

A Vision of Scouting as a Youth Ministry

Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry • Archdiocese of Cincinnati

Scouting & the Catholic Parish: Partners in Youth Ministry

For decades, Scouting* has played an enormously positive role in American life and culture. Not only do countless adults cherish fond memories of campouts, badges, learning and great fun - more importantly, the values and attitudes reinforced in Scouting have provided them with a sturdy framework of positive life principles.

In the Catholic Church, Scouting has been a longstanding partner in the development of character, values and conscience in young people. The twelfth point of the Scout Law ("A Scout is Reverent") has traditionally been the point of connection with religion and parish life.

With the explosion of ministries in Catholic parishes over the past twenty years, it has become much less clear how Scouting fits into the parish picture. Pastors who had a positive experience of Scouting in their own youth often welcome and support such units. Others are not sure how, or if, Scouting fits into the modern parish. Neither are adult Scout leaders clear on this, so they often keep Scouting on the periphery of parish life, meeting and storing equipment on the parish premises, but having little contact otherwise. In many parishes, relationships with Scout units have deteriorated or ceased.

A hopeful turning point came with the insight that Scouting is perhaps best understood as one vehicle of a parish's youth ministry. Parish youth ministry typically involves a number of different programs (e.g. catechetical, service, social, spirituality, etc.). Furthermore, Boy Scout units are chartered not as separate organizations but as *programs of the chartered partner*, in this case, the parish.

Clearly, Scouting is one of the youth-serving programs of the parish - in short, a youth ministry!

Based on this insight, this vision paper was developed with the input of parish and Scout leaders (a) *to help parish and Scout leaders understand how Scouting might better serve the parish as one of its youth ministry programs*, and (b) *to help parishes and Scout leaders become better partners on behalf of youth*.

In order to serve as an authentic parish youth ministry, the Scouting program should intentionally reflect our faith. That does not mean that it should be "super religious" or overly pious, but that we need to find ways to naturally and organically integrate our faith into the Scouting program. Of course, Scouting is not intended to replace or compete with other parish youth programs; rather, its menu of fun, adventure, hands-on leadership and life-education provides one more unique way for young people to grow.

Just as the two ends of a bridge converge in the middle to support one another, so Scouting and Catholic youth ministry need to lend their strengths to one another, for the betterment of our young people.

* [It is important to note that this document focuses on Boy Scouting simply because Boy Scouts of America units can be chartered to parishes, whereas Girl Scout units are structured differently. However, we hope that the vision presented here, appropriately adapted, will assist Girl Scouting as well.]

The Goals of Catholic Scouting Ministry

In 1997, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) unanimously approved the landmark document *Renewing the Vision - A Framework for Catholic Youth*

Ministry, which provides the direction and content for Catholic youth ministry in the United States. The document describes the three key goals of youth ministry:

Goal #1. Empowerment and Discipleship: To empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today.

Goal #2. Full Participation in the Faith Community: To draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission and work of the faith community.

Goal #3. Personal and Spiritual Growth: To foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person.

Scouting is a tested program that a parish can use to work toward these goals:

Goal #1. Empowerment and Discipleship

In *Renewing the Vision*, the U.S. bishops say "Ministry with adolescents helps young people learn what it means to follow Jesus Christ and to live as disciples today, empowering them to serve others and to work toward a world built on the vision and values of the reign of God." (p.9) This means that it's not just something that adults do for young people; it is something that young people *learn to take responsibility for and do on their own*. Scouting is built on the same concept. As Scouts move through the program, they develop leadership abilities and take on more responsibility. The most effective Scouting units are those where young people take on responsible leadership roles.

Whereas Scouting strives to build leadership in young people, Scouting as a youth ministry strives to develop explicitly Christian leadership, or "servant leadership." This is the kind of leadership demonstrated by Jesus in the gospels, and modeled at the Last Supper when Jesus washed the feet of His disciples.

Scouting has a long and fine tradition of service. When we approach Scouting as a youth ministry, service takes on new meaning: it becomes an expression of our faith. Service is what Christians do because of who we are. As the Letter of James puts it: "Faith without good works is quite dead." (James 2:16). Scout leaders with a vision of youth ministry assist young people in understanding their works of service as expressions of their faith as disciples of Jesus Christ. In this way, Scouting and youth ministry become partners in the creation of a more just, peaceful and compassionate society.

Goal #2. Full Participation in the Faith Community

Adult Scout leaders with a vision of youth ministry assist young people in becoming followers of Jesus in the Catholic faith community. They accomplish this most dramatically through the example of their own lives. This suggests that our most effective Scout leaders are people who actively live their faith as followers of Jesus. They are people who are not ashamed or timid of their faith, but freely and wholeheartedly express it in word and deed.

