

## Building Faith Connections

[The following article from the May/June 2005 *What's New* newsletter for Girl Scout Program, Membership & Research Staff is reprinted with permission from GSUSA.]

Strengthen your community partnerships by connecting with communities that have access to girls, resources, and lots of volunteer energy. Form a Faith Alliance!

That's just what the Cumberland Valley Girl Scout United Methodist Alliance (CVGSUMA) is. This Alliance was formed to encourage the growth and retention of Girl Scout troops and membership, as well as promoting the religious awards within the United Methodist Church.

*Why bring together women and men from the local council area who believe in the Girl Scout program and are committed to their faith?*

Alliance members understand both the Girl Scout Movement and the United Methodist Church. They pool resources, ideas, best practices, and a commitment to serving youth. Volunteers who are allies in both communities navigate with incredible skill and passion as they bridge groups which they are a part of.

CVGSUMA members come together regularly to plan activities and design and implement strategies for the two communities to work together. The work of the Alliance currently includes the development of an Interfaith Retreat. And, they are currently creating 'District Leaders' across the local area to help with relationship development, council consultation, and general guidance.

*What kind of things can your council do if you create an Alliance in your community?*

CVGSUMA is currently supporting The Girl Scout Senior Troop 1356 who, for their Gold Award project, is refurbishing Camp Cedar Crest. The troops' plans include organizing ongoing annual work days at the camp to ensure lasting impact. The relationship of the two local organizations not only models cooperation and community involvement, but helps Girl Scouts get things done!

At the national level, the United Methodist Church and GSUSA have a joint memorandum of understanding whereby both organizations work together to support girls in their spiritual development. Larry Coppock is the National Director of Civic Youth Ministries for the United Methodist Church. "I'm excited about the Alliance forming" stated Mr. Coppock, "I believe it will help promote the Girl Scout program in the Church. We hope that Cumberland Valley's model will be the first of many around the country."

It is hoped that the Alliance will serve as a model and be used by Girl Scouts and other faith communities, to develop stronger relationships and more organized outreach to girls.