

A Scout's guide to earning and wearing a religious emblem



Representing an array of faiths — from the African Methodist Episcopal Church to Zoroastrianism — religious emblems encourage Scouts, Venturers and adult volunteers to strengthen their faith-based journey within Scouting.

This journey aligns with the 12th point of the Scout Law — reverent — and the “duty to God” part of the Scout Oath.

While the BSA is secular and members are not required to belong to any religious organization, BSA members are required to acknowledge a belief in God.

Earning a religious emblem helps turn that “acknowledgement” into something deeper and more meaningful.

To learn more about religious emblems, including how to earn them, wear them and promote them within a Scout unit, I talked with Jason Noland. He’s the CEO of Programs of Religious Activities with Youth, or **PRAY** [<https://www.praypub.org/>]. PRAY is one of several faith organizations with which the BSA partners to administer religious emblems programs.

“Religious emblems are important because they help connect young people deeply to their faith and implement Scouting as part of a congregation’s youth ministry within the denominations where they belong,” Noland says.

What are religious emblems?

They are medals created by the various religious groups represented in Scouting. Their purpose is to encourage youth and adults to grow stronger in their faith as part of their Scouting experience.

Why are religious emblems important?

Studies by the BSA have shown that Scouts who earn a religious emblem stay registered longer in Scouting's programs.

Considering that nearly three of every four units is chartered to a faith-based institution, this connection is vital to sustaining those relationships.

How are these emblems different from regular advancement?

In one sense, they are not different at all. Just like earning a merit badge, a Scout has to take the initiative to start the process to earn a religious emblem.

However, a young person doesn't ask his or her Cubmaster, Scoutmaster or Venturing advisor to help with that process. He or she contacts the religious institution. At most institutions, there's already a process in place for earning these emblems.

What role do adult leaders play?

An important one. They can encourage young people to earn the emblems, connect them with the appropriate faith leader and present the awards in a meaningful way.

Units with a **Religious Emblems Coordinator** [<https://blog.scoutingmagazine.org/2013/10/07/religious-emblems-coordinators-can-help-you-retain-scouts/>] have a designated adult who promotes emblems and tracks which ones have been earned.

What resources are available?

Many of the faith organizations have their own websites, including the **National Jewish Committee on Scouting** [<http://www.jewishscouting.org/>], **National Catholic Committee on Scouting** [<http://www.nccs-bsa.org/>] and more.

The official website of PRAY [<https://www.praypub.org/bsa>] has a ton of great info, like this **Duty to God poster** [http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-879_WB.pdf] you can print and share.

What are the steps to earning a religious emblem?

1. **Obtain the specific booklet for your religion** by checking with your local Scout Shop or contacting the religious organization directly.
2. **Ask parents to review the program guidelines.**
3. **Become a member of your religious institution**, if necessary. Note that some programs require participants to be official members of the religious institution and that age and grade requirements vary from program to program.

4. **Find a counselor.** Each program sets its own guidelines as to who may serve as counselor. Some programs require clergy to serve as counselors; other programs allow parents or other family members to fill the role.
5. **Complete the requirements** and obtain the proper signatures.
6. **Order the emblem itself.** These emblems are not available from your local council Scout Shop. Follow the instructions in your booklet to order the emblem.
7. **Receive the emblem** in a meaningful ceremony, preferably in the member's religious institution.

How do you get the medal itself?

Unlike other advancement, these emblems are not purchased through the local council Scout Shop. You buy them through the faith organization that administers the emblem program.

The instructions for ordering are highlighted at the end of the booklet. Emblems should be presented in a meaningful ceremony, like any other award in Scouting.

Many units do this on Scout Sunday, Scout Sabbath or Scout Jumuah.

Depending on the grade and emblem, it may take anywhere from 6 to 14 weeks for the emblem to arrive. So plan accordingly.

What about adult emblems?

Unlike youth religious emblems, adult awards are based on service to Scouting and their faith.

Most require a nomination form, letters of reference and clergy signature.

Their approval also goes through the appropriate faith organization. Because most units are interfaith and multid denominational, it is not uncommon for adults to receive the emblem of other faiths in recognition of their service.

How/where are emblems worn?

All faiths have emblems or medals that should be worn as part of the official uniform and are appropriate for those events.

A silver knot on purple cloth may be worn by youth members who have received their religious emblem. For adults, the knot is the reverse: purple on silver cloth.

If you earned both, you may wear both at the same time.

A reminder about the BSA's position on religious principles

From the *Guide to Advancement* [<http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/33088.pdf>] :

5.0.5.0 Religious Principles

From time to time, issues related to advancement call for an understanding of the position of the Boy Scouts of America on religious principles. The Boy Scouts of America does not define what constitutes belief in God or practice of religion. Neither does the BSA require membership in a religious organization or association for membership in the movement. If a Scout does not belong to a religious organization or association, then his parent(s) or guardian(s) will be considered responsible for his religious training. All that is required is the acknowledgment of belief in God as stated in the Declaration of Religious Principle and the Scout Oath, and the ability to be reverent as stated in the Scout Law.