

Circle Ten WB 110 – Interfaith Instructional

Written for and first presented at Circle Ten Wood Badge 110 (S2-571-14-3) by [Jason Buffington](#) – August 2014

Each Wood Badge course has two Interfaith services:

1. The first delivered by staff, in order to not only provide opportunities for Reverence but also to instruct the participants in how to deliver an Interfaith service.
2. The second is delivered by the participants, with coaching provided by the Course Chaplain.

This document includes the Instructional Elements prior to the staff-delivered service for Circle Ten’s Wood Badge 110 course, at Philmont in August 2014. The service “message” is also available at www.ScoutingForGod.org.

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Introduction to Reverence in Scouting

Good Morning !

My name is Jason Buffington and exactly four years ago, at WB 94, I was sitting where you are now.

Before we begin our Interfaith Worship Service, I'd like you to please open your program handouts and look on that first text on the left side of the first page – and follow along and I read these two letters from a Scoutmaster.

Letters from Scoutmaster

Imagine writing this letter:

Dear Mr. Jones.

I am sorry about your son Johnny's horrible allergic reactions to the peanut butter sandwiches that we serve on all of our campouts. I didn't ask the boys about their food allergies because I didn't want to offend or embarrass anyone.

Your Scoutmaster

How about writing this one:

Dear Scouts and families,

This is to inform you that effective immediately, we will no longer be serving any food on campouts.

While we have always enjoyed preparing and serving food with your sons each weekend, we recently discovered that one of the boys is a vegetarian. Since we are used to serving meat with most meals, we have decided it is easier to simply not serve any food over the campout weekend. Those boys who are interested in eating should bring their own food and eat privately within their own tents.

Your Scoutmaster

Of course the letters are made up, and the examples are extreme, but let's talk about them for just a minute.

- Most of us would never have to write the letter above, because we understand how important food allergies are. So, we are mindful of them before we serve food -- and we handle each boy's food requirements and preferences with sensitivity on an individual boy's basis.
- Most of us would not write this letter either, because we know that we cannot deny the boys food over a weekend. Instead, we might visit with the vegetarian Scout's parents to clearly understand their wishes, and then accommodate that boy. When we have boys who cannot eat pork or beef, we might prepare a vegetarian meal to cover all of those boys, and then later add chicken/turkey (or beef/pork) for the remainder of the boys, depending on the meal. But again, we would ask in advance and then accommodate each boy's needs by organizing the meal in such a way that everyone gets what they need.

The Jewish and Christian faiths summarize it in Deuteronomy 6:3, “Man does not live by bread alone”.

Baden Powell on Reverence

Baden Powell in his book, *Scouting for Boys*, said “**A boy cannot become the man he is intended to be, without growing in his faith**”.

BP said that youth needed to grow in their faith. “Their faith” – not yours. That is why “Interfaith Scouting” is so important. It’s about *creating a climate where the youth can grow in their own faith*.

There are Scouting Units out there that are thought of as “closed” units, where their charter org or committee has designed the unit to be deliver a single-faith religious experience. Kids of other faiths are welcome to join, but they do so with the conscious choice that their personal beliefs may not be consistent with the religious elements of that Scouting program.

For the rest of us, part of our charter is to provide our Scouts with an intentional opportunity or mandate to grow in their faith, as they go through their Scouting Adventure.

BSA on Reverence

When I say it is part of our Charter to do that -- that is not a figure of speech.

The Boy Scouts of America national charter says:

Article IX, Clause 1 of the Charter of the Boy Scouts of America states:

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

Starting in Cub Scouts, we learn to promise:

I promise, to do my best ... to do my duty to God ! As leaders, it isn't our job to convince them who God is, but to help them to do THEIR duty to THEIR understanding of God.

If you want more clarification how to interpret those promises, the Scouting.Org website has an explanation of “Reverence”, which states:

In the first part of the Scout Oath or Promise the member declares, “On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law.”

The recognition of God as the ruling and leading power in the universe and the grateful acknowledgment of His favors and blessings are necessary to the best type of citizenship and are wholesome precepts in the education of the growing members. No matter what the religious faith of the members may be, this fundamental need of good citizenship should be kept before them.

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. Its policy is that the home and the organization or group with which the member is connected shall give definite attention to religious life.

