

CED 714



Religious Inclusivity in Scouting: The Commissioner's Role

Time allotted	50 minutes
Teaching format	Instructor-led discussions with PowerPoint support, Activity

Resources

Handouts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• CED 714 – Policy and Practice Resources – 1 per person
Equipment and materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• CED 714 – Religious Inclusivity in Scouting: The Commissioner's Role course plan• CED 714 – Religious Inclusivity in Scouting: The Commissioner's Role PowerPoint presentation• Computer and projector• Whiteboard or flipchart, appropriate markers, and eraser

Course Connections

Connections to other CCS courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• BCS 114 – Understanding and Communicating with Today's Leaders• DCS 512 – Recruiting for Diversity• CED 720 – A Commissioner's Introduction to Valuing Diversity
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Presentation Outline

Introduction and Course Objectives – 5 minutes

The purpose of this course is to discuss how to foster units that are inviting and welcoming to families of all religious identities, including those who do not identify with a particular religion. With an increase in the number of Americans who identify as non-religious, it is important that we continue to try to reach all youth, while still embracing reverence and the duty to God.

Introduce the learning objectives, noting that by the end of this session, each participant should...

- **Understand** the shifting religious affiliations and identities in America
- **Describe** the relationships between Scouting America, the values of Scouting, and religion
- **Explain** how units can use inclusive practices to support the values of Scouting in a religiously diverse America

Note: This presentation explores the topic of religious inclusivity. Some units chartered by faith-based organizations choose to limit membership to members of a single faith. The contents of

this presentation may not be applicable to units that have chosen to restrict membership to a particular religion.

Changes in Americans' Religious Affiliations – 10 minutes (slides 4-10)

To provide context, we begin with data on the shifting religious identities and affiliations in America.

First, we can see that the percentage of Americans who identify as having no religion has increased dramatically over time, having grown from about 5% in 1972 to about 28% today.

Next, here's a graph showing the proportion of Americans who report having been raised without a religious affiliation. The proportion has grown from about 2% in the early 1970s to over 10% today. For both the previous slide and this one, we're seeing a fivefold increase in non-religion.

Finally, we have some data on the gap between the 11% of Americans who were raised without religion and the 28% who currently identify as having no religion. As you can see, about 70% of those who identify as non-religious previously identified as religious, but have since left religion. Note that this does not necessarily mean that they have no beliefs or faiths; just that they do not currently identify with a particular religion.

Reasons for Leaving

Why are some people leaving religion? It's a complex question with no single answer.

Ask: *What reasons do you think people give for leaving?*

Cragun and Smith explore this issue in *Goodbye Religion: The Causes and Consequences of Secularization*. Their research shows that people leave for many different reasons. They also note a significant shift: the rise in people reporting no religious affiliation may reflect a reduction in social stigma. In other words, people today may feel less pressure to misrepresent their religious identity than in previous decades.

Push and Pull Factors

Cragun and Smith identify both "push" and "pull" factors influencing religious disaffiliation.

Push factors include disagreements with religious positions on social and behavioral issues such as inequality, abortion, and the acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals. Some participants cited increasing politicization of religion, while others no longer accepted core religious doctrines. Many also pointed to perceived hypocrisy among religious leaders—particularly violations of moral standards they promote, with sexual abuse scandals frequently mentioned. These factors led individuals to question the value and credibility of their religion.

Pull factors involved what people gained after leaving. Time once devoted to religious services was often redirected toward other pursuits, especially social activities. Cragun and Smith found that social engagement, rather than passive activities like television, gaming, or internet use,

was the strongest pull. Many participants also emphasized personal autonomy and the freedom to shape their own beliefs, sometimes drawing from multiple religions or philosophies.

What Does this Mean?

What does all this mean in terms of the impact?

The research suggests that there are few differences between religious Americans and non-religious Americans, other than their differing religious affiliations. Those without religion still tend to seek out communities to be part of; they still donate to charities in roughly the same amounts, follow moral codes, value family, and have approximately the same levels of civic engagement. These are areas where Scouting can make a valuable contribution. There is no reason to believe these families will be less likely to participate in Scouting as long as they, and their religious identity, are welcome.

Scouting America's Mission, Religion, and the Values of Scouting – 10 minutes (slides 11-14)

Next, we will examine Scouting America in more depth and explore its compatibility with various religious identities.

Let's begin by reviewing Scouting America's mission statement: "The mission of Scouting America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law."

Two aspects of that should be emphasized for our purposes today.

- The Scout Oath and Law have included the duty to God and reverence elements since 1911.
- When the mission statement refers to "young people," it does not qualify or limit that, so the presumption is that Scouting should be available to ALL young people who want it.

Religion and Scouting

Scouting has historically attracted youth from diverse faith backgrounds and includes charter organizations representing multiple religions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Muslim, and others.

Currently, about 42% of units are chartered by a faith-based organization. In comparison, in 2013, about 72% of units were chartered by a faith-based organization. This is a smaller proportion than historically seen, but still a substantial number of units.

Current Policy and Practices

Currently, Scouting America has a diversity statement that emphasizes valuing and respecting all persons. It specifically states that families of all backgrounds are welcome.