Scout leaders with a vision of youth ministry make it a point to be full, active, participating members of the parish faith community - and they assist their units in doing the same. Boy Scout units chartered to parishes must build bridges of understanding, cooperation and collaboration with their chartered partners. The unit is understood to be a

part of a parish's youth ministry, and as such is accountable to the pastor or a designated staff member, e.g., Director of Youth Ministry, Director of Religious Education, Pastoral Associate, etc. The Chartered Organization Representative and the Pack and Troop Committees play especially important roles in building and maintaining a positive relationship with the parish.

A Scouting unit with a vision of youth ministry not only participates in Scout Sunday observances, but is a visible presence in the life of the parish throughout the year. For example, the unit supports regular participation in Sunday liturgy, parish prayer services, service projects and renewal efforts. Individual Scouts are encouraged to participate in parish youth ministry activities and religious education. In all of this, the adult Scouters need to take the lead, modeling full participation in parish life for the youth.

In turn, the parish understands Scouting as one of its ministries. The Scout program thus will enjoy the support and pastoral direction that other parish ministries receive from the pastor and/or parish staff.

Goal #3. Personal and Spiritual Growth

Nearly every meeting, event and activity in Scouting has personal growth as one of its explicit goals. Not only do Scouts develop new knowledge and skills, they also receive encouragement in positive and healthy values and attitudes.

Scout leaders equipped with a vision of youth ministry build upon this framework to impart knowledge and skills that will assist the young person in living out his faith. Likewise, leaders can use the Scout program to affirm and nurture explicitly Christian values and attitudes.

Religious emblems programs, retreats, prayer, liturgies, service projects, rank advancement, unit rituals and ceremonies, special speaker programs, camping and nature programs - these are just a few of the ways that adult leaders can build a spiritual dimension into Scouting. Most importantly, adult leaders model their own faith by "walking their talk," sharing their belief in word, behavior and service.

Of course, the Scouting program is only one place where the faith of young people is formed. Hopefully youth will receive a firm foundation in the home, and be further nurtured through parish youth ministry, parish schools of religion or Catholic schools. Scout leaders carry neither sole nor primary responsibility in this regard; rather, they are partners with parents, religious educators and youth ministers.

Glimpses of the Vision: Some Snapshots

What does Scouting look like when it understands itself to be part of a parish's ministry with young people? Here are a few "snapshots" of the anticipated outcomes of this vision:

- **A Youth Ministry Identity:** Adult Scout leaders understand themselves to be youth ministers as well as Scout leaders; they are trained in youth ministry as well as in Scouting. They bring to their Scouting the explicit intention of impacting the faith of young people.
- **Prayer:** Prayer is a strong, consistent part of the life of the Scout unit. Meetings begin and end with prayer. Creative, developmentally appropriate prayer activities are a normal part of the unit's affairs.
- **The Eucharist:** The Eucharist is a normal part of the life of the Scouting unit. This is especially true on Scout Sunday, but also true on campouts and other trips and excursions. Unit leaders make sure their kids make it to Sunday liturgy, even if it's not convenient.
- **Personal Faith and Spirituality:** Unit leaders are themselves growing in their own faith, and try their best to attend retreats, workshops, days of recollection, renewal programs and the like in order to further develop their own faith and ministry.

- **Faith Sharing:** Faith is shared and celebrated on a regular basis. Unit leaders are comfortable and prepared to share their faith. The Scouts know they are in a place of faith not only because of where they meet, but by the way the adult leaders talk and behave. The sacred scriptures are familiar and frequently used as inspiration and guide.

- **Religious Emblems:** The religious emblems programs are held in high regard by the unit leaders, and it is a priority to assist young people in achieving the emblems. Unit leaders not only encourage Catholic Scouts to achieve the Catholic emblems, but also encourage Scouts of other faiths to achieve their respective emblems.

- **Parish Participation:** The Boy Scout unit is clearly a part of the parish community, visibly present at parish events and activities, accountable to the pastor and/or parish staff. Unit leaders make efforts to build bridges of cooperation and collaboration with other parish ministries, and work hard to help their Scouts become fully contributing members of the faith community. Unit leaders establish a healthy, mutually supportive working relationship with the pastor and parish staff. They are active members of their faith community, effectively modeling the kind of faith and participation they are trying to develop in their Scouts.

Practical Steps to the Vision

How can we make this vision a reality in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati? The good news is that we've already begun! Whether or not they call it youth ministry, adult Scout leaders have long been sharing their faith regularly and effectively with young people. Through the religious emblems programs, Scouts of all ages are exploring their faith and traditions. Dedicated members of our Catholic Committees on Scouting meet regularly to plan and lead retreats, design training programs and spiritual enrichment activities. Through the witness of their words and actions, Catholic Scout leaders are making a difference in the lives of young people!

