

Do you know P.R.A.Y. ?

Bill Chaffin, Conference Scouting Coordinator

Do you? Well, allow us to show you about this dynamic program that can be used in your church with your youth.

First of all, here is an “altar call” about P.R.A.Y. from Steven Scheid, our National Director of the Center for Scouting Ministries in the GCUMM office. Steven (my friend and brother) writes....

Is your church searching for ways to engage youth and increase church attendance? Is the congregation bemoaning the lack of young families as your church ages? I know my church is graying and coping with declining church attendance. Moreover, the books floating around my house are about reaching millennials, reaching the unchurched, and the church in quarantine and post-quarantine. Why is “build it and they will come” no longer sufficient? Because we are not called to be passive, we are called to be in relationship with those whom we wish to reach and disciple.

So how do we reach our neighbor? How do we connect with those who are different than us? A potential path to discipleship and developing relationships is in our hands! The P.R.A.Y. program is “a Bible-based religious emblems program for Protestant and Independent Christian churches designed to bring children, youth, and families to Christ.” Oh, that. But wait – it truly can be what it says, a program designed to bring children, youth, and families to Christ. What is missing? Us – as disciples, apostles, teachers, and followers – doing what we were called to do:

“And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”

Matthew 6:15

In 2010 my family moved to our present church. My children had started in the P.R.A.Y. program in our previous church, completing “God and Me,” the first level, at that time, of the Religious Emblems program. What a delight it was to discover girls were welcome in the program and not just boys! The program has been traditionally offered through Cub Scout packs or Boy Scout troops, so I had not witnessed a program open to girls. To keep my children advancing in the program I implemented a P.R.A.Y. Religious Emblems programs at our new church. Thus, our narrative was flipped: the church offered the program, rather than the Scouting unit.

The first time we offered the program it required recruiting solid Christian teachers from the church. While it is a lot of work to recruit 2 teachers for each grade level, coordinate start and end dates, and manage an award ceremony, once the details are worked out, it is a matter of maintaining what has been created. Furthermore, we only offer the program every other year to not wear out our volunteers. Over time we brought the award ceremony into a Sunday morning service with an award cake reception afterward. Our most recent epiphany was turning the award celebration into a potluck for the youth and their families along with church members. We had finally moved past delivering content and building a few key relationships with the youth, to encouraging our church members to see the number of wonderful youth who use our building weekly and make tentative steps towards reaching out and connecting with these youth and their families.

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic has slowed our momentum. We heard requests for an online Religious Emblems program, but our teachers were not ready for the challenge in the Spring. Then information from P.R.A.Y. and our Virginia Scouting Conference Ministry Coordinator sparked renewed enthusiasm. Within a week I recruited the teachers, and they are ready, willing, and raring to go with teaching the program online. The new P.R.A.Y. resources promise to make the task easier. And the teachers of the younger grades are excited about the necessary level of parent involvement for them to successfully teach elementary-aged children online. Hmmm, maybe we are not looking at an unfortunate obstacle, but rather a God-given opportunity to fulfill our Great Commission.

If our experience has inspired you to consider sponsoring a Religious emblem awards program in your congregation through P.R.A.Y, enlisting your own adult leaders and whatever youth you have in the church, community, and scouting organizations, the P.R.A.Y. organization, your Virginia Scouting coordinator (Bill Chaffin), and I stand ready to assist you in planning, implementing, and celebrating a viable disciple-making extension in your community.

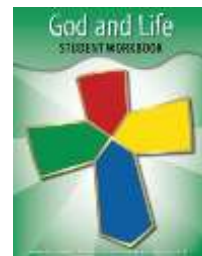
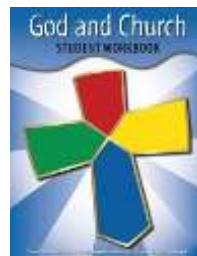
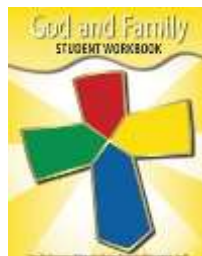
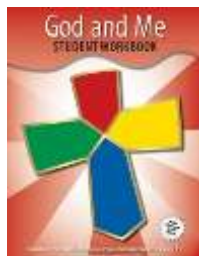


Now that Steve, has sparked the interest and lit the fuse, let me share much more about this program and how it works and how it will fit in your church.

