



NATIONAL CATHOLIC COMMITTEE ON SCOUTING

Scouting As Youth Ministry



A Vision of Youth Ministry

In 1976, the United States Catholic Conference published its landmark document “*A Vision of Youth Ministry*”, which has served as the guiding force behind the development of youth ministry in the United States. The document described two key goals of youth ministry, and since 1976 a third has been added:

Goals of Youth Ministry

Goal #1. Personal & Spiritual Growth

Youth ministry works to foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person

Goal #2. Full Participation in the Faith Community

Youth ministry seeks to draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission and work of the faith community.

Goal #3. Empowerment & Discipleship

Youth ministry empowers young people to become disciples of Jesus Christ who witness to their faith by living and working for justice, peace and human dignity.

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 Scouting 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 in parish schools of religion, parochial school and through other youth ministry opportunities. Scout leaders carry neither sole nor primary responsibility in this regard; rather, they are partners with parents, religious educators and youth ministers, as the African proverb suggests, “It takes a whole village to raise a child”.

Continued on next page

Scouting As Youth Ministry

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. Scouting 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 parish Scouting Committee play an especially important role 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, 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 leaders 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 Scouting program thus will enjoy the support and pastoral direction that other parish ministries receive from the pastor and/or parish staff.

Empowerment and Discipleship

“A Vision of Youth Ministry” (USCCB, 1976) states that youth ministry is “to, with, by and for” young people. That means that it is 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 had 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.

Continued on next page

Scouting As Youth Ministry

The Scouting Vision

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 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 Scouting 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 it a point to make it to Sunday liturgy.

Personal Faith and Spirituality: Unit leaders are themselves growing in their own faith, availing themselves of retreats, workshops, Scouter Development, the Catholic Scouter Institute, etc. to further develop their own faith and ministry.

Faith-Sharing: Faith is shared and celebrated on a regular basis. Unit leaders are comfortable and well-prepared to share their faith. The Scouts know they are in a place of faith not only because of where they may meet, but by the way the adult leaders talk and behave.

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 Scouting unit is clearly 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.

Continued on next page

Scouting As Youth Ministry

Scouting and the Catholic Parish: Finding Common Ground

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 parish life.

With the explosion of ministries in Catholic parishes over the past twenty-five 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 Scouting 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, relations with Scouting 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. social, catechetical, service, spirituality, etc.). Furthermore, Scouting 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, the vision presented here was developed with the input of parish and Scouting 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 Scouting to become better partners on behalf of young people.

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 mutually support one another, so Scouting and Catholic youth ministry need to lend their strengths to one another - for the betterment of our young people.

References:

“*A Vision of Youth Ministry*”, USCCB 1976

“*Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic youth Ministry*”, USCCB, 1997