

Boy Scout alternative, Trail Life USA, launches 'premier' Christian group for boys

By Cheryl Wetzstein - *The Washington Times* - Saturday, September 7, 2013

Leaders of newly announced Trail Life USA said they expect it to become a "premier" Christian organization for boys and young men when it starts fully running in the new year.

Some 1,200 people attended the group's national inaugural convention in Nashville, Tenn., which ended Saturday with a prayerful call for volunteers and donations.

Trail Life USA's goal is to counter the "moral free fall" of the nation, and "raise a generation of faithful husbands, fathers, citizens and leaders," organizers said. Its other mission is to provide a robust, Christ-centered alternative to the Boy Scouts of America.

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At the opening session, John Stemberger, chairman of the board of Trail Life USA, teased the crowd that he would not be surprised if there were "spies" from Grapevine, Texas — BSA's home base — in the audience.

That would make sense, since everyone from supporters to the curious want to know what's being planned, he said, adding that Trail Life USA will not be "anti-BSA." The conference's theme was "Honoring the Legacy, Raising the Standard."

Trail Life USA's name, drawn from more than 300 options, was carefully vetted and is intended not to be political or controversial, organizers said.

"Trail" refers to a pathway and being outdoors, but also symbolizes the passage of life, where there are moral choices, and right and wrong paths, said Mr. Stemberger.

"Our whole life is about the trail, both in the outdoors and in the journey of life as believers," he said. "So Trail Life is a way of life that is centered on following Christ in the outdoors."

Organizers also unveiled the new Trail Life USA logo: It features a circle with a sun, mountaintops with a path, and a male figure with a hand extended over his head, beckoning others to follow.

Watchwords of the new organization are "adventure, character and leadership," and "walk worthy."

The genesis of the new group was the BSA leadership's closely watched decision in May to change its membership policy and admit youth regardless of their sexual orientation or sexual preference.

In contrast, Trail Life USA will be inclusive of boys, regardless of religion, race, national origin or socioeconomic status, and accept boys who are experiencing same-sex attractions or gender confusion.

However, it will not admit youth who are open or avowed about their homosexuality, and it will not admit boys who are not "biologically male" or boys who wish to dress and act like girls.

Adult leaders of Trail Life USA will be Christians who sign a statement of faith and submit to background checks. Both boys and adults will be required to adhere to a code of conduct.

On Saturday, the attendees — many of whom have or had a connection to the BSA — hammered out details about the new organization. They ended the conference by presenting their organization's sign — a right hand held up — and oath to do one's duty to God and country and serve and love others.

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The goal is to “become the premier organization that honors God and builds some great young men,” said Mark Hancock, one of the board members. People from 44 states, including Hawaii and Alaska, attended the convention, he added.

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