

Prayer and Worship



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Spiritual development may be encouraged throughout the Scouting programme. We can grow spiritually through a range of practical activities and experiences and by the way in which we undertake them. Prayer and worship are the occasions when we directly acknowledge that we are in God's presence. These times can be during an evening's meeting, when out on a hike, whilst in camp, or on some special occasion.

Relationships

In a wider context, our spirituality can be seen in the relationships we have with:

- our **S**elves,
- **O**ther people,
- the **N**atural world around us,
- **G**od.

These four relationships can be remembered as **SONG**.

Prayer and worship take place at the moments when we enter into a direct relationship with God. We become aware of God's presence. Then, as in other relationships:

- we can talk to God
- we can listen to what God says to us.

To help our members develop this kind of relationship with God, they will need:

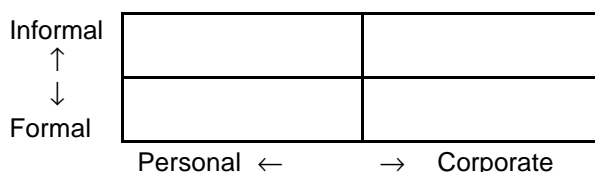
- time set aside for prayer and worship
- a suitable atmosphere
- the opportunity to both express themselves and be able to listen
- encouragement to respond through their actions.

This means that the programme should provide the necessary time, atmosphere, opportunity and encouragement. The Leader needs to remember that all relationships require the right setting, and should not be taken for granted. Thus God's presence in the Colony, Pack, Troop or Unit needs to be acknowledged and allowed to develop. Proper prayer and worship enable this.

Dimensions

There are some occasions when people wish to pray or worship alone. There may be some experience that they wish to share with God which is especially personal to them, or they may find they just prefer to be away from others. Many people wish to spend some time quietly with God in order to develop a personal relationship with Him. There are other times when like-minded people wish to pray and worship together. This might be in a small group with a common need or experience, or a larger group sharing or seeking to share the same situation.

Likewise, both prayer and worship may vary in formality. Sometimes they are quite spontaneous whilst at other times they follow a systematic form of words or liturgy. These different dimensions can be shown as two axes of a graph:



From this, we can see four main approaches:

- personal and informal
- personal and formal
- corporate and formal
- corporate and informal.

But within each of these approaches there are many possibilities, and different approaches may suit different members at different times for different purposes. The Scout Group should try to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to share in each of the experiences, and the programme should allow for this.

Reasons

There are many reasons to pray and worship. Most faiths recognise four main categories into which prayers fall:

- praising God's glory
- giving thanks for something
- seeking forgiveness
- asking on behalf of others.

Within each of these categories there are many possibilities, since experiences, needs, and opportunities are occurring all the time. Sometimes our prayers or worship may fall into only one of these categories; on other occasions, they may fall into all of them.

Involvement

If the prayer being offered, or the worship taking place, is to have meaning for those taking part, those people need to have a sense of sharing in the experience. The relationship with God needs to be meaningful to them. They need to be actively involved as participants, rather than just passively listening or watching as observers. Care needs to be taken to ensure that this occurs. The content and words must be carefully chosen. This is especially true for young children, but is no less important for adolescents and adults. Consider the different responses from young people who:

- are asked to read something they are given
- read what they have chosen
- compose what they read.

Of course, guidance and help should be given in the selection and writing of prayers and features of worship. Guidance is also necessary in helping people develop their understanding of formal forms of prayer and worship in the various faiths and denominations. In this guidance it should be acknowledged that a feeling of involvement increases the sense of commitment and depth of meaning, and thus increases the depth of the relationship with God.

Timing

Prayers can be offered at any time. Worship need not be restricted to certain hours or certain days. Leaders should look for opportunities to pray and worship during an activity, evening, or camp, rather than feel limited to just the beginning or the end of an activity. There are four possibilities for timing:

- **before** an event or activity, perhaps referring to what has brought people together, and making reference to what is to come;
- **during** a particular activity, maybe in the middle of a hike, at a suitable point during a game, or when something happy or sad occurs;

- **after** something has taken place, referring to specific experiences, interpreting their relevance, and looking ahead to how that understanding could be taken further;
- **on special occasions** such as Scouts' Owns, renewals of Promise, church parades, and special services, all of which require very careful preparation (and for which separate resource material is available).

Respect

Leaders should respect the fact that different faiths put emphasis on different things and have different approaches to prayer and worship. Indeed, such variety exists between denominations or groups in the major world religions. There are distinctions between the ways in which Jews and Moslems pray and worship, as there are between Roman Catholics and Quakers. These differences are rooted in the experience and traditions of the various religious communities. Even within those communities, some people may feel more comfortable with some aspects of prayer and worship than others. It is the Leader's responsibility to know the religious traditions of all the young people in their Group, and to understand and respect those traditions. Scouting does not seek to undertake responsibility for religious development, but its Leaders have a duty to encourage it to take place. By knowing fully the preferred approaches to prayer and worship, and by being able to build upon these in the everyday life of the Group, the Leader can help each Member in their personal and shared relationship with God.

Note

This factsheet is designed to be helpful to members of theistic faiths. If additional or alternative advice would be useful, reference should be made to the Programme and Development Department, Gilwell Park, Chingford, London E4 7QW.