

Handbook for Chaplains and Chaplain Aides in Boy Scout Troops and Venturing Crews



Foreword

The Religious Relationships Task Force of the Boy Scouts of America has developed and endorsed this handbook to guide religious leaders, unit leaders, and other volunteers in selecting and supporting chaplains and chaplain aides. Its provisions also guide those adults and young men and women who serve in these key leadership roles.

To serve as a chaplain or chaplain aide is a unique opportunity for ministry. While serving in these offices, you will have the opportunity to help Scouts as they grow, both physically and spiritually. Some techniques to be used are modeling, mentoring, and offering faith-based experiences. Use this handbook to help you become better oriented to the duties, responsibilities, and opportunities of chaplaincy service in Boy Scout troops and Venturing crews. It includes useful information and resources to help you better perform your duties.

Boy Scouts of America—Declaration of Religious Principle

The Boy Scouts of America maintains that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God and, 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, in conjunction with the organization or group with which a member is connected, will give definite attention to religious life. Only persons willing to subscribe to this Declaration of Religious Principle and to the Bylaws of the Boy Scouts of America shall be entitled to certificates of membership.

Although nonsectarian, the Scouting program is an available resource for religious organizations, schools, and community and civic groups to use in their programs for young people. Scouting is an educational program based on “duty to God” and designed to enhance:

- A personal value system
- Leadership skills
- Citizenship responsibilities
- Career awareness
- Personal fitness

Unit Chaplain

The Scout troop or Venturing crew chaplain is an adult who may be the executive officer of a religious chartered organization; a member of the clergy or other called, ordained, or certified professional religious leader; or a layperson appointed by his or her religious leader or chartered organization. If the unit is operated by a religious organization, it is customary for the religious leader to serve as the chaplain. The religious leader may ask a member of the staff who is qualified to serve in that position. The chartered organization for a unit not operated by a religious organization is encouraged to select a unit chaplain from among religious leaders in the community.



As the unit chaplain, you have an opportunity to be a friend to the Scouts and leaders and thereby contribute to their spiritual welfare and growth. By virtue of your position and personality, you can encourage the young people in their Scouting roles and other aspects of their lives. The chaplain should:

1. Assure members and leaders of your interest in them and their activities.

2. Provide a spiritual tone for all unit meetings and camping experiences.
3. Provide spiritual counseling service when needed or requested.
4. Provide opportunities for all young people in the unit to grow in their relationship with God and their fellow Scouts or Venturers.
5. Encourage Scouts and Venturers to participate in the religious emblems program of their respective faith.
6. Be familiar with the "Chaplain Aide" section of this handbook.
7. Work with the unit's chaplain aide to plan and conduct an annual Scout-oriented religious observance, preferably during Scout Week in February.

Support and Observe Unit Leadership. Remember, volunteer Scouters who share their time and effort are what makes Scouting work.

- Support them. Recognize them for a job well done. Commend them personally for their ministry. Thank their family members, too, for their sacrifice makes Scouting possible.
- Observe them. Unit Scouters are charged with fulfilling the purpose of both the chartered organization and Scouting. The leadership should demonstrate awareness of and understanding of both facets. It should be evident that Scouting activities are fulfilling spiritual needs, in addition to developing Scouting skills.
- Coordinate with the chartered organization representative (COR). This person is the representative of the chartered organization to the unit, local Scouting district, and local council of the Boy Scouts of America. The chaplain should work closely with the COR in the interest of the chartered organization and its ministry, as well as for children, youth, and families.

Ministry Opportunities. After housing and schooling needs are met, one of the first contacts a new family often has in the community is with a Scouting unit. As new unit members are registered, you will learn of their religious preferences or interests and can extend an invitation to join your congregation in worship, or you may direct them to other opportunities for worship in the community. At no time should the chaplain proselytize.

Sensitivity to Needs. Interacting with Scouters and youth members offers you an opportunity to relate to them at a level where you will become sensitive to needs not yet expressed. Be alert for personal, family, or social situations that may require special care.

Accidents, Illnesses, and Other Concerns. It is appropriate for you, as chaplain, to request that unit leaders report to them any accidents, illnesses, or other concerns encountered by unit members. You should become aware of situations where a pastoral call would be appropriate and beneficial. Leaders who are in regular contact with their members often are the first to know of situations that may need pastoral attention.

If a member misses several meetings, it may be an indication that something is wrong. Ask that the names of absentees be shared with you. As chaplain, you have the opportunity to visit and discover the source of the problem. If the problem is with some aspect of the Scouting program or leadership, you should discuss this problem with the chartered organization representative, unit committee chairman, or other appropriate individual.

Religious Emblems Study Programs. The chaplain is in an ideal position to promote the religious emblems program and encourage Scouts to complete the requirements for the emblem of their faith. Many units include members of various faiths; therefore, it is helpful to have some knowledge of all emblems. Since procedures vary among different faiths, obtain a copy of the *Duty to God* brochure, No. 512-879, which lists all religious emblems programs and how to acquire study materials. In addition, call the local council service center or the council religious relationships committee for help in identifying ways to promote the religious emblems program and emblem recipient recognition ceremonies.

