

RESPECT: FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE SCOUTING IRELAND

Campaign for a Secular Alternate Scout Promise in Scouting Ireland

Scouting has always combined a respect for its traditions with social responsiveness and relevance to modern society.¹ Today, many in Ireland see themselves as non-religious (including humanists, agnostics, and atheists). The 2011 Census showed a quarter of a million people identified with 'No Religion', the largest group after 'Roman Catholic'. This 6% of the population is larger than *all* other Christian denominations combined.² A 2011 poll showed similar results. In it, '47% of Irish respondents said they considered themselves religious, 44% not religious, and 10% convinced atheists.'³ *Scouting Ireland* (SI) must decide how it will address this secularism, as well as ever-greater religious diversity.

While ad hoc accommodation for non-religious individuals has often been made in practice, the absence of a recognised alternative secular Promise in SI formally bars such individuals. This 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy places many members, including those who cherish the movement, in an invidious position when making the pledge. It also suggests to both present and potential members, young people and adults, that they're unwelcome.⁴ We believe that it's possible to maintain SI's traditional focus on spirituality with the formal acceptance of non-religious members.

With that goal in mind, this document provides three alternative proposals. The first requires the National Management Committee (NMC), or a Taskforce created under its authority, to consider the matter. This is our preferred option. It allows the NMC to consult the membership and the *World Organisation of the Scout Movement* (WOSM) directly over the next year, but requires a proposal for, or report to, National Council in 2016. Of course, the

¹ For example, while Scouting began with a focus on boys, many organisations now admit males and females.

² Another 68,668 did not answer the question. [Central Statistics Office: Population classified by Religion and Nationality 2011.](#)

³ 'Irish atheists increase by 400 percent in ten years.' See [WIN-Gallup International Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism – 2012.](#)

⁴ For one account, see L O'Connor, "["Duty to God" - being an atheist in Irish Scouting.](#)'

NMC meets this weekend (17-18 January 2015) and may move immediately to address the issue.⁵

The other two texts propose a supplementary, alternative Scout Promise through constitutional change at the upcoming National Council (NC). Article 6 of our Constitution already includes the standard Promise and an alternative that replaces the 'Duty to God' with a pledge 'to further my understanding and acceptance of a spiritual reality.' But neither of these Promises is appropriate for many non-religious Scouts and Scouters.

These proposals have been produced on the basis of numerous, admittedly informal, discussions, but we believe they represent the thinking of many within SI.⁶ We make them available now so that they can be used, if necessary, by any group that wishes to make submissions for NC.⁷ While we will act as individuals to promote change, the *Campaign* has no role in the proposal process.

Individuals and groups voting to submit any of these proposals are signalling their hope that NC *consider* the subject and *clarify* the matter. They need *not* support an alternative Promise. In the event that more than one proposal reaches NC, groups and their delegates to NC can decide whether or not they wish to withdraw one text in favour of another.

Constitutional change is a difficult process, requiring successful votes in two successive NC meetings, first by simple majority, then by a two-thirds majority.⁸ The virtue of this approach is that the time between the first and second votes could provide space for further discussion and reflection.⁹ As a practical matter, however, the initial text will limit subsequent conversation. This could, at least in this instance, unnecessarily reduce the flexibility needed to handle the matter with appropriate diligence and diplomacy.

⁵ The NMC, which includes a National Spiritual/Religious Advisory Panel, could also act under Article 8 of the *Constitution* to 'allow the use of different forms of the Scout Promise ... to suit different ... faiths' This would require 'faith' to be broadly understood as a 'belief system'.

⁶ Online with the [Campaign for a Secular Alternate Scout Promise in Scouting Ireland](#), the forum on www.scouts.ie, with Scouting officials in Ireland, the UK, and the WOSM, and various others.

⁷ Scout Group Councils, Scout County Boards, the National Youth Fora, and the NMC.

⁸ See, eg, Article 60-61, Articles 33-40, etc of the *Constitution*.

⁹ The latter can be an extraordinary meeting or the 2016 NC.

