

What I Have Seen And Heard

by † Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory



I spent most of last Saturday afternoon with a group of Scouts from various parishes in the Archdiocese of Atlanta, who assembled at Saint John Neumann Parish for the annual Scouts Mass and Award ceremony. The young men and women ranged in age from college-age students to youngsters in the primary grades. As usual, they were filled with enthusiasm and laughter, and their parents were filled with pride at their achievements.

Before Mass, I met with most of the youngsters to extend my personal congratulations on the awards that they were to receive. I asked them what they like most about Scouting. The answers varied from the trips that they make, to the service projects that they do, to the cookie sales that the Girl Scouts organize, to just having fun with other young people. Scouting is an activity that offers many possibilities for young people to learn and to grow. Many of the values that Scouting offers dovetail quite nicely with the faith traditions of the Catholic Church.

Scouting in the United States is nearly 100 years old. Generally, 1910 is given for the establishment of the Boys Scouts and 1912 for the founding of the Girls Scouts. It's interesting to note that the Girls Scouts were established right here in Georgia by a lady from Savannah by the name of Juliette "Daisy" Gordon Low.

Scouting has found its way into most of the major religious faiths. There are Baptist Scout troops, Jewish Scout troops, Muslim Scout troops and, gratefully, many Catholic Scouting programs. We have many excellent opportunities for our young people in our parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

We are also quite fortunate to have many adults who provide

the type of leadership and example that translate into an effective youth ministry for our young people. The ethics that Scouting offers are secular in nature, yet they easily become Catholic when they are viewed through the prism of our faith. The love for nature, which Scouting highlights easily, becomes a vehicle to help young people reverence and respect God's creation. Francis of Assisi can be a beacon of real inspiration for youngsters who learn of the profound regard that St. Francis had for all of God's creation.

Honesty, service, generosity, patriotism, responsibility—all of those secular values are ripe for connection with the Catholic faith of our young people who come to see those values as expressions of the spiritual heritage that we strive to follow as members of the Church of Jesus Christ. But they need the good example of adult leaders who help them see the link between what the Scouting program might propose and what the Gospel demands. That clear association between the goals and values of Scouting and the religious traditions of the young people who are involved with Scouting is the responsibility of the churches, synagogues, and mosques that host Scouting programs.

We are very fortunate in the Archdiocese of Atlanta to have many fine lay leaders, clergy and Religious who do just that for our young people. I was very pleased last Saturday to celebrate our local Scouting program with some of our young people and with a number of the adults who generously bridge and highlight our Catholic faith with the values and goals that young people find in Scouting—and who do so quite well, I might add.