Note: Volunteers may obtain bin resources through their local council service centers. Limited quantities are free of charge.

Service Project Opportunities. Service projects for advancement are required of all Scouts. Helping others is a Scouting tradition. As chaplain, you have the advantage of being able to identify many possible service projects for individuals and families, for the chartered organization, for the community, and beyond the community. You will need to be on the lookout for service projects that are helpful and significant.

A particular emphasis in service projects is to focus on concerns and cares of the faith community, such as persons living in impacted areas (neighborhoods isolated by highways, interstates, commercial developments, etc.); aged, homebound, hungry, and illiterate people; ethnic minority groups needing help; and persons with handicapping conditions.

Badge of Office. The chaplain patch, No. 440, may be ordered from the BSA National Distribution Center at 800-323-0732 or www.scoutstuff.org, or from any Scout shop, local council service center, or official Scouting distributor.

Chaplain Aide

The chaplain aide is an approved youth leadership position in Boy Scout troops and Venturing crews. The purposes for this leadership position are to:

- Make the 12th point of the Scout Law more meaningful in life.
- Promote a greater understanding of and appreciation for all religions.
- Provide Boy Scouts and Venturers with the opportunity to work with an ordained member of the clergy, thereby gaining insight into the religious professional life.



Qualifications. The responsibilities of the chaplain aide include encouraging the spiritual awareness and growth of each member of the unit and assisting the unit chaplain and other adults and unit leaders. Consequently, the candidate for chaplain aide must:

1. Be mature and sensitive and have earned the respect and trust of his or her fellow Scouts.
2. For a troop chaplain aide, be at least a First Class Scout; for Venturing, be an established member of a Venturing crew.
3. Have received—or be working toward completing the requirements leading to—the age-appropriate religious emblem for his or her faith.

Duties. The chaplain aide should:

1. Encourage unit members to strengthen their own relationships with God through personal prayer and devotion and participation in religious activities appropriate to their faith.
2. Participate in planning sessions with the troop's patrol leaders' council or crew's officers to ensure that spiritual emphasis is included in unit activities, e.g., vespers, prayer before meals, religious observances.
3. With the unit chaplain, plan appropriate religious services for all members during weekend campouts. Units may conduct their own religious services, invite the unit chaplain or an exemplary layperson to participate in the service, or visit a nearby church, synagogue, temple, mosque, or other religious institution. Invite the unit chaplain to visit a campout, eat with unit members, and conduct a worship service.
4. Help the unit chaplain (or other designated adult) plan and conduct an annual Scout-oriented religious observance, preferably during Scout Week in February.
5. Present an overview of the various religious emblems programs to the unit at least annually, instructing members to contact their own religious leader to guide them in the appropriate study programs.
6. Present an overview of the religious emblems programs to Cub Scout dens or packs and other Scouting units on request.
7. Maintain the unit's religious emblems award progress chart.
8. Assist the unit chaplain, or other appropriate adult, to plan and conduct a religious emblem recognition ceremony. Presentation of a religious emblem is the responsibility of the local religious institution in which it is earned, though it is appropriate for the unit to recognize members who have received religious emblems at courts of honor or other appropriate occasions.

Badge of Office. The chaplain aide patch, No. 443, may be ordered from the BSA National Distribution Center at 800-323-0732 or www.scoutstuff.org, or from any Scout shop, local council service center, or official Scouting distributor.

Unit Worship Opportunities

As a chaplain or chaplain aide, your principal duty is to plan for and/or conduct meaningful worship opportunities.

Group Prayers. When present, members of the clergy, other religious leaders, or the chaplain aide may be asked to lead the unit, or other Scouting units, in prayer at courts of honor and other gatherings. If the group consists of members with mixed beliefs, or if the beliefs of the group are unknown, then prayers should be of an interfaith content. However, if the group is of like belief or the unit is chartered to a religious organization, then it is entirely appropriate to offer belief-specific prayer. Invocations, benedictions, and devotions with interfaith content are available in the pamphlet *A Scout Is Reverent: A Resource for Interfaith, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Worship at Scouting Events*, No. 34248.

At Weekend Activities. Because Scouting units often camp on weekends, youth members and leaders may not be able to attend their regular worship services. Every unit going away for an overnight or weekend needs to plan to conduct or attend a worship service (either for the individual or for the unit) in keeping with the 12th point of the Scout Law. The chaplain should be invited to conduct the services or work out a program with the chaplain aide and other adult leaders. The chaplain may recommend scripture readings or devotional readings to be used at the close of the evening or as a morning meditation. The chaplain aide and unit chaplain (or other designated adult) should conduct these services with other youth members and adult participation.

Interfaith Considerations. Coming together to worship God with fellow Scouts and Scouters is an excellent opportunity to model the 12th point of the Scout Law—A Scout is reverent—and that part of the Scout Oath that addresses duty to God (also found in the Cub Scout and Venturing oaths). It is a Scouter's responsibility to help each youth member grow in his or her chosen religious teachings, not to suggest or dictate what faith group or beliefs to follow. Scouters should encourage youth members to develop in their own faith while guiding and encouraging them to do their duty to God in accordance with their religious dictates.