Proposals for constitutional change are necessarily made subject to Articles 8 and 61, requiring the approval of the WOSM.¹⁰ Those here are, however, closely modelled on changes made in 2013 by *The Scout Association* (UK), in consultation with the WOSM and with British religious and secular leaders.¹¹ Each would add an alternative Promise that individuals could use after appropriate discussion and reflection. Otherwise, no constitutional text is removed or altered.¹²

Implicit in the latter two proposals is that their texts are interpreted consistently with the religious, spiritual, and faith references in Articles 2, 3, and 5. This is in line with UK changes, their acceptance by the WOSM, and the WOSM's own [Guidelines on Spiritual and Religious Development](#), which gives very broad definitions to spirituality.¹³ The texts should also be read to implicitly include the other Principles (Values) of Article 5, as well as the other aspects of the Promise in Article 6, and the Law in Article 7 (which contains no religious component).¹⁴

Finally, this text has been submitted to the National Secretary in advance of the NMC meeting. Action by the NMC before the NC, initiating consultation with the membership and the WOSM over the next year, may make these proposals unnecessary. As noted, we believe that such an approach should allow SI the flexibility for careful, civil, and constructive consideration of the matter.

Yours in Scouting

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¹⁰ Note that the WOSM currently has its own active *Duty To God* Taskforce.

¹¹ See a discussion of those changes online [here](#) (including a short video [here](#)).

¹² One text even permits the standard and proposed Promises to be spoken simultaneously.

¹³ Article 2's reference to 'creed' can be interpreted as 'religious belief'. The references to spirituality and faith in Articles 3 and 5 may be read, parallel with UK changes and WOSM texts, as consistent with a secular Promise. Article 3 refers to 'spiritual development'. Article 5's '[a]dherence to spiritual principles, loyalty to the faith that expresses them and acceptance of the duties resulting therefrom' copies verbatim from the WOSM text. As the WOSM interprets this text in their own Constitution as consistent with the UK changes, we can do the same. Alternatively, the text of Article 5 could be altered, along the lines of the British changes, to 'Exploring our faiths, beliefs and attitudes'. Their '[Values of Scouting](#)' include 'Belief: We explore our faiths, beliefs and attitudes.'

¹⁴ Surprisingly, neither the existing WOSM Promise nor those of *Scouting Ireland* make explicit reference to constitutional Principles beyond the Law (and the Promise itself).

Proposal 1

[Insert group] agrees to ask National Council to vote on the following resolution:

Resolved that National Management Committee should initiate a consultation process with the membership on the inclusion of openly non-religious members (while maintaining *Scouting Ireland's* traditional focus on spirituality and the constitutional requirements of the *World Organisation of the Scout Movement*). This should conclude with a proposal for, or report to, National Council in 2016.

Explanation:

Scouting has always balanced a respect for its traditions with social responsiveness and relevance. Today, many Irish people identify themselves as non-religious, including humanists, agnostics, and atheists. While accommodations are often made in practice, the absence of a recognised alternative secular Promise formally bars such individuals from *Scouting Ireland*. It places many current members in an invidious position (requiring them to pledge to something they don't accept) and may suggest to present and potential members, both young people and adults, that they're unwelcome.

This proposal suggests retaining the exploration of religion and spirituality at our core, but recognising and respecting the non-religious who already are, or wish to be, members. It allows the National Management Committee (NMC) to consider how to meet this goal, eg the creation of a Taskforce on the matter (centred perhaps on the NMC's National Spiritual/Religious Advisory Panel). The NMC proposals would be made in light of recent changes in *The Scout Association* (UK) and within the requirements of the *World Organisation of the Scout Movement*, including its active *Duty To God* Taskforce and its [*Guidelines on Spiritual and Religious Development*](#). But the NMC would be required to conclude with a proposal for, or report to, National Council in 2016.

