

# Girl Guide troop kicked out of church hall because they didn't attend services

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A Girl Guide group in Hove claims it has been kicked out of its base in a church hall because its members don't attend church services.

The Vicar at St Leonards Church says the Guides of the 7th Hove troop – which held its weekly meetings for free in the church hall – were given access only if they promised to attend services and do work for the church.

The Reverend Stephen Terry says they were not fulfilling their part of the deal and so he had "no option" but to give them the boot.

But group leader Julie Winder said that it wasn't her place to force the girls to go to church services, adding that the church was "out of touch" with modern life.

In a letter to parents, she said: "The church has informed us that we can only remain on our present terms if we drastically improve the attendance records. The only way we can do this is to only have practicing Christians as members which means we must exclude non-Christians. If we don't comply with his wishes, we are being priced out. So much for a caring community church."

She told *The Argus* newspaper that many of her members were either Roman Catholic or of different religions, adding a number of others were from separated families and visited their other parent at the weekend.

She said: "We try to get them to go when we can. If not, then the leaders try to represent them."

Reverend Terry told *The Argus* he had asked the group to attend at least four services a year: Remembrance Sunday, Christingle, Palm Sunday and Harvest Festival.

He said: "We also ask for them to help out at a few church events. We have no problem with the concept of Guides and the girls are no trouble at all. We have found it very difficult working with the leaders. It is not the case that we have thrown them out – they have walked away from this standing agreement."

The group has now moved to Portslade Town Hall, which they have secured for a cheaper rate.

Stephen Evans, campaigns manager at the National Secular Society, said: "It is not unusual for churches to insist that scouts and girl guides attend services or hold 'church parades' as a condition of using church buildings for weekly meetings.

"This shows what little regard the Church has for respecting freedom of conscience. It needs to recognise that the Girl Guides has never been a Christian organisation – so requiring attendance at Church is wholly unreasonable."

The Guides are currently reviewing their 'Promise' and considering replacing the religious oath with one secular promise for all.

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