

AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

LIGHT • FREEDOM • TRUTH

"Light to see the Truth, Freedom to make it Known"

Rev. Garland F. Pierce, Executive Director

Monday, July 31, 2017

Mr. Michael Surbaugh
Chief Scout Executive
Boy Scouts of America
P.O. Box 152079
Irving, TX 75015-2079

Dear Mr. Surbaugh:

Greetings from the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC), its Department of Christian Education (AMECED), and the Association of African Methodist Episcopal Scouts (AAMES)

This missive comes after a period of discussion and reflection among church leaders, scouting leaders, scouts, and parents within and related to the AME Church. It comes to you so that the African Methodist Episcopal Church officially can go on record, registering our deep disappointment and the strong offense taken at President Trump's speech at the 20th National Jamboree.

We are fully aware of the long-standing tradition of extending the invitation to the sitting president to speak to scouts during their jamboree, a moment intended to be inspiring and motivating. Likewise, as a global Christian denomination present in forty-one countries and five continents, we are appreciative of the Boy Scouts' strong non-partisan position. We read with interest your statement of explanation and apology emphasizing these two points.

Scouts and scout leaders from the AME Church were present at the 20th National Jamboree. The AAMES had a booth in the Duty to God Tent as it has had for the last six jamborees since 1997. Leaders present estimate that 1000 scouts and scouters visited the AAMES booth during the jamboree. AAMES leaders serve at the national level as part of the religious relations and diversity committees. We estimate that at least 2,000 young people are registered through AME-related troops and that about that same number of AME young people are registered through non-AME affiliated troops. Young members of AME congregations outside of the USA also participate in the global scouting movement. We share this to illustrate the commitment of the AME Church to scouting as a vehicle for character and leadership development. We see it as a part of our church's overall goals of faith formation and leadership development of our children. Many have invested time, talent, and resources to these aims and goals of scouting, believing that this exposure will be beneficial for our children and that scouting will offer a safe space for learning, exploration, and skill-building. A critical part of this is the importance of diversity.

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The time that has passed since President Trump's speech has allowed us to reflect on the positive experiences, which our young people have had at the jamboree. Likewise, it has made clear to us how wrong-headed and shameful it was for the President to use this safe space for learning, exploration, service, and community-building to plant seeds of divisiveness and political rancor among this group of young people, causing some among our group to feel uncomfortable, even segregated and called out. When we fundraise for our young people to participate in such gatherings and when we lead campaigns to encourage the establishment of new troops in our AME congregations, we do not do so expecting that our young people will be exposed to such an atmosphere of division.

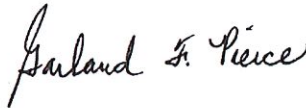
This unfortunate incident has served as an impetus for several conversations within our church regarding diversity and the creation of safe space as well as space for difference and healthy debate. We trust that it will cause the BSA to do the same, redoubling its efforts to increase and protect diversity at every level of leadership and involvement in scouting. Hopefully, in a climate where civility and non partisanship can not be assumed or taken for granted, last Monday's incident will also cause the BSA to revisit its practice of speaker invitation, at the bare minimum, making clear the BSA's position on such matters as part of the invitation.

For all the positive influence scouting has on the lives of its young participants, the AME Church is grateful for the partnership and remains committed. A safe and respectful space for learning and exploration for our young people is priority and paramount. We will settle for nor tolerate anything less. The incident of last Monday fell short of this goal as well as the espoused goals of the Boy Scouts of America. We expect better; and, we are willing to work with you and all of goodwill who are committed to working to ensure better for our young people.

Sincerely,



Bishop David R. Daniels, Jr.
Chair, Commission on
Christian Education



Rev. Garland F. Pierce
Executive Director,
Department of
Christian Education



Mr. Clarence E. Crayton, Jr.
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Boy Scouts Director
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