

The Decline of the Boy Scouts... but the Rise of Masculinity?

The Boy Scouts of America is filing for bankruptcy. A [press release](#) announced the move, citing the need to “equitably compensate victims who were harmed during their time in Scouting.” The statement refers, of course, to the many Scouts who were [sexually abused](#) as young boys.

Seeking to rectify wrongs and move on in providing a high-quality program for children is commendable. But does the move come too late to save the Boy Scouts? Possibly.

Signs of struggle within the organization have been visible for several years, the attempt to [allow girls into the program](#) being just one of them.

Maintaining its appeal in the midst of such struggles was a challenge for the Boy Scouts, as enrollment numbers show. In a recent five-year span, “the number of Cub Scouts has declined by 18.5 percent to 1.2 million, and the number of Boy Scouts and Varsity Scouts has declined 8.4 percent to 834,122,” explains a [recent article](#) in *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*.

But that doesn't mean scouting and its activities are lost for future generations. The *Chronicles* article highlights Trail Life USA as one popular organization filling the void for boys seeking the masculine adventures and survival skills which the Boy Scouts were once known for.

One reason for the growing popularity of Trail Life USA appears to be its ambition to combat negative cultural trends. Unlike the Boy Scouts – and much of modern culture – it emphasizes the importance of religious activity, recognizing

that boys need a “compass” that points them to truth and Christian values, while providing a pattern for a moral and upright life.

Second, Trail Life USA seeks to keep its program male specific. Doing so is not an attempt to disrespect females, according to the head of the organization. Instead, it’s an acknowledgement that the sexes are different. Separating boys from girls and giving them unique activities provides opportunities for growth not readily available in school or other organizations.

Finally, Trail Life USA encourages the participation of an endangered demographic group: fathers. “Unlike many other youth organizations, Trail Life emphasizes troop meetings being true father-son activities, not just an activity fathers drop their sons off at.” Thus, not only is Trail Life training the next generation on how to be men, it also is training adult men to step up and accept leadership. The model of father involvement also builds in natural safeguards against some of the sexual abuse problems that necessitated the Boy Scouts’ pursuit of bankruptcy.

Religion, masculinity, and fatherhood: three items that are often maligned in popular culture. Yet given the 25 percent growth in membership Trail Life has experienced in the last year, it seems that these virtues are still highly prized by some in society.

Our nation needs men who know what they believe and aren’t afraid to let those beliefs be known. We need men who aren’t afraid to show their masculine side in a quiet strength that protects the vulnerable. Finally, our nation needs men who value children and recognize the responsibility a man has to provide a role-model for leadership in his own home and to the little ones he is raising.

In recent years, it seems the Boy Scouts have drifted from

promoting these principles, and have instead chosen to focus on political correctness. But if the growth of Trail Life USA and the decline of the Boy Scouts are any indication, political correctness is the last thing boys and their parents are looking for.

Perhaps there's still hope for American masculinity.

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[Image Credit: U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Aaron Berogan/Released]