TRAINING TOPIC

## An Introduction to the Scouts Own

*With Pack Family Camping strongly encouraged and promoted, Packs should be holding a Scout’s Own Service every camping trip, whether it on a traditional day of worship or not. I am sure some are doing very well, some are not, and some are simply ignoring a Scout’s Duty to God and getting home earlier. Here is a brief presentation by Kyna Hendra, “Mrs. MacScouter,” clearing up what is and is not a Scout’s Own Service. Her book that you can see on* [*www.macscouter.com*](http://www.macscouter.com) *is over a 100 pages of excellent tip s and ideas for building your own Scout’s Own. CD*

***From the MacScouter’s “A Scout is Reverent” Book***[*http://www.macscouter.com/ScoutsOwn/index.html*](http://www.macscouter.com/ScoutsOwn/index.html)

The founder of Scouting, Robert Baden-Powell, believed that Reverence and Duty to God should be an important part of the Scout Movement and of every Scout and Scouter. He originated the notion of Scout's Own ..."a gathering the Scouts for the worship of God and to promote fuller realization of the Scout Law and Oath (or Promise), but supplementary to, and not in substitution for, regular religious observances." (Aids to Scoutmastership, p.38)

Let us first consider what Scouts' Owns are not.

* They are not Church Services, nor are they meant to be a substitute for them.
* They are not a structured liturgy like the Book of Common Order, etc.
* They are not a good opportunity for the Leader to bang home some truths with a little bit of God added for effect.
* They are not necessarily the Chaplains or Leaders' department or duty.

Given those guidelines, let's define what Scouts' Owns are. This is not what they ought to be - this is what they are; and if they do not fulfill one or more of these categories, they are not Scouts' Owns.

* They are an acknowledgment of God and his creation and ourselves as part of it, expressed in a way that all the faiths that Scouting embraces can share together.
* They are a pause in our activity to discover something deeper and more permanent in the things we are trying to achieve or learn or enjoy.
* They are a response to the Creator for the gift of life.

Which means, of course, they can be almost everything from a time of silence through a single sentence right up to a kind of service of worship that might include music and singing and stories and readings and prayers. In other words, although the next few paragraphs and pages suggest some material that could be useful for a Scouts' Own and end with a couple of outlines that might be useful for a colony/pack/troop/unit evening or in camp, there really is no "proper form."

For example, a group of Venture Scouts [older Scouts or high adventure group] may get to the summit of a mountain after a difficult or challenging rock climb and as they stand or sit down to recover and enjoy the view, one of them says, with feeling, "Thank God we made it!" and the others respond "Too right" (in context, another word for "Amen"), conscious or not, they have experienced a Scouts' Own, because they have recognized both their achievement and their growing because of it. The glory of a sunset and the breaking of the dawn; the sky at night, the hills by day and the flickering friendship round a camp-fire are absolutely natural settings for thinking -- sometimes silently, sometimes aloud -- about the power that is the beginning and end of everything and our human place in the complex order of the universe. And that's a Scouts' Own, without the need, even, for a mention of God by name -- only by implication. You see the point? A Scout's Own is really a spiritual experience that happens.

But sometimes, especially at the younger ages, it has to be underlined. So a game or an activity that has demanded effort in body or mind or in tolerance and team-work can, on the spot, be turned into a Scouts' Own with a thought and a "thank-you" for God -- no necessity for hymns or uniforms or readings. Of course, there is a place for a Scouts' Own with songs and readings -- when a time is set aside for God. Then it can be good to tell a story of adventure or challenge, where the people have relied on their faith -- whatever their faith -- in the Creator God to achieve their goal; and sing a campfire song or two about sharing and caring and serving. The song "Allelu, alleluia, praise ye the Lord" can be fun, because, divided into two groups, one does the 'Alleluias' and the other the 'Praise ye the Lord' and whenever they are singing they stand and when not they sit. This is praise that is ordered chaos and fun. Maybe that's a good description of a true Scouts' Own.

And prayers. A lot of young folk today find prayer difficult, yet the best prayers come from them. The young Cub Scout who prays "Thank you God for making me" has hit the nail on the head that's a Scouts' Own in a sentence. So it is far better to let the young people make up their own prayers - maybe creating a Group book of prayers and use it, updating it year by year. As a Leader you will never quite match, for them, the depth of their own thinking.

Finally, having, hopefully, done away with the mystique surrounding and the necessity of formality or a formal structure for Scouts' Owns, we suggest you go and get on with them - and enjoy them!

**Some Ideas on Scouts' Owns**By Baden Powell  
Printed in "The Scouter", November 1928

For an open Troop, or for Troops in camp, I think the Scouts' Own should be open to all denominations, and carried on in such manner as to offend none. There should not be any special form, but it should abound in the right spirit, and should be conducted not from any ecclesiastical point of view, but from that of the boy. Everything likely to make an artificial atmosphere should be avoided. We do not want a kind of imposed Church Parade, but a voluntary uplifting of their hearts by the boys in thanksgiving for the joys of life, and a desire on their part to seek inspiration and strength for greater love and service for others.

A Scouts' Own should have as big an effect on the boys as any service in Church, if in conducting the Scouts' Own we remember that boys are not grown men, and if we go by the pace of the youngest and most uneducated of those present. Boredom is not reverence, nor will it breed religion.

To interest the boys, the Scouts' Own 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 homily "talk" rather than an address), which grips the boys, and in which they may laugh or applaud as the spirit moves them, so that they take a real interest in what is said. If a man cannot make his point to keen boys in ten minutes he ought to be shot! If he has not got them keen, it would be better not to hold a Scouts' Own at all.

**Basic Concepts for Planning a Scout's Own (Interfaith Worship) Service**

* Choose a setting that lends itself to the occasion and promotes reverence –
  + - A grove of trees,
    - A site with a view of a lake, pond, brook, etc.
    - For small groups, sitting in a circle can be a very effective arrangement.
* Everything must be in good taste.
* The service should be planned, timed, and rehearsed.  
  (Generally 30 minutes maximum.)
* It should go without saying that those attending an interfaith worship service will be courteous, kind, and reverent. They should respect the rights and feelings of others even if their beliefs and religious practices differ from their own.
* Everyone in attendance should have opportunities to participate, if they wish, through responsive readings, silent and group prayer, singing, etc.

**Recognizing Diversity in a Scout's Own (Interfaith Worship) Service**

* Scouts practice many faiths, and many units are composed of Scouts from a variety of faiths. When this is the case during a Scout outing, ask them to suggest materials, to participate in the planning, and to assist in leading the service. If the group represents a mixture of religions, you may choose to use inspirational passages instead of particular religious materials.
* Because different faiths observe different religious practices and have a variety of holy days, it is not always possible to conduct an interfaith service in a time frame that fully recognizes individual religious obligations. This should be acknowledged and explained. Other time may need to be built into the schedule to allow individuals to meet their obligations.
* "Interfaith" means a service that all Scouts and Scouters may attend. Therefore, much attention must be paid to recognize the universality of beliefs in God and reverence.
* Encourage Scouts and Scouters to participate in religious services. Let them know ahead of time the nature of a service so that those anticipating a multi-faith experience do not find themselves surprised by a service that espouses the beliefs of a particular faith or religious tradition.