



Day Four: Model Scouts' Own Worship Service

Time Allowed

30 Minutes

Teaching Format

Troop instructional discussion followed by model service

Learning Objectives

As a result of this session, participants will be able to do the following:

1. Have experienced an appropriate Scouts' Own worship service.
2. Be able to plan a Scouts' Own worship service.
3. Be able to discuss the importance of religious services for a unit.

Materials Needed

- Copies of selected hymns/songs, responsive readings, unison prayers, etc. (These can be included in the Participant Notebook ahead of time.)

Recommended Presenter

NYLT staff members

Recommended Location

Chapel or other appropriate, quiet setting site from the learning area where all participants can be comfortably seated as they take part in the proceedings

PRESENTATION OUTLINE

Instructional Presentation (12 min)

Lead a discussion of key issues surrounding religious observance in Scouting. The nature of the discussion will vary with different courses depending on participants' backgrounds and information needs. Among the issues that may be covered are the following:

Why Include Religious Services in Scouting?

Scouting America's Charter and Bylaws recognize the religious element in the responsibilities of its members, but it is absolutely nonsectarian in its attitude toward that religious training. Religious instruction is ultimately the responsibility of the home (family) and the religious institution.

From the Scouting America's Charter and Bylaws

"Scouting America maintains that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God."

From the *Scouts BSA Handbook*, 14th edition (2019):

“A Scout is reverent. A Scout is reverent toward God. A Scout is faithful in fulfilling religious duties. A Scout respects the beliefs of others.”

“Wonders all around us remind us of our faith in God, and we show our reverence by living our lives according to the ideals of our beliefs.

”You will encounter people expressing their reverence in many different ways. It is your duty to respect and defend their rights to their religious beliefs even when they differ from your own.”

What is a Scouts’ Own worship service?

Baden-Powell’s explanation is as valid today as when he wrote it:

“ . . . I think the Scouts’ [worship service] should be open to all denominations, and carried on in such manner as to offend none. There should not be any special form, but it should abound in the right spirit, and should be conducted not from any ecclesiastical point of view, but from that of the boy. . . . We do not want a kind of imposed church parade, but a voluntary uplifting of their hearts by the boys in thanksgiving for the joys of life, and a desire on their part to seek inspiration and strength for greater love and service for others.

—Lord Robert Baden-Powell
Printed in “The Scouter”
November 1928

Basic Concepts for Planning a Scouts’ Own Worship Service

- Choose a setting that lends itself to the occasion and promotes reverence—a grove of trees; a site with a view of a lake, pond, or brook; etc. For small groups, sitting in a circle can be a very effective arrangement.
- Everything must be in good taste.
- The service should be planned, timed, and rehearsed (generally 30 minutes maximum; shorter is acceptable).
- It should go without saying that those attending a Scouts’ Own worship service will be courteous, kind, and reverent. Participants should respect the rights and feelings of others even if their beliefs and religious practices differ from their own.
- Everyone in attendance should have opportunities to participate, if they wish, through responsive readings, silent and group prayer, singing, etc.

Recognizing Diversity in a Scouts’ Own Worship Service

Scouting America itself is a secular organization, not affiliated with or preferring any religion. Scouts practice many faiths, and many units are composed of Scouts from a variety of faiths. When this is the case during a Scout outing, **ask them** to suggest materials, to participate in the planning, and to assist in leading the service.

An interfaith worship service recognizes and respects the differences among individual religious beliefs and observances and among faith traditions. The service should be a



learning opportunity for all Scouts and conducted in a manner that offends no religion or faith.

Interfaith worship should be relevant for youth and meaningful and uplifting for all who attend the service.

Key Points

- Multifaith, or interfaith, means a service that all Scouts and Scouters may attend; therefore, much attention must be paid to recognizing the universality of beliefs in God and reverence. With that in mind, perhaps the most appropriate opening for a Scouts' Own worship service is, "Prepare yourself for prayer in your usual custom."
- While we encourage voluntary participation, no unit, even one chartered by a religious organization, can require participation in a religious ceremony or service.
- Because different faiths observe different religious practices and have a variety of holy days, it is not always possible to conduct an interfaith service in a time frame that fully recognizes their individual religious obligations. This should be acknowledged and discussed ahead of time so that opportunities can be built into the schedule to allow for all Scouts to meet their religious obligations.
- If you know that all people attending a service are of a particular faith, you can tailor the service to that faith if desired.
- Encourage Scouts and Scouters to participate in religious services. Let them know ahead of time the nature of a service so that they can decide if it is appropriate for them to attend.

Summary

Whenever possible, Scouting America outings and activities should include opportunities for members to meet their religious obligations. Encourage Scouts and Scouters to participate. Even the opportunity to share the uniqueness of various faiths, beliefs, and philosophies with other members may be educational and meaningful. The best way to become knowledgeable about the religious beliefs of others is to inquire about them. By sharing religious beliefs with others, we add to our program and help everyone appreciate religious diversity. People of all faiths need to know they are safe and will not be criticized for their faith.

Planning and carrying out religious activities can be as simple or complex as the planners choose to make them, but the effect is not necessarily increased with complexity.

Care must be taken to support and respect all the faiths represented in the group. For example, certain hymns and songs, as well as certain scriptures, are not appropriate for everyone. Also, the concept of an offering is foreign to some religions; to others, carrying money on the Sabbath is forbidden.

If services for each faith are not possible, then an interfaith, nonsectarian service is recommended. Scout leaders can be positive in their religious influence while honoring the beliefs of others and without promoting a particular faith.

The Scouts' Own Worship Service (18 min)

At this point, the session can shift from instruction to example as staff members offer a brief Scouts' Own worship service that follows the guidelines set out above.

There are many formats for Scouts' worship services. One of the more traditional frameworks is developed in the following plan.

Key Elements of a Scouts' Own Worship Service

1. Call to worship
2. Hymns or songs
3. Scripture(s) or readings from a variety of religious or inspirational sources
4. Responsive reading
5. Personal prayer
6. Group prayer
7. Inspirational reading or message (ideally reinforcing servant leadership)
8. Offering (World Friendship Fund*)
9. An act of friendship
10. Benediction or closing

* Explanation of World Friendship Fund (*from the Scouting America website*):

"Through the World Friendship Fund, voluntary contributions of Scouts and leaders are transformed into cooperative projects that help Scouting associations in other countries to strengthen and extend their Scouting programs. The World Friendship Fund gives members of Scouting America a good turn opportunity to help fellow Scouts who are in need of their support. It teaches Scouts that Scouting is global. Since the inception of the World Friendship Fund, American Scouts and leaders have voluntarily donated more than \$11 million to the fund. The World Friendship Fund was developed during the closing days of World War II. At that time, there was a great need to rebuild Scouting in those nations that had been wrecked by war and were just emerging from the shadows of totalitarianism."

If an offering is collected, it will be used to make a donation to the World Friendship Fund. All those contributing need to know this is the beneficiary. **No other beneficiary may receive these funds.**