

SCOUT SUNDAY/SABBATH AND THE SCOUTS' OWN SERVICE BRINGING DUTY TO GOD TO YOUR UNIT

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS: Scout Sunday/Sabbath is celebrated in February. It is usually near February 8th (the Birthday of the BSA), but the specific date may be chosen “as convenient” for a Unit.

- If your Chartered Organization is affiliated with a religious group, consider joining with them for their weekly service.
- Consider planning a Court of Honor, Fellowship Meal, or other activity involving the Unit and family members preceded by an optional “Scouts’ Own” service.
- Some faiths have reservations about worshipping or praying in union with other faiths, so respect the religious sensibilities and commitments of Unit members and stress that participation is voluntary.
- Another alternative is to encourage Youth and Leaders to wear the Uniform to their weekly worship service or to simply note an upcoming Scout Sunday/Sabbath with a moment (and possibly *Scouts’ Own* ceremony) during a regular Unit Meeting.

In bringing this dimension to your Unit’s activities it’s important to remember that we are not trying to foster the expression of a particular Faith Tradition. Rather we are reminding our Youth of the Spiritual Dimension of their lives and cultivating an *Attitude of Respectful Gratitude* for the things they enjoy, the people they relate to, and the world around them. In some traditions this spiritual dimension points towards a Supreme Being and formal worship, but other traditions are more abstract and do not think in terms of a deity or a pantheon. The intent of any spiritual dimension in Scouting is to support the personal faith of the Youth, but the reality is that for some youth any spiritual dimension in Scouting may be his or her only exposure to a “communal spirituality”.

WHY DO THIS? A Scout is Reverent — In the words of Lord Baden-Powell: “I have been asked to describe more fully than has been shown in *Scouting for Boys* what was in my mind as regards religion when I instituted Scouting and Guiding. I was asked ‘Where does Religion come in?’ Well, my reply is ‘It does not come in at all. It is already there. It is the fundamental factor underlying Scouting and Guiding.’”

HOW DO WE DO THIS? Baden-Powell was not insisting on a particular religion. His ideas in this regard were simple and specific and three quotes will help to focus our thoughts:

- No man is much good unless he believes in God and obeys His laws. So every Scout should have a religion.
- Religion seems a very simple thing: 1st Love and serve God, 2nd Love and serve your neighbor.
- In doing your duty to God always be grateful to Him. Whenever you enjoy a pleasure or a good game, or succeed in doing a good thing, thank Him for it, if only with a word or two, just as you say grace at a meal.

It also helps us to look at the formal position of the Boy Scouts of America in this regard: *The Boy Scouts of America maintains that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God. In the first part of the Scout Oath or Promise the member declares, "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law." The recognition of God as the ruling and leading power in the universe and the grateful acknowledgment of His favors and blessings are necessary to the best type of citizenship and are wholesome precepts in the education of the growing members. No matter what the religious faith of the members may be, this fundamental need of good citizenship should be kept before them. The Boy Scouts of America, therefore, recognizes the religious element in the training of the member, but it is absolutely nonsectarian in its attitude toward that religious training. Its policy is that the home and the organization or group with which the member is connected shall give definite attention to religious life.*

SOME PRACTICAL HINTS The formal ceremony expressing "Reverence" in Scouting is often called a *Scouts' Own*. There are many possible ways of organizing one, but here are some guidelines to get you started:

Choose a Theme — Begin with a topic for gratitude, reflection, or need and build on that foundation.

Keep it Simple — Appeal to the Youth and meet them on their own ground. Don't be "flowery"!

Keep it Short — About five minutes is probably more than long enough, ten minutes is pushing things, more than ten minutes will cultivate an attitude of gratitude for the conclusion!

Involve the Youth — Have the Youth plan and lead as much as possible, but provide the guidance and support they will probably need. If your Unit has a *Chaplain's Aide*, he is the natural organizer and leader.

Respect Diversity — Try to use shared spiritual texts or writings that respect a variety of traditions (the Old Testament and Psalms are common to more traditions than the New Testament), but ethical writings from almost any tradition may be used.

Make it Special — Set aside a time and place, separate yourselves from "ordinary" activities.

Plan for Silence — Allow for some silence so that each participant has a moment with his or her own thoughts to formulate a personal response.

Consider Providing an Aid — Provide a printed program or "aid" if the group includes outside

visitors or if the situation warrants.

A possible form for a *Scouts' Own* based on a theme of *Gratitude for the Beauty of Nature* might follow this framework:

1. **Call to Gather:** The leader invites the group to come together for a brief service. Respect the fact that some traditions may prefer to pray standing or with head covered, so be sensitive about posture and hats. The Call should include a statement or reference to the theme. "Troop, let us gather around the fire-ring and pause in gratitude for our time together on this campout."
2. **Opening Song:** Something that is either well-known or that fits in with the theme, say "America the Beautiful".
3. **Lesson:** A reading touching on some ethical or spiritual matter related to the theme. Psalm 19, first half, "The heavens declare the glory of God..." would be appropriate in this context.
4. **Reflection:** A very short reflection relating the reading and theme to the situation of the Scouts. It might be appropriate for the Scoutmaster or Chaplain or some respected adult to handle this role. Don't be long-winded, scholarly, or preachy!
5. **Silence:** "Let us pause now in silence to reflect and respond."
6. **Response:** A communal response, perhaps based on a point of the Scout Law related to the theme. In this example, the *Wilderness Pledge* might be used.
7. **Invocation:** A brief "prayer", "request", or "statement of need" (possibly by the adult who led the **Reflection**) that unites the group, ties in the theme, and leads to a conclusion. "May we as god scouts respect the wonders of nature, hold and use them in trust, and pass them on to those who follow us and so please the Great Scoutmaster of us all."
8. **Closing:** Possibly a song followed by a suitable dismissal. "Let us pause a moment in silence before turning to pack our gear."

RESOURCES

The World Organization of Scouting Movements has produced two excellent references that are available electronically:

Scouting and Spiritual Development <<<http://www.scout.org/node/6322>>>

Guidelines on Spiritual and Religious Development <<<http://www.scout.org/node/6317>>>

The Boy Scouts of America has this relevant item:

BSA Charter and Bylaws, Article 9, Section 1, Declaration of Religious Principle
<<<http://www.scouting.org/scoutsourc/guidetoadvancement/appendix/charterandbylaws.aspx>>>

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