"Scouting America promotes a culture where each youth, volunteer, and employee feels a sense of belonging and builds communities where every person feels respected and valued. Leading by example and encouraging each other to live by the values expressed by the Scout

Oath and Scout Law, we welcome families of all backgrounds to help prepare young people to serve as successful members and leaders of our nation’s increasingly diverse communities.”

Current Policy and Practices

How do we reconcile duty to God and reverence with welcoming non-religious families? As outlined in the *Guide to Advancement*, Scouting America does not define belief in God and defers entirely to families on matters of faith. For advancement, how a Scout fulfills their duty to God is determined by the Scout and their family. The BALOO syllabus further affirms that duty to God may include showing respect for others and their beliefs.

Inclusive Practices for Supporting Duty to God and Reverence – 10 minutes, including 5-minute activity (slides 15-20)

What can units do to reinforce Scouting America’s position that families of all backgrounds are welcome? Clear principles guide how duty to God and reverence can be practiced in ways that respect diverse religious identities.

Cub Scouts

At the Cub Scout level, duty to God requirements are designed to be completed at home with family. Den Leaders and registered adults should ensure families understand the Family and Reverence adventure requirements and the expectation that they be completed in a timely manner for rank advancement. Typically, this is the extent of a leader’s role.

In limited circumstances—such as when a pack is chartered by a religious organization and all den members belong to that organization—the adventure may be completed together with parental permission and appropriate guidance. These situations are the exception and do not apply to most units.

Scouts BSA

At the troop level, rank requirements often ask Scouts to explain how they have fulfilled their duty to God. Leaders should facilitate these conversations without judgment or imposing personal religious expectations. Defining duty to God rests with the Scout and their family.

Outdoor Leadership Training

Scouting America encourages the use of mealtime graces and interfaith services during camping and applicable activities. These should be inclusive and comfortable for participants of all faiths. In practice, this means using prayers, blessings, or songs that are general in nature and not tied to a specific religion.

Guidance from the BALOO syllabus (relevant for packs, troops, crews, and ships):

- Shared benedictions and mealtime graces should be *interfaith in context* so people of all faiths are comfortable.
- Scouting America encourages Scouts to worship in their own manner.
- Interfaith services, when offered, should be nondenominational, objective, tolerant, and understanding.

- Participants should be reminded that duty to God may include respect for others and their beliefs.
- Attendance may be encouraged but is not mandatory.

Interfaith messages often focus on shared values such as peace, compassion, and community. Another option is incorporating prayers, blessings, or songs from multiple faith traditions. Services should not reflect a single religion unless a religious organization charters the unit and all members share that faith.

The Commissioner's Role in Supporting Religious Inclusiveness

Commissioners support inclusivity by:

Reinforcing both duty to God and reverence alongside the importance of inclusion

Connecting leaders and families to relevant policies, practices, and resources

Encouraging leaders to ground ethical decision-making in the Scout Oath and Law

As Scouters, we do not promote any specific religion. We support moral development that aligns with many belief systems. The Scout Oath and Law provide a strong ethical framework for all youth, regardless of spiritual background.

Reminder:

A Scout is Courteous. We welcome every family committed to the Scout Oath and Law. We prohibit bullying, harassment, and unlawful discrimination—online and in person—and we expect leaders to ensure a respectful environment for all youth.

Activity: Supporting Religious Inclusiveness in Units 5-minute Activity

Breakout Group Instructions. Read the Scenario on slide 20:

- **Discuss as a Group:**
 - Share your initial thoughts about the scenario.
 - Consider how a commissioner can best support the unit leader while respecting the beliefs and backgrounds of all families.
 - Explore inclusive ways to interpret and demonstrate *duty to God* and *reverence* that align with Scouting values, such as gratitude, reflection, service, or living by personal principles.
- **Develop a Commissioner Response:**
 - Identify key messages or examples you would share with the unit leader.
 - Ensure your advice reflects understanding, inclusivity, and the Scouting spirit.
 - Think about how you would communicate this guidance in a supportive and nonjudgmental manner.
- **Prepare to Share – after about 5 minutes:**
 - Choose one member of your group to summarize your discussion and present your response to the larger group.

In the unlikely event that participants have trouble thinking of examples, here are a few:

Reverence:

- Flag ceremonies
- Having moments of silence or periods of quiet reflection

- Saying grace or having a moment of reflection before meals
- Sharing inspirational thoughts and quotes
- Attending Veterans Day or other veteran-focused ceremonies

Duty to God:

- Collecting food for food drives
- Other collections for charitable purposes
- Conservation projects
- Wreaths Across America services
- Color A Smile coloring projects (for younger Cub Scouts)
- Other projects or actions that help people or improve communities
- Doing a good turn daily

It is also worth noting that some religious organizations participating in the Religious Emblems Program, such as the Unitarian Universalist Association, do not require participants to be members. These can serve as a way for youth to learn about multiple religions. Scouts and families should, however, be upfront about seeking to learn rather than join (if that is their intention). Some religious organizations restrict these programs to members of their faith and/or organization. Still, other organizations welcome any interested parties, even if they are purely intellectual rather than faith-based.

Summary – 2 minutes

- Religious affiliations and religious identities are shifting in America
 - More Americans identify as non-religious
- Scouting America, as well as the values of Scouting, are designed to be nondenominational and do not require religious membership
- Units can use inclusive practices to support the values of Scouting in a religiously diverse America

Questions/Comments? – 3 minutes