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## Boy Scouts' end to ban on gay leaders unnerves religious groups

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**JASON CATO**  (<https://twitter.com/Jac412Cato>) | Tuesday, July 28, 2015, 11:06 p.m.

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Michael Crane loved the 11 years he worked at a Boy Scouts of America camp in Fayette County and the five years he spent at the organization's regional headquarters in the Hill District.

He walked away in 2012 out of fear that he would have been fired if someone had discovered he is gay.

"I was forced to stay in the closet, or else I would have lost my job," Crane, 30, of Monroeville said.

Though the national organization this week lifted its ban on gay Scout leaders and employees, Crane said he isn't sure he will return, even though he thinks the group offers the country's best outdoor programs, leadership and citizenship training.

"I'm still a bit on the fence," said Crane, who leads the Pittsburgh chapter of Scouts for Equality — a group that campaigned against the Boy Scouts' ban. "This is an organization that would have fired me if I had been honest about who I was."

The organization's decision Monday to end its ban on openly gay troop leaders and employees while allowing church-sponsored troops and councils to maintain the prohibition if they so choose will lead to more discrimination lawsuits and cause more groups to leave the organization, said John Stemberger, a Florida lawyer who in 2013 founded the Christian outdoor youth program Trail Life USA in response to the Boy Scouts' decision to allow gay members.

Trail Life USA has 25,000 members compared to the Boy Scouts' 2.6 million.

"There will be a very significant exodus," Stemberger predicted.

Crane disagreed.

"Honestly, most people won't notice a change," he said. "Qualified leaders will be able to come back to Scouting to volunteer, many with their own families, and the program will continue to deliver what has been a hallmark of the American culture for more than a century, uninterrupted."

The Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh will not defect. Instead, local church officials urged parish troops to choose leaders who espouse Catholic values regarding homosexuality.

"It is more important than ever for us to provide a Catholic Scouting experience for our boys and young men, and we encourage our adult parishioners to step up as leaders," the diocese said in a statement.

A diocese spokeswoman declined to say whether the diocese would go to court to stop any troops from selecting gay leaders.

Sexual orientation discrimination lawsuits are inevitable given the Boy Scouts' decision and the recent Supreme Court ruling that legalized same-sex marriage, Stemberger said.

"It kind of brings the whole issue to a constitutional level where it can trump First Amendment choices," he said.

The Hill District-based Laurel Highlands Council, which oversees Scouting activities in the region, referred questions to the Boy Scouts' national office, which declined interview requests.

"Chartered organizations will continue to select their adult leaders, and religious chartered organizations may continue to use religious beliefs as criteria for selecting adult leaders, including matters of sexuality," the Boy Scouts said in a statement. Of the more than 100,000 Scouting units nationwide, 70 percent are chartered by religious groups — including many Catholic and Mormon churches.

The Pittsburgh diocese said it does not track the number of Boy Scout troops at local parishes. Local officials with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints could not be reached.

National Mormon leaders, however, said they are "deeply troubled" by the Boy Scouts' decision. When Mormon governing councils reconvene in August, the religion's century-old tie to the Boy Scouts will be re-examined, they said.

"The church has always welcomed all boys to its Scouting units regardless of sexual orientation," the church said in a statement. "However, the admission of openly gay leaders is inconsistent with the doctrines of the church and what have traditionally been the values of the Boy Scouts of America."

Stemberger said the Mormons would likely start their own program if they left the Boy Scouts. Southern Baptist leaders are in discussions about establishing a denomination-wide relationship with Trail Life USA, he said.

His organization is reaching out to the Catholic church to try to establish a relationship similar to the one the church has with American Heritage Girls, a Christian alternative to Girl Scouts.

"We're hoping they do the same with us," Stemberger said, "but we will see."

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