At many Scouting weekend activities (such as unit campouts, Order of the Arrow fellowships, or district camporees), the resources available and the numbers in attendance do not justify planning and offering services for various faith groups. It would seem ideal in these circumstances to plan and conduct a single interfaith religious service—and a single service would certainly ease the burden on planners and on facilities.

The name of the service should be clear—*interfaith service*, *all-faiths service*, or *Scout's Own service* (but interfaith is the preferred term). Be sure everyone understands that the service is nonsectarian and, thus, all are invited. The terms *nondenominational* and *interdenominational* are not the same as interfaith; rather, they are terms that typically denote forms of Christian worship.

Preparing an interfaith service requires a significant understanding of the youth members and Scouters who will be in attendance (or who are expected to be in attendance), along with a significant understanding of their varied faith traditions. Use of the term "interfaith service" means that everyone is welcome, and everyone should feel comfortable with what is spoken, sung, read, or otherwise imparted during the service.

Truth in advertising is extremely important. If a service is advertised as interfaith, then its content must be so. The worship experience must be consistent with Scouting's Declaration of Religious Principle, and the Scout planners must be sensitive—and deliver what they advertise!

Here are some basic guidelines for conducting weekend interfaith religious services:

- The word God generally is accepted by most faith groups and is the term used in all phases of Scouting. Note that this term represents the creator or divine spirit, as it is used in the Scout Oath and the Venturing Oath. It is not intended to be a limiting term—there are many names that individual religions use to represent God. If there is a reasonable likelihood that persons of the Jewish faith will be present and you are using printed materials, it would be considerate to use the term G-d instead, as many Jews do not write the name of God.
- Other than God, specific names should be avoided (such as Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, or Holy Spirit) since they are religion-specific. Likewise, male pronouns (such as Father God, Heavenly Father, or His) should be avoided if possible as they may be disrespectful in some religions.
- Remember that, while an interfaith service may be very spiritually uplifting, it might not fulfill the individual religious obligations of Scouters and youth members belonging to certain faith groups. It simply may not be possible to satisfy everyone's needs with a single service. Be sure people know that in advance so that they may plan accordingly.

- Choose a theme for the service that fits with the specific weekend or time of year. This helps focus the prayers, songs, and message in a meaningful way and ties the religious service into the weekend event rather than having it stand alone and appear to be a separate activity. Possible themes include God’s Creation, Thanksgiving, The Great Outdoors/Forest/Ocean, Doing One’s Best, or On the Trail of the Eagle.
- Songs (a term more appropriate than “hymns”) should be generic in nature, addressing God alone (not Jesus, Buddha, etc.). This may be a challenge as the list of usable and familiar worship songs is fairly short.
- Choose quotations and readings wisely—be sure they fit the theme or message of the service. If the verbiage is altered from the original, be sure to use the word adapted after the author’s name. (For instance, taking a quotation and turning it into a responsive reading is an adaptation of the original phrase.)
- An interfaith service should incorporate common elements in such a way that the entire service flows together to support the spiritual needs of those in attendance.
- The length of time required for an appropriate religious service is variable. It depends on the time of day, the age of the participants, and other factors. Don’t, however, short-change this experience by wedging it into a 15-minute spot—for instance, between a major activity and dinner. Make the religious service an intentional, important part of each Scouting weekend.
- When a “message” is delivered (and it is best to avoid use of the words sermon or homily, as those are religion-specific terms), be sure that the person presenting the message understands that this is an interfaith experience. Choose a topic that relates to all in attendance. Avoid injecting one’s personal religious beliefs into the message—for instance, a biblical theme. Remember to be sensitive to those in attendance.
- Pick a location for the interfaith service that fits with the theme of the service, one that is comfortable for the participants and will enhance the religious experience. Seek to avoid religious symbols (although this may be hard to do if you are using a chapel with affixed symbols), or be sure that all appropriate symbols are represented.
- Consider obtaining and using copies of *A Scout Is Reverent: A Resource for Interfaith, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Worship at Scouting Events*, which is available at www.scoutstuff.org. Other religious materials related to Scouting and the religious emblems programs also are available at this website.
- Make notes about what worked well and share them with others who may be asked to plan future interfaith services.

Funeral or Memorial Services for Scouts or Scouters. On occasion, a Scouting unit may experience the loss of a Scout or leader. It is a difficult time for everyone. At the request of the family or with the permission of the family and religious leader, Scouts may participate in the funeral and memorial service to celebrate the life of the Scout or leader. Some things that may be appropriate include:

- Attending in uniform
- Sitting together as a unit
- Serving as honorary pallbearers or ushers
- Serving during the service by doing such things as reciting the Scout Oath or Scout Law

The primary concern is for the family and its preferences. The involvement of the unit or members in the unit is at the discretion of the family and its religious leaders.

This handbook replaces the following BSA publications:

- “The Roles of the Troop Chaplain and the Chaplain Aide”
- Manual for Chaplain Aides and Chaplains, No. 05-216



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