a shared set of values - to be honest, helpful, kind and considerate; to respect other people and the world around you; to develop your beliefs and have the courage of your convictions; to face challenges; to be a good friend; and to take action for a better world.

“We feel it would be inappropriate to comment on this debate until it has taken place.”

John Bingham - The Telegraph