Proposal 2

[Insert group] agrees to ask National Council to consider:

Adding the following alternative Scout Promise to Article 6 of the Constitution:

‘On my honour I promise to do my best, to serve my community, to help other people and to live by the Scout Law’ or, in Irish: ‘Geallaim ar m’onóir go ndéanfaidh mé mo dhícheall, fónamh a dhéanamh do mo phobal, cabhrú le daoine eile agus Dlí na nGasóg a choimeád.’

Explanation:

Scouting has always balanced a respect for its traditions with social responsiveness and relevance. Today, many Irish people identify themselves as non-religious, including humanists, agnostics, and atheists. While accommodations are often made in practice, the absence of a recognised alternative secular Promise formally bars such individuals from *Scouting Ireland*. It places many current members in an invidious position (requiring them to pledge to something they don’t accept) and may suggest to present and potential members, both young people and adults, that they’re unwelcome.

This proposal suggests retaining the exploration of religion and spirituality at our core, but recognises and respects the non-religious who already are, or wish to be, members. It adds a second alternative in Article 6 removing the ‘Duty to God’ only for individuals who, after appropriate discussion and reflection, choose to use the supplementary Promise. Otherwise, it changes nothing. No constitutional text is removed or altered. And, as a practical matter, the proposed wording allows the standard and proposed Promises to be spoken simultaneously by different individuals.

The amendment is made subject to Articles 8 and 61, requiring the approval of the *World Organisation of the Scout Movement* (WOSM). The proposal is, however, closely modelled on those already made in 2013 by *The Scout Association* (UK) with the consent of the WOSM. Implicit in it is that the text is read as consistent with the religious, spiritual, and faith references in Articles 2, 3, and 5. This is in line with the UK changes, their acceptance by the WOSM, and the broad wording of the WOSM’s own [Guidelines on Spiritual and Religious Development](#). Finally, like the current Promises, the proposed text implicitly includes the other Scout Principles (Values) of Article 5, as well as the other aspects of the Scout Promise in Article 6, and the Scout Law in Article 7 (which contains no religious component).

Proposal 3

[Insert group] agrees to ask National Council to consider:

**Adding the following alternative Scout Promise to Article 6 of the Constitution:
'On my honour I promise to do my best, to uphold our Scout Principles, to serve my community, to help other people and to live by the Scout Law' or, in Irish:
'Geallaim ar m'onóir go ndéanfaidh mé mo dhícheall, chun na príosabail ghasóige a sheasamh, fónamh a dhéanamh do mo phobal, cabhrú le daoine eile agus Dlí na nGasóg a choimeád.'**

Explanation:

Scouting has always balanced a respect for its traditions with social responsiveness and relevance. Today, many Irish people identify themselves as non-religious, including humanists, agnostics, and atheists. While accommodations are often made in practice, the absence of a recognised alternative secular Promise formally bars such individuals from *Scouting Ireland*. It places many current members in an invidious position (requiring them to pledge to something they don't accept) and may suggest to present and potential members, both young people and adults, that they're unwelcome.

This proposal suggests retaining the exploration of religion and spirituality at our core, but recognises and respects the non-religious who already are, or wish to be, members. It adds a second alternative in Article 6 replacing the 'Duty to God' with 'to uphold our Scout Principles' only for individuals who, after appropriate discussion and reflection, choose to use the supplementary Promise. Otherwise, it changes nothing. No other constitutional text is removed or altered.

The amendment is made subject to Articles 8 and 61, requiring the approval of the *World Organisation of the Scout Movement* (WOSM). The proposal is, however, very closely modelled on those already made in 2013 by *The Scout Association* (UK) with the consent of the WOSM. The only difference is the use of 'Principles' rather than 'Values' as our Constitution uses the former terminology.

Implicit in it is that the text is read as consistent with the religious, spiritual, and faith references in Articles 2, 3, and 5. This is in line with the UK changes, their acceptance by the WOSM, and the broad wording of the WOSM's own [*Guidelines on Spiritual and Religious Development*](#). Like the current Promises, the proposed text implicitly includes the other aspects of the Scout Promise in Article 6 and the Scout Law in Article 7 (which contains no religious component). Indeed, it would be the only text to explicitly reference the Principles of Article 5.