

Girl Guides offers concession to Christians in row over dropping God from pledge

Christian members of the Girl Guides will be allowed to mention God before they take the organisation's new pledge in a compromise backed by the Church of England's Synod



The Girl Guide movement last night offered an olive-branch to Christians over the decision to drop references to God from its traditional pledge after pressure from the Church of England over the issue.

Members of the movement will now be able to add a line to the start of the new promise specifically mentioning God.

The announcement came as the Church of England's General Synod voted overwhelmingly to endorse the approach.

Christians voiced dismay last year when the organisation announced that, following a major consultation exercise with its members, it was dropping references to God from the traditional pledge.

Under the new wording, which came into force in September, members now pledge to "be true to myself and develop my beliefs" instead of promising to "love my God".

The approach contrasted sharply with that of the Scouts which recently introduced an alternative secular promise for atheists but retained references to God in its main pledge.

Some Guide groups, including one in Jesmond, Newcastle, refused to adopt the new wording and faced the threat of expulsion.

But a compromise deal has now been reached after talks with the groups, many of which meet in church halls.

The announcement came as the Church of England's General Synod debated a motion criticising the Guides' decision and accusing the organisation of "discriminating" against Christians.

But during the debate, members backed an amended motion drafted by the Rev Andrew Dotchin, from Ipswich, who suggested that members could instead add a preface to the promise, such as saying: "In the presence of God I make my Guide Promise."

The Guides agreed, adding that as long as the new pledge is respected members could add their own preface to add "context".

It suggested that members could also say prayers before taking the promise if they wished.

A spokeswoman said: "Girlguiding warmly welcomes the support shown by members of General Synod for our work with girls and young women.

"We remain committed to one promise for all and the wording that resulted from our extensive consultation.

"This wording has been in place since September last year and has been welcomed by many members both of faith and no faith who have embraced the inclusivity it enables.

"Girlguiding has taken on board the view of a minority of our members who struggle with the new wording and suggested those members can provide the context of their own belief if they wish before making our promise.

"This suggestion ensures the wording of our promise is unaltered and, rather than having an alternative, ensures we maintain our one promise for all that celebrates shared values and embraces all beliefs."

During the debate, Alison Ruoff, from London, who tabled the motion, said: "I understand that there are many units who have no intention of using the secular promise at all but have said nothing openly."

But Rev Dotchin urged the church to seek compromise rather than a full reinstatement of the new promise.

"It is all too easy for the Church to sound like 'disgusted of Tunbridge Wells', rather than welcoming of Church House Westminster," he said.

Terry Sanderson, President National Secular Society, said: “Now that the Guides have given into the bullying, I hope that Church and the other Christian organisations that have been putting them under such pressure will now ease off.

“It is a good way to solve the problem, a way that should calm the protestors, some of whom wanted a uniquely religious oath that would have excluded the many young people who have decided that they do not have a faith.

“Now anyone can join the Guides in good conscience.

“Let’s hope the Church, though, will bear in mind that the Girl Guides organisation does not belong to them and they shouldn’t try to run it as though it does.”

John Bingham - The Telegraph