

Duty to God

I believe that God put us in this jolly world to be happy and enjoy life.

Robert Baden-Powell

Scouting is nothing less than applied Christianity.

(Scouting is nothing less than your religion applied.)

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No man is much good unless he believes in God and obeys His laws.

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BSA Reference Materials

- Cub Scout handbooks
- Boy Scout 2016 rank requirements
- BSA Declaration of Religious Principles
- Duty to God religious emblems brochure
- November 2014 CubCast on Scouting.org

Online Resources

- www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/2016BoyScout_requirementsFAQs.pdf
- P.R.A.Y Religious Emblem Resources for most faiths, <https://www.praypub.org/religious-emblems>
- Bible reading program, www.praypub.org/biblebasics/
- National Catholic Committee on Scouting religious activity awards, <http://www.nccs-bsa.org/index.php/religious-emblems>
- National Jewish Committee on Scouting religious activity awards, www.jewishscouting.org/store/

Points to ponder:

- The BSA National Charter and Bylaws contain the BSA Declaration of Religious Principles. Key provisions include:
 - “The Boy Scouts of America maintains that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God.”
 - “The activities of the members of the Boy Scouts of America shall be carried on under conditions which show respect to the convictions of others in matters of custom and religion, as required by the 12th point of the Scout Law, reading, ‘Reverent. A Scout is reverent toward God. He is faithful in his religious duties. He respects the beliefs of others.’”
 - “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.”
 - “In no case where a unit is connected with a church or other distinctively religious organization shall members of other denominations or faith be required, because of their membership in the unit, to take part in or observe a religious ceremony distinctly unique to that organization or church.”
- All Scouts now say the Scout Oath and Law, which include “duty to God” and “a Scout is Reverent.” The new Cub Scout requirements contain a duty to God element at every rank. Each Cub Scout handbook includes a series of age-appropriate nonsectarian activities that help boys learn and demonstrate their duty to God.
 - Each Cub Scout handbook also includes a discussion about the importance of religion in the boy’s life, together with examples of ways the boy can complete his duty to God requirement.
 - Bear and Webelos ranks include an option for the Cub Scout to complete his duty to God requirement by earning the religious emblem for his age and faith.
 - Since not all faiths have a religious emblem, and since not all congregations offer them, both the Bear and Webelos ranks have an alternate way to complete the duty to God requirement.

- If a Scout’s faith uses the same religious emblem for fourth and fifth grades, and if the Scout earns it as a Bear, he will need to complete the alternate requirement as a Webelos Scout.
- The duty to God element is now part of the requirement to show Scout spirit:
 - “Demonstrate Scout spirit by living the Scout Oath and Scout Law. Tell how you have done your duty to God. ...”
- Does including “duty to God” as a part of the Cub Scout and Boy Scout rank requirements put too much emphasis on religion? Does it create a requirement of belonging to a religion?
 - Not as written. There is no requirement that a Scout identify a religious faith as part of his duty to God—although, if the Scout does have a religious faith, it is likely to be part of the self-reflection and expression. It is important to note that Scouting is nonsectarian and promotes no specific religion. In fact, a boy need not belong to any official religious institution—he could practice his beliefs privately at home.
 - However, while membership in an organized religion is not necessary or implied, a Scout does have to ascribe to the Declaration of Religious Principles, and express belief in a higher power. The parent or guardian’s signature on the BSA Youth Application acknowledges this condition of membership.
- Unlike the Cub Scout rank requirements, the Boy Scout rank requirements do not elaborate on how a Scout is to do his duty to God. Does these mean troop leaders need to examine and evaluate a Scout’s Duty to God, and then determine whether it is sufficient by some standard?
 - No. The verb in the requirement: is “*Tell* how you have done your duty to God.” Not demonstrate, discuss, show, prove, etc.
 - The troop leader is merely to listen to the Scout *tell* about how he (the Scout) believes he has done *his* duty—that is the requirement. The idea is for the Scout to have a self-reflection about belief and reverence. Nothing more is required.
 - The requirement does not indicate that a discussion or a two-way conversation should take place. This is a monologue by the Scout, not a dialogue between a Scout and his leader.
 - The telling might be a very brief statement, depending on the Scout and the family’s beliefs, and on where the Scout is in his development of understanding of such matters, which often evolves as the Scout matures.
- A unit leader’s beliefs about God may be different from those of the Scout. With the requirement “tell how you have done your duty to God,” a troop leader might believe that the Scout should do more or do something differently to show duty to God. Can a boy be withheld from advancing for that reason?
 - No. The troop leader does not evaluate whether a Scout’s expression of how he shows duty to God is sufficient by any standard. In signing off the requirement, the leader simply acknowledges that the Scout *has told* how he has done *his* duty to God. The leader should make no judgment and the Scout should not be held to any specific standard of belief or level of activity in order to complete the requirement.
 - There will often be differences of belief among troop members and troop leadership—but the troop leader’s beliefs do not establish a standard for the Scout. The policy of the Boy Scouts of America is that “the home and the organization or group with which the member is connected shall give definite attention to religious life.” The troop leader is to respect those differences, with no attempt to impose his or her personal beliefs on the Scout.
- For more information on the Boy Scout duty to God requirements, see the FAQs at www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/2016BoyScoutrequirementsFAQs.pdf
- Although the Boy Scout requirements do not include specific activities for demonstrating a Scout’s duty to God, unit leaders should make their Scouts aware of the following *optional* religious activities and awards that can help deepen a Scout’s faith:
- Earning the religious emblem for his age and faith.
 - If the religious emblem takes several months to complete, a Scout might use the continued pursuit of his religious emblem to tell how he has done his duty to God for more than one rank (if he completes one

rank while pursuing his religious emblem and completes the religious emblem while working on his next rank).

