

HISTORY OF THE DIOCESE OF OWENSBORO CATHOLIC COMMITTEE ON SCOUTING

The present convening of the diocese of Owensboro Catholic Committee on Scouting began in the spring of 1993, when Daniel Feidt, then Scoutmaster of Troop #173 in Hartford, and John Olynick, then Scout Executive for Audubon Council of the Boy Scouts of America, met with the Most Rev. John J. McRaith, then Bishop of Owensboro, with the idea of creating a committee to serve Catholic Scouts in the Western Kentucky area. Bishop McRaith was receptive to the idea but directed that such a committee should serve both Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts equally, and so it was organized and began meeting that spring. Rev. Stephen Ulrich, an Eagle Scout originally from Evansville, IN, was appointed Diocesan Scouting Chaplain by Bishop McRaith, and officers were elected at the first meeting. Suzanna Carney, a Girl Scout volunteer in Owensboro who was also a Boy Scout parent, was the first Chairperson, elected to serve one year, and Dan Feidt – who had experience in working with such a committee in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and had been a former seminarian – was chosen as the first Vice-Chair, who would assume the duties of Chair after a year. The other officers were: Sean Mahoney (then District Executive for Shawnee District of Audubon Council) as Secretary and the Council's Professional Staff Advisor; David Doggette, Sr. as Membership Development Chair; Debbie Davis as Religious Emblems Chair; John Keelin as Religious Activities Chair; and Nadine Thompson and Tony Cooper (the latter then head of the Diocesan Youth Ministry Office) as Communications Co-Chairs. Members at large included David Ashley, Marvin Black, Joetta Mayfield and John McCarty, the last of whom joined the committee that fall. The meetings were held on a monthly basis in 1993-94 at St. Pius X Elementary School in Owensboro. A Planning Retreat took place in September 1993 at Camp Pennyroyal, the Kentuckiana Girl Scout camp near Pleasant Ridge in Daviess County, and BSA Scouter Development Training was held as well as BSA Religious Emblems Counselor Training at that retreat; three individuals were honored with the BSA's St. George Emblem at the retreat as well. Plans were made to hold an Awards Ceremony with a Mass on an annual basis in order to recognize youth and adult recipients of emblems with Bishop McRaith as concelebrant, and the first one was held at St. Stephen's Cathedral in Owensboro on May 1, 1994. The committee had by then begun holding Boards of Review for candidates for the BSA's Ad Altare Dei and Pope Pius XII emblems.

At the conclusion of the first year, with Suzanna Carney leaving the area to move with her family back to her hometown of Fort Wayne, IN, Dan Feidt took over as Chair and moved the monthly meetings to the Glenmary Home Missioners Candidate House in Hartford; at that time, all the Girl Scout volunteers from the first year ceased to attend meetings, but the committee went on. Kathy Doup succeeded Tony Cooper as Director of Youth Ministry in the Diocese, and with an extensive Girl Scouting background, she assisted greatly in Communications.

She would later return to Girl Scouting as Director of the Pennyroyal Service Center in the Kentuckiana Council and continue to help the committee in that regard. Over the years, new people were recruited to help. In the fall of 1996, the first (and thus far, only) Bishop's Dinner was held to attempt to muster support for Scouting activities among the clergy in the Diocese, and an effort was made to attempt to assure that priests could be available to celebrate Mass on site during widely attended camping activities such as Council Camporees and Order of the Arrow Section Conclaves held within the Diocese. Also that fall, the first Youth Retreat was held for Boy Scouts at St. Meinrad Archabbey in Southern Indiana, and that has become an annual event ever since, with the location changing from time to time (as has the location of the Awards Mass). Another Scouter Development and Religious Emblems Counselor Training Session was held at the Retreat in its first year, and that tradition would continue through the next two; by that time Dan Feidt, who'd had no Vice-Chair when he had become Chair, had stepped down but remained with the committee in charge of Religious Emblems until moving with his wife back to the St. Paul area in 1999. When he left, his duties were split between David Ashley (who had succeeded him as Chair) handling Adult Awards and Jeff Hedges (who became the fourth Chair of the committee) handling Youth Awards, which they have done ever since, helping each other out. Also in 1999, with Fr. Ulrich taking a leave of absence from the Diocese, Rev. Ken Mikulcik was chosen by Bishop McRaith to succeed him as Diocesan Scouting Chaplain and has been in the position ever since; Fr. Mikulcik had been a Boy Scout in Mayfield in the Four Rivers Council as a youth. Under Fr. Mikulcik, the concept of an annual Planning Retreat returned, but held in the late spring of each year with locations varying from year to year. Hundreds of Scouts and Scouters have benefited from the work of the Diocese of Owensboro Catholic Committee on Scouting over the years, with Retreat experiences and emblems awarded, and a dedicated nucleus of volunteers continues to assure that the work will go on. For many years now, meetings of the committee have normally been held on a monthly basis at Ponderosa Steak House in Central City on weekday evenings at the convenience of Fr. Mikulcik in order to accommodate his schedule.