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 with 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 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 there. The focus is Christianity, and specifically Catholicism,” said Don Rice, 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,” Rice 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 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. Those 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.

“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.

American Heritage Girls Bring Faith to the Table

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

By Louise Brass

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

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