

SCOUTS-L

**RELIGION &
SCOUTING**

From mfbowman@CapAccess.org Sun Dec 8 12:28:24 1996
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From: "Michael F. Bowman" <mfbowman@CapAccess.org>
To: "Mark R. Vereb" <Mark_Vereb@OCCSHOST.NLM.NIH.GOV>
cc: Multiple recipients of list SCOUTS-L <SCOUTS-L@TCUBVM.IS.TCU.EDU>
Subject: Re: Religious References

Mark,

As an Episcopalian it would be easy for me to read a prayer from the Book of Common Prayer at a meeting and ask that the audience respect my reverence in my own tradition, and that wouldn't necessarily be wrong. There is a lot to be said for sharing and learning to respect the beliefs of others - it goes a long way towards fostering toleration through understanding.

However, my concern has to be not so much with the parents, but with the Scouts who are present, especially with Cubs. Will they understand that their differing beliefs are also tolerated or will they think that they have to believe the same way as the leader in order to participate? If one of the boys presents a prayer and explains it, the chances are good the other boys will understand a little. But remember these are young fellows and their concepts about religion are just in the formation process. Ask them what "Duty to God" means and they may tell you going to church, saying prayers, etc. If you asked an adult you'd get much more complex answers. The point is that they are learning and may not understand as much as the leader or other adults would understand.

If the leader asks everyone to join him in his particular brand of prayer there is a risk that some of the boys may feel that they are in the wrong place and not welcome because of their different religious upbringing. I would encourage you at the Cub level to keep to invocations and prayers that avoid references to any particular faith or to any name associated with a particular religion. You may also want to consider that in some faiths it is considered irreverent to say the name of "G*d" in public or to write it in a prayer.

When in doubt you can always take the following approach:

Leader: As Scouts we have promised to do our duty to God and country. For each of us that means many different things according to our own religions. As we gather together here as Scouts let us take a

moment in silence to reflect prayerfully on our blessings each in our own way.

Silent Reflection:

Leader: We ask that You, the Great Cubmaster of all Cub Scouts be with us until we meet again.

Leader: Would all Cub Scouts come forward and form a ring holding hands together as we sing the Cub Scout vesper.

There are many variations and possibilities for encouraging recognition of a Scout's duty toward his own beliefs and faith without risking making a Cub feel that he is out of place. I would encourage you in this direction.

Here is a prayer that I've used at meetings that has been thus far well received by all:

2. A SCOUT'S PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father,

Help to keep my honor bright
And teach me that integrity of character
Is my most priceless possession.

Grant that I may do my best today,
And strive to do even better tomorrow.

Teach me that duty is a friend and not an enemy,
And help me face even the most disagreeable task cheerfully.

Give me the faith to understand my purpose and life,
Open my mind to the truth and fill my heart with love.

I am thankful for all the blessings you have bestowed upon my country.
Help me to do my duty to my country and
To know that a good nation must be made from good men.

Help me to remember my obligation to obey the Scout Law,
And give me understanding, so that it is more than mere words.

May I never tire of the joy of helping other people or
Look the Other way when someone is in need.

You have given me the gift of a body,
Make me wise enough to keep it health,
That I might serve better.

You are the source of all wisdom,
Help me to have an alert mind,
Teach me to think,
And help me to learn discipline.

In all that I do and in every challenge I face,
Help me to know the difference between right and wrong,
And lead me in obedience on a straight path to a worthy goal.

By Michael F. Bowman
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Speaking only for myself in the Scouting Spirit, Michael F. Bowman
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