

Managing Spiritual Emphasis

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The Spirit of love for your fellow man is, after all, the Spirit of God working in you. (B.-P.)

Spiritual emphasis is the one aspect of the Scouting program that consistently creates the highest level of anxiety in leaders. We see a growing commitment by a multicultural, pluralistic society to recognize the rights of all religions, not just the majority. The question of faith is a deeply personal one. Many leaders are uncomfortable with discussing their own beliefs and sensitive to the possibility of offending others.

Although they have different meanings, we tend to use the terms "religious" and "spiritual" interchangeably. Many program examples on spiritual emphasis are published monthly in the *Leader*, yet we are often unsure how or when we should use them.

Why even bother with spiritual emphasis? What place does it have in Scouting and our daily lives? This article tries to show that the spiritual is an integral part of Scouting - a basic thread that runs through our aims and principles. The material came out of a session recently presented at a provincial Trainer III course in Alberta. The four objectives of the session were to:

1. understand the difference between what is "spiritual" and what is "religious";
2. understand the philosophy of what prayer is, what grace is, and what a worship service is;
3. be able to differentiate between spiritual Scouting activities and religious Scouting activities;
4. understand how to manage common problems associated with spiritual emphasis and some situational policy interpretations relating to Bylaws, Policies & Procedures, Religion (Section IV).

The definitions and philosophy used here have been adapted from various world religion resources and proofed by religious leaders of diverse faiths to ensure acceptability of thought and content.

Definitions

Before entering into discussions, it's important for leaders to have some knowledge and comprehension of the common terms. Let's start with the meanings of spiritual, religious, and multifaith.

Spiritual: Getting in touch with one's own inner being: characterized by the highest qualities of the human mind or spirit.

Religious: Pertaining to any particular system of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that constitutes one's relationship with the powers and principles of the universe, most commonly with a deity or deities.

Multi faith: Those spiritual values common to all religions that encompass the highest qualities of humanity: e.g. benevolence, compassion, social justice, the Golden Rule. A multi faith service keys in on these common spiritual values, demonstrating that people of diverse religious backgrounds share the

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goals of perpetuating peace and harmony in life. Think about this and its application to Scouting.

Given these definitions, we can move on to the ideas of spiritual emphasis and religious emphasis.

Spiritual emphasis has to do with acts or actions that bring awareness to the highest qualities of human being (mind, body, and soul). Some examples of the spiritual emphasis in Scouting are:

- carrying out the Scout promise, law, motto and slogan;
- developing and demonstrating a personal understanding of God or of the powers and principles of the universe;
- accepting responsibility for yourself and the consequences of your actions;
- responding to others in caring ways;
- demonstrating awareness of and concern for the environment.

Religious emphasis has to do with the ritual acts or observances that pertain to a particular system of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours through which a person hopes to gain a connection with the powers and principles of the universe or a deity or deities. Some examples of the religious emphasis in Scouting are:

- developing a fuller understanding of your religious beliefs through working towards the Religion in Life award or some other religious study;
- actively participating in your religion's worship services as a Scouting member;
- attending a religious sponsor's retreat for Scouters of that faith.

Prayer, Grace, Worship

A common concern of leaders is that they often don't know the purpose behind such things as prayer, grace, and Scouts' Own. We know many ways to do them but are unsure of exactly what, for example, prayer is supposed to accomplish or how it relates to young people and Scouting. Because we are unsure, we are often uncomfortable with making an "understanding of God" part of our program.

Why do we pray? Praying heightens our awareness of common, everyday acts so that we may have a greater understanding and appreciation for them. A greater knowledge of ourselves and our relationships leads us to a fuller association with our spiritual and religious convictions.

Why do we say grace at meals? It reminds us that we do not live to eat, but eat to live. By moving awareness past personal hunger to an awareness of food as a physical blessing, we gain a realization not only of our good fortune to have food but also of our potential for continued physical and spiritual growth.

Why do we have Scouts' Own? The purpose of a Scouts' Own is "for the worship of God and to promote a fuller understanding of the promise and law". A worship service creates an environment that helps us concentrate on our relationships with ourselves, others, and God or the powers and principles of the universe. A Scouts' Own provides

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time to reflect on our fulfilling of the promise and law and our personal commitments to our spiritual values.

With the definitions and philosophy tucked in the back of our minds, let's start to unravel some questions about how to approach various situations.

Q. What type of prayers and other material can we use in a Scouts' Own?

A. B.P. & P. says that a Scouts' Own is prepared by Scouters, young people and, on occasion, chaplains, and should be acceptable to all the faiths represented. Planners of a Scouts' Own have two options.

- Survey the group for religious diversity and ask each person's opinion on the content you propose for the Scouts' Own. You can do this easily with small groups.

- Conduct a multifaith Scouts' Own. Instead of using identifiable traditional religious material, choose spiritual material that has universal appeal. This option is most useful where the group's size doesn't make surveying practical.

Q. When can we conduct a Scouts' Own?

A. B.P. & P. states "these services may be held at any time". The best time to hold a Scouts' Own is whenever it is most meaningful to the group. A prayer during a meeting is essentially a quick Scouts' Own.

Q. Is prayer necessary in a Scouts' Own?

A. No. A Scouts' Own can take on a spiritual message in the form of skits, stories, games, or a simple discussion. The content is the decision of those who are planning the Scouts' Own in consultation with the others who will be participating.

Q. Should we ask members to uncover their heads during a prayer?

A. In a group, such as a Scouting section, where the known religious beliefs of every member are similar (in this case Christian), the request is appropriate. In a group where you do not know if one or a diversity of religions is represented (e.g. at a jamboree), simply word the call to prayer with the request, "Let us pray". Each Scout may then choose how he or she will pray within the context of his or her own beliefs rather than those of someone else.

Q. What type of blessing should we use at large functions such as regional Honours and Awards ceremonies?

A. For large gatherings, which obviously consist of a mix of faiths, a multifaith approach is the most acceptable. Use a blessing that is spiritual with a universal appeal.

Q. What is the leader's role in the Religion in Life award program?

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A. The leader's role is to inform youth members of the program's availability and to distribute the appropriate Religion in Life pamphlets. The young people then work with their personal religious advisor to complete the requirements. Although the leader can present the award, it is more appropriate for the religious advisor to make the presentation at a designated worship service.

Q. What type of emphasis should we stress to candidates on a training course ?

A. It's important to stress the spiritual emphasis. Although the leaders may all be of a similar faith, they need to learn the flexibility of a multifaith approach in order to work with open groups and sections. To avoid biasing how leaders approach a Scouts' Own back in their own group, trainers need to be careful that their personal religious views, rituals or beliefs do not bias the nature of a Scouts' Own training session.

Q. Who should conduct a Scouts' Own on a training course?

A. The Wood Badge training guidelines say that Scouts' Own should be organized by the course team. But leaders may be involved in the planning and presentation of the service.

Q. What resource materials are available to us?

A. There are plenty of traditional inspirational religious materials from various faiths along with Let's Celebrate, but these are not always applicable in a multifaith situation. Look to your library for outdoors poetry (Frost, Emerson) and general inspirational reading. Look also to the Leader where, along with spiritual and religious materials in Scouter's 5, most issues include further discussion and ideas. For example, Worship and Celebration (Jan. '88) offers ideas for a multifaith service. Articles over the past three years have considered such topics as Scouting's spiritual nature, information on and readings from many different religions, and ideas for Scouts' Own as well as formal worship services.

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