In fact, you can't join the BSA without agreeing to this. The application form for youth and adults has that same passage we just read and adds:

Only persons willing to subscribe to these precepts of the Declaration of Religious Principle and to the Bylaws of the Boy Scouts of America shall be entitled to certificates of membership.

Scouters, brothers and sisters, most of us are used to public schools where religion is taboo. And at the risk of soapboxing, then they shouldn't wonder why they have issues of Character in school children. We, as Scouters, are in the business of building character, and according to the founder of our movement and the charter of the BSA, that requires each boy to recognize and nurture a relationship with their Deity.

OK, so now you hopefully understand the "WHY" more ... let's talk about the "WHO" and "HOW":

Grubmasters for God

Let's go back to the food analogy to make this more real. In a Boy Scout Troop, every patrol has a Grubmaster.

- If a Grubmaster doesn't do their job, the patrol doesn't eat.
- If a Chaplain or Chaplain's Aid doesn't do their job, the Troop isn't spiritually nourished.

It would be nice if our hearts had that same grumbling that our stomachs do when they are empty, so that the Troop would feel that hunger – and look to the Chaplains with this expression of "dude?" what did you bring for us?

For a Scout Chaplain to be effective, like a Grubmaster, they need to understand allergies and preferences – meaning which faiths are represented and styles of worship that fits the Troop's culture and tradition.

A Grubmaster would never bring the same single/simple food item for all the meals, just because it is simple and is the only item (like quesidillas) that everyone agrees on. No, he should bring a variety of food, so that everyone gets a little of what they need – and no one, is left hungry.

Like a Grubmaster, they aren't expected to deliver the meal by themselves. Sure, they are responsible to bring the ingredients, but it takes a team to prep, cook, serve, and clean a meal ... and Chaplains Aide's should seek out others to help deliver the service.

How to Deliver an Interfaith Experience

What we call "Interfaith Worship", Baden Powell called "Scouts' Own". Here is BP's guidance:

To interest the boys, the Scouts' Own [a worship service] must be a cheery and varied function. Short hymns (three verses are as a rule quite enough - never more than four); understandable prayers; a good address from a man who really understands boys (a homely "talk" rather than address) which grips the boys, and in which they may laugh or applaud as the spirit moves them, so that they have a real interest in what is said.

Let's put that into practical terms that we can apply today:

- Choose a setting that promotes reverence – a grove of trees, a site with a view of a lake, pond, brook, etc. For small groups, sitting in a circle is effective.
- Everything in good taste. Those attending the service will be courteous, kind and reverent. They should respect the rights & feelings of others even if their beliefs and religious practices differ from their own.
- The service should be planned, timed and rehearsed. (generally 30 minutes, but less is better).
- Everyone in attendance should have opportunities to participate, if they wish, through responsive readings, silent & group prayer, singing, etc.

If you are taking notes, I want you to write this down:

An Interfaith Worship Service should be a shared experience that enables the individual members to each commune with their unique understanding of their Creator. [repeat]

There are two formats for Interfaith Worship that I have found to work well:

- (1) Deliver an "Ecumenical" service, which does NOT mean that it is sanitized of any specific religious references. Instead, use verses and wisdom from multiple doctrines – words, passages, and songs that allow each of us to have a personal dialog with our understanding of our Creator. Think of it like a buffet ... everybody gets what they really came for, while getting exposed albeit briefly to something else.

Remember, the role of Reverence in Scouting is NOT to evangelize or prefer any faith over any other, but almost every faith tradition on earth talks of a Creator ... or a Provider ... or a Healer. There are passages in every religion's manuscript on Trustworthiness, Loyalty, Helpfulness, etc.

There is another style that I like too:

- (2) To take a foundational part of Scouting and use those lessons to help each of us to see our Creator in a new way. Remember when we talk about effective communication requiring common ground? There is lots of common ground in our shared Scouting experiences that can be used to help each Scout commune with their understanding of our Creator.

That is what we are going to do today:

This morning, we will be modeling for you an Interfaith Worship service – and hopefully providing you with an opportunity to commune with God in a way that is personally uplifting.

As with most things in Scouting and certainly this course, first you will have the chance to observe and then you will have the chance to apply it, in hopes of better equipping you to bring this back to your Scouts. So, later this week, the Chaplains' Aides will have the opportunity to deliver another worship service.

In that frame of mind, let us turn our minds and hearts from instructional – to a spirit of worship and reverence.