

FOREVER FAMILY

More than Scouting

BY LOUISE BRASS
The Observer Correspondent

The American Heritage Girls organization is growing around the diocese. The movement could be described as “scouting with added value — the value of faith.”

Activities look a lot like traditional scouts’ endeavors, but the addition of the faith element that AHG includes means girls also have a chance to learn about their Catholic faith, including the saints, the martyrs, the meaning of the Mass and the blessings that knowledge can bring them throughout their lives, organizers said.

These activities, many headquartered at Holy Cross Parish in Batavia, help to unite parishes of the diocese into one big family, said Elise Balsamo, leader of the 65-member Troop 0224, at Holy Cross.

“We extend far. We have some girls that come from Carol Stream, Elburn, Geneva, Elgin, DeKalb and Sugar Grove,” Balsamo said.

Other troops include in Huntley, where Cassandra Lauinger is the coordinator of Troop 1412 at St. Mary Parish, and in East Dubuque, where Father James Parker, now the pastor at Holy Cross, was the driving force behind starting a troop at St. Mary Parish there.

“The focus is Christianity, and specifically Catholicism,” said Don Rios, of Elgin, who came to wait out the Friday night meeting. His daughter, Sofia, 13, worked on a project at a nearby table in the community hall at Holy Cross.

“This is important to me because my job as a parent is to pass the faith along,” Rios said. “This is one way we can do that.”

He and his wife, Janice, learned about AHG when they and their daughters were hiking at Cantigny Park in Wheaton a few years ago. Their path happened to cross an AHG booth.

“We started talking to

some of the leaders. I was very impressed by the girls that were there. They were very well spoken and very comfortable in their own skin so to speak; very confident,” he said.

Now, their three daughters are involved in AHG. For Sofia, camping has been the best fun so far in the three years she has participated.

“I like camping, and I like



(Observer photo/Louise Brass)

Explorers Reese Klug, Felicity Kralka, Megan Malooly, Kimi Adams, Signe Cooper, Evelyn Sauer, Lucia Gorski and Cecilia Rios, learn how to earn their genealogy badge from Kurt Wesoff, during an AHG session in Batavia Jan 13.

This kingdom (of heaven) does not involve the establishment of a new political power, but the fulfillment of the Covenant between God and his people, which inaugurates a season of peace and justice To secure this covenant pact with God, each one is called to convert, transforming his or

her way of thinking and living. This is important: converting is not only changing the way of life but also the way of thinking. It is a transformation of thought. It is not a matter of changing clothing, but habits!

— Pope Francis

American Heritage Girls Bring Faith to the Table

hanging out with all the girls. One of my favorite places we’ve gone camping is Eagle Cave in Wisconsin,” she said.

Katherine and Jason Kralka home school their six children. Three who are involved with Troop 0224 are Clare, 10; Felicity, 9; and Sophia, 6.

The family attends St. Peter and Paul Parish in Virgil. Katherine helped plan an AHG lock-in activity in February.

She said she doesn’t mind the 25-minute drive to get to Batavia.

“We just love this group,” she said. “They offer so much more because it’s specifically a Catholic group. They learn a lot from the older girls. They love all the activities they can do with their friends.

“If this wasn’t specifically a Catholic group I don’t think we would be here,” Kralka said.

The girls can make friendships that last a lifetime, while developing scouting skills and earning badges for religious as well as non-religious achievements, said Julie Goodwin, the National Catholic Relations Specialist for the AHG organization.



Mary Claire Talbot, Patriot with Troop 0224 brings in the flag as the troop members salute at the start of the meeting Jan 13.

“It becomes a Catholic troop when it is chartered by a Catholic parish,” she said. “It helps girls, kindergarten through 12th grade, become stronger in their faith.

“The Stars and Stripes Award is our highest award which involves more than 100 hours of service to the community,” she said.

“They learn a lot about their faith and how to walk and talk

about their faith,” Goodwin added. “We are preparing girls to go out in to the world.”

Nationally, AGH includes various denominations, including Baptist and Lutheran. Troops are chartered by churches of individual faiths.

Goodwin spearheaded the founding of AHG in the Rockford Diocese in 2009, working with the late Bishop Thomas G. Doran. She said that she is heartened to see the successes of AHG here, and the interest of so many families.



(Observer photos/Louise Brass)

AHG Assistant Leader Deanna Lee helps Tenderhearts Michaela Marcheschi (center) and Adeline Marcheschi make star lanterns, called parols, in the style used at Christmas time in the Philippines.

(Photo provided) Samantha Law helps to pass out sandwiches at the Dubuque (Iowa) County Right to Life chili luncheon. She is a member of American Heritage Girls Troop 8510 of East Dubuque.