- If a younger Boy Scout is unable to earn a religious emblem, the duty to God discussions and examples in the Bear and Webelos handbooks might serve either as reminders of the things he is already doing in his faith lie, or might serve as guideposts for his duty to God.
- Serving as the troop's chaplain's aide.
- Participating in Scout Sunday or Scout Shabbat services.
 - The Scout shops sell annual nonsectarian Scout Sunday patches for Scouts who attend services related to Scout Sunday. The National Jewish Committee on Scouting sells a similar patch for Scouts who participate in Scout Shabbat services.
- Other religious activities and awards
 - P.R.A.Y. recently introduced the Bible Basics RP3 program to encourage more Christian Scouts to read their Bible and put what they learn into action. The Bible Basics program currently consists of four subjects, each with three Bible stories to read, discuss with parents, and put into action. A fifth subject is coming soon. A patch is available upon completion of the requirements for each subject.
 - The National Catholic Committee on Scouting has three series of religious activities (with two more coming) and two international activities. The activities offer youth and adults fun, easy ways to learn more about their faith and Catholic role models, and become more aware of the faith community around the world. Several patches are available.
 - The National Jewish Committee on Scouting has announced a Passover Patch, which will be available for sale through the next 10 years. Also, each year starting with 5775/2015, the NJSC will issue a "rocker" depicting one of the 10 plagues. The design of the rockers is such that they will form a mural that encircles the central 10-sided patch.
 - Duty to God hike/ride.
 - Some councils or districts organize a duty to God or Ten Commandments hike or ride that involves visits to several places of worship and an overview by a religious leader of key tenets of the faith practiced at each place of worship.
 - Including different faiths in the program enhances the educational value of the event.
 - An event that includes Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, and other places of worship would be ideal, if feasible in light of the local demographics.



Which religious emblem square knot should I wear?

Cloth, silver knot on purple, No. 5007, may be worn by youth or adult members who earned the knot as a youth, above left pocket. Cloth, purple on silver, No. 5014, may be worn by adult members presented with the recognition, above left pocket. Adults may wear both knots if they satisfy qualifying criteria. (See the Guide to Awards and Insignia, No. 33066.) Only one youth and one adult knot is worn, but any combination of devices representing the program in which a religious emblem was earned may be worn on the same knot. (See Cub Scout device, No. 926; Webelos Scout device, No. 932; Boy Scout device, No. 927; and Venturer device, No. 930.)

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the religious emblems programs?

The religious emblems programs are programs created by the various religious groups to encourage youth to grow stronger in their faith. The religious groups—not the Boy Scouts of America—have created the religious emblems programs themselves. The Boy Scouts of America has approved of these programs and allows the recognition to be worn on the official uniform, but each religious organization develops and administers its own program.

How do we get started on these programs?

First, youth members must obtain the specific booklet for their religion. This booklet will contain information on all the lessons and service projects that they will need to complete. Each member needs to have his or her own booklet to document progress. Some religions also provide adult manuals for counselors and mentors. Check with your local council to see if it stocks these booklets in its store, or contact the religious organization directly (addresses and phone numbers are listed in this brochure).

Second, parents must review the specific guidelines for their particular program; age/grade requirements vary from program to program. Some programs require that the youth be an official “member” of the local religious institution, others may not. Each program determines who may serve as counselor (some require clergy, others allow parents or other family members). Be sure to look at specific eligibility guidelines!

Third, families should talk to their religious leaders and show them the booklet before beginning any program. Most of the religious emblems programs require that they be completed under the auspices of that religious organization, and many require the signature of the local religious leader. Again, check the specific eligibility requirements for your religious program.

Fourth, the member needs to complete the requirements, obtain the proper signatures, and follow the instructions to order the emblem/award. (These emblems are not available in your local council.) The emblem can be presented at any time of the year and should be presented in a meaningful ceremony, preferably in the member’s religious institution.

Who may serve as counselor?

It depends on the program. Some programs require clergy to serve as counselor, others allow a parent or family member. Please check the specific guidelines for your religious program.

I have a unit with children of all different faiths. How can I include the religious emblems programs for my unit?

The religious emblems programs should be presented to youth members and their families as an optional program for them to complete through their religious organization. Religious instruction should always come from the religious organization, not from the unit leader. Parents need to be informed of these programs and told where to get the information for their particular faith. Interested in making a presentation on the religious awards? Find sample scripts at www.praypub.org.

Do boys and girls participate in the same program?

It depends on the religion. Some religions have created programs that are used by both boys and girls. Other religions have created programs for members of separate youth agencies (i.e., Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., and Camp Fire Boys and Girls). Please check the specific eligibility requirements for each religious emblems program.

Do the youth have to belong to a religious institution?

It depends on the religion. Please check the eligibility requirements for your particular religious program.

Why doesn’t my religious institution know about the religious emblems programs?

Although the religious bodies at the national level created the religious emblems programs, the local religious institution may not be aware of these programs. It may be helpful to write for more information or even obtain a copy of the curriculum to give to your religious leader.

If the religious emblems program for my faith has more than one level (for the different grade levels), may my child earn all of these recognitions?

Yes. Members can earn all levels of their religious emblems program. However, they must be in the appropriate program guidelines when they start and complete each level (they may not go backward and earn younger programs).

How is the emblem presented?

The emblem should be presented in a meaningful ceremony, preferably in the youth member’s religious institution. Some emblems come with a sample presentation ceremony.

How long does it take to complete a program?

It depends on the program. Some programs may take three or four months, others longer.