Much is already in place, yet much still remains to be done. Here are some important next steps:

1. **Get Busy Sharing the Vision:** We need to share this vision with parish and Scout Leaders so as to build stronger bridges of cooperation between Scouting and our parishes. Copies of this vision should be provided to both parish and Scout leaders, along with other helpful resource materials. Scout leaders are encouraged to open up a dialogue with parish leaders on the topic of Scouting as a youth ministry.

2. **Get Training:** Scouting leaders should receive youth ministry training in addition to that provided by the Boy Scouts of America. Training can cover a variety of topics that will assist adults in understanding their unique role as Scouting youth ministers, as well as practical ways to carry out that role. The Catholic Committees on Scouting should provide regular opportunities for this training at gatherings throughout the year.

3. **Get Organized:** On the parish and unit level, this means

building strong Pack and Troop Committees that share this vision. It means revitalizing the role of Chartered Organization Representatives who understand themselves to be liaisons between the Scouting program and the parish. It means setting up patterns of regular communication and accountability with the pastor and/or his staff.

On the archdiocesan level, getting organized means supporting the Archdiocese of Cincinnati Catholic Committee on Scouting and the local area Catholic Committees on Scouting. These important committees can't provide their services like retreats, awards ceremonies, adult training and religious emblems without the generous commitment of volunteer time and energy.

4. **Get To Work:** There are two different ways for Scouting leaders to put this vision into practice in their units: through (a) **INFUSION** and (b) **SPECIAL YOUTH MINISTRY PROGRAMMING**. As they proceed, leaders are encouraged to be sensitive to Scouts of other faiths and religions while remaining true to our Catholic Christian identity. Following are a number of practical approaches:

a. INFUSION of faith, prayer and spiritual themes into the regular Scouting program:

- including opening and closing prayers into regular gatherings;
- using moments of natural beauty, stress, conflict or celebration as "teachable" or "prayable" moments;
- sharing one's own story of faith with Scouts;
- "being there" for hurting young people, offering a listening and compassionate ear to their problems;
- helping young people make connections between Scouting and faith themes (e.g. "A Scout is thrifty" can easily relate to care for the environment and reverence for all God's creation; also connecting leadership development to Christian leadership development);
- looking for opportunities to affirm and encourage young people so as to strengthen their identity as children loved and chosen by God;
- using service experiences as opportunities to educate young people about Christian service;
- taking advantage of the marvelous opportunities offered by banquets, awards ceremonies, rank advancement, etc., to reflect on God-given gifts.

b. SPECIAL YOUTH MINISTRY PROGRAMMING of an explicitly religious or spiritual nature within the Scouting program:

- the religious emblems programs – outstanding opportunities for Scouts to explore their faith within the context of Scouting;
- camping retreats that explore Christian themes;
- leadership development programs that focus on Jesus as a model leader;
- Scout Sunday, special liturgies and prayer services;
- exploring the Scout Oath and Law from a uniquely Christian perspective – and calling young people to live up to these values and principles;
- special speaker programs on Christian values and themes, such as moral decision-making; also topics that assist young people in their developmental struggles – stress, drug awareness, family problems, etc.;
- service projects of an explicitly Christian nature (e.g. constructing an outdoor prayer space, assisting in leadership of parish prayer services or service projects);
- unit participation in parish-based renewal, educational and service projects;
- training programs for adults and youth to serve as unit chaplains and chaplain aides.

This final suggestion is probably the key to many of the others. If each unit has a trained chaplain who takes responsibility for both *infusion* and *special programming*, Scouting youth ministry in the unit will flourish.

Supporting the Vision

Parish and Scout leaders are not alone in pursuing this challenging vision. The Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati has a wealth of resources for adult leaders in support of their youth ministry. Under the auspices of the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati Catholic Committee on Scouting carries the primary responsibility for furthering the vision and making it a reality. It does this through:

- training programs, like Scouter Development and the Catholic Scouter Institute;
- the religious emblems programs, including training adults to administer these programs;
- scout retreats;
- parish advisors, organized to assist parish and unit leaders;
- summer camp chaplains;
- adult recognition awards, for outstanding service in Scouting youth ministry.

It is timely for all of us who work with young people to become better partners on their behalf. So many of the institutions we have relied upon to transmit faith and values have been seriously weakened. Families are fragmented. Youth are left to work out their beliefs on the streets, or in front of the TV. Youth violence - and violence perpetuated on youth - is a national tragedy. Worthy adult role models are few and far between; even rarer are those whom young people admire as truly holy people. The media portray a whole gamut of questionable values. Young people are awash in a sea of confusing messages.

That's why *NOW* is the time for us to join hands and close ranks in support of young people. With this statement of vision and equipped with these resources, church and Scouting leaders *can and must* become partners in youth ministry - for the sake of our young people and the future of our church.

Let's get to work.