



Celebrating Diversity At The Scout Group Level

by John E. Plumadore

Strategic Direction #6 - Becoming more culturally diverse. Encourage and welcome Canadians of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds to participate in and deliver programs.

We do it for the children, youth and young adults

Young people are the very essence of our future as a country and a peaceful world. Our programming can reflect and reinforce our ideals every week from Beavers to Rovers, if we plan well and incorporate ideas, activities and language that follow the Mission and Principles.

Celebrating diversity at the local Scout group level is an exciting and challenging task for all Scouters in our multi-cultural, multi-faith society. Consider how Scouting's program already offers so many ways to celebrate diversity. But it's equally important to be aware of the differences in

cultures too. The following points will highlight some of the important aspects to be aware of when incorporating diversity into your program.

Program Elements

All youth members and leaders promise to love and serve God. The particular expression of the Promise depends on the individual's own faith, although different faiths have much in common when the Promise is put into practice.

- In the Colony: Helping Take Care of the World, Sharing. The pond shows animals and humans living in harmony. How about humans in harmony with other humans?
- In the Pack: Awards, Badges, Stars, Religion in Life, World Cubbing, World Religions, World Trade, etc. all offer opportunities to discuss other cultures.
- In the Troop: Awards, Badges, Religion in Life, service opportunities, etc. bring diversity to life in your troop.

(Program Elements excerpts taken

from the Cultural Diversity and Scouting, October 1999 document written by the late Roy Truman.)

Ceremonies

Ceremonies often involve prayer or religiously oriented discussions or songs. Prayers, spoken text and songs may be chosen or created to suit those attending.

- Openings and closings – Create these ceremonies to suit those attending.
- Grace before meals – Refer to God, but leave out other names or references specific to a religion, unless all the religions represented have other names in common, example "Lord".
- Church parades – Ecumenical or multi-faith parades are possible, given advance planning with the clergy involved.
- Headgear – "Take off your hats" has been a common request in the past, but people of many religions pray with their hats on. A better phrase is "Please prepare for prayer".

Photos: Scouts Canada Archives

- Posture during prayer – Varies by standing, sitting, kneeling or prostrate. Some hold hands. Disabilities and physical limitations can also affect posture for prayer. Allow people to pray using the posture which conforms to their situation and preference.

Importance of Religion and Culture

Religion and culture are important to us all, and govern much of our behaviour. We all share a common set of needs, and fundamental values are often similar across cultures and religions. It's important not to assume we know all about others, since values, beliefs and practices vary within a group.

- Scouting requires belief in the God of one's choice, in taking the section Promise and the Leader's Promise. No particular religion is specified.
- Communicate, ask youth and parents – don't assume everyone of the same culture shares identical values, beliefs and practices.
- It can be tough to be different – whether the difference is disability, gender, religion, race or culture. Consider how the other person is feeling and what his or her experience is like.

Foods and Eating

Cultures and religions vary with respect to foods allowed, eating customs, festivals and fasting, and other aspects of eating. It is important to respect others when planning menus, snacks and outings. Allergies and food sensitivities must also be considered. Ask the youth and parents.

- Dietary Laws – examples include pork, meat, meat preparation, fasting.
- Festival Foods – kids of all ages like to eat and have a party!
- Allergies – be sure you understand youths' allergies and medical situation by reading over their medical history. Talk to the parents before serving food.

Seasons, Time and Festivals

Religions and cultures have holidays, festivals and observances which need to be taken into account when program planning. Not all Christians observe Christmas and Easter at the same time. There are different calendars. Similarly for some other religions. Ask!

Annual cycles

- Lent, fasts, Ramadan, ...

- Major festivals
 - Christmas, Easter, Passover, ...
- Time for prayer
- Allow for youth and leaders to attend religious services while at camp.
 - Some religions call for prayer several times each day at prescribed times, (example, morning prayers, evening prayers, after a bath or shower).

Gestures, Body Language and Speech

Just as humans have language in common, yet speak many languages, people use gestures and body language, but the details and interpretation can vary significantly. We may find ourselves confused or offended without knowing why, or may cause offence or confusion inadvertently. It's important to be aware of our and others' reactions and try to understand them.

Personal space and distances:

- Who can touch who varies (i.e. can a man touch a woman?).
- "Keep your distance" – each person has a "comfort zone" – a space around him or her. This varies with culture.
- At camp or elsewhere, Muslim females should be provided with toilet facilities distinct from those for males. It's permissible for non-Muslim females to use the same facilities.

Head gestures

- There are many head gestures and positions (i.e. down, back, side, shake, nod). Different groups apply different meanings to them. For example, shaking the head means "no" in North America, but "yes" in some other areas.

Eye Contact

- May be sought or avoided. Avoiding eye contact may be a sign of respect, yet so may be making eye contact.

Arm and hand movements

- Have widely different meanings. One culture's inoffensive gesture may be obscene to another's.

Differences in speech patterns

- Indirect speech, (example, may not say "no")
- Direct speech, (example, North American blunt style)
- Speed of response, (amount of time taken to ponder a question and implications).

Together we can achieve Strategic Direction #6 while living and growing

Scouts Canada's adventure. I encourage you to share your resources, successes or questions with me at jjplumadore@scouts.ca. λ

– John Plumadore is the National Director for Community Development and Diversity.

Spirituality/ Cultural Resource Books (Available from most public libraries)

Cultural and religious programming resources are many. The following resources should enhance your programs.

Books

World Holidays – A Guide for Children by Heather Moehn

Celebrate – by Julie Bisson

Feasts and Fasting – by Kerena Marchant

The World of Festivals – by Philip Steele

Teaching Kids to Care and Share – by J. L. Roehekeparation (Anglican Book Stores)

Let's Celebrate – by Caroline Parry

Web sites

When it comes to the Internet, there is literally a wealth of resources out there! These are just a few I've found helpful.

Multi Cultural Calendar – www.multiculturalcalendar.com

Interfaith Youth Core – www.ifyc.org

United Religions Initiative (URI Kids World Religions) – www.uri.org

Golden Rule – www.scarboromissions.ca

Harmony Movement – www.harmony.ca

Department of Citizenship and Immigration – www.settlement.org/cp/ or www.cic.gc.ca

Department of Indian and Northern Affairs – www.ainc-in-ac.gc.ca/ks

Canadian Heritage Canada – www.canadian-heritage.gc.ca

World Scout Bureau (Spirituality) – www.scout.org

Scouts Canada – www.scouts.ca (Multi Cultural Scouting)