The title of this article is not a misprint. We all know how *to* pray. We all pray in many ways from on our knees, to a conversation in the car, to bedtime prayers for special prayers at special times. We all know how to pray. But...do you know P.R.A.Y.? This is an organization that is a Bible-based religious emblems program for Protestant and independent Christian churches that is designed to bring youth to Christ; simple. It further facilitates bringing children, youth and families to Christ. P.R.A.Y. is Programs of Religious Activities with Youth built to foster Christian growth in the family, in the church and in youth serving agencies. To many, the program has also been called God and Country. When I was a Scout the God & Country was one long program. The expected time frame was about eighteen months to complete. When I see an adult leader with a youth religious emblems square knot on his shirt (remember...back then only boys were in the BSA!) I was impressed. When I was fourteen and a Star Scout a year and a half was forever! Today, P.R.A.Y. is broken down into five manageable programs.

P.R.A.Y. Components

The basic P.R.A.Y. program is built in five age-specific programs that build on one another; Jesus and Me (Grades K-1), God and Me (Grades 2-3), God and Family (Grades 4-6), God and Church (Grades 6-8) and God and Life (Grades 9-12).



Each program has a Student Workbook, a Counselor (teacher) Manual, and a Mentor (parent or guardian) Workbook. Each series of study have been updated in 2020. The Counselor Manual is required for each program to ensure that the program is correctly and accurately presented. In order to receive awards the youth must be registered in the program.

One of the misperceptions of the P.R.A.Y. programs among those who see it in use is that it is a Scouting program. It is not. Any youth can participate and become educated in this marvelous, well-constructed program for our youth. It helps young people to develop a deeper relationship with God and to understand how God is active in their individual lives, the lives of their families and those around them and in the world itself. The programs are most often administered through Boy Scout or Girl Scout programs. Scouts BSA (formerly the Boy Scouts of American, Girl Scouts USA and American Heritage Girls are active partners. Any youth, an individual or group (small group or Sunday School class) can use the programs.

The Counselor/teacher can be any adult. There have been youth leaders, UMM or UMW, scout leaders or clergy are good candidates to lead the classes. Given these prospective leaders one could easily see the positive interaction between the local church and the community youth serving agencies meeting within your halls. Please be extra sensitive to the adult leading the class. In the BSA you will be required to have two-deep leadership, both with YPT – Youth Protection Training – to lead. Your individual church may also use Safe Sanctuaries or some comparable youth care program. You MUST be sensitive to this and make sure you are covered.

If you plan to run the program in a virtual format (we will speak about that a little later) then two adults would still be needed; one counselor and one mentor.

Girl Scouts USA cares deeply for every girl and protects them through training, background checks, and safety resources. Check with your local Girl Scout Council for specific training in your area. This training and background checks are requirements for participation with GSUSA.

P.R.A.Y. Chronology

The God and Country program was originally established in 1945 as an award for Boy Scouts, age 12 and up. It was a constant with ups and downs and in the 1970s the program became coed thus allowing the Girl Scouts to get into the picture. The program also made a significant move expanding to three levels (God & Family, God & Church and God & Life). Up until this point the program had simply been God & Country and often took a youth twelve to eighteen months to complete. Also in this time the adult God and Service Adult Award was created. The program was rename P.R.A.Y. later in the 1970s and the program was managed under the Protestant Committee for the BSA.

A major development came in 1983 when Gene Hazelwood became the first fulltime Executive Director, a role he held until his death at which time his son Mark, an educator, was convinced by the Board unanimously to be the next director. Mark maintained and grew the program until his retirement in 2016. His wife, Debbie (also a former educator) is still at P.R.A.Y. creating much of the curriculum. Marks' successor, Jason Noland, became CEO in November or 2016. Under Jason the program has expanded. The Jesus and Me curriculum was released in 2018 for Kindergarten and First Grade. The RP3 Bible Basics program, established in 2014 began to expand. RP3 is a patch series designed to help

families, Sunday School classes as well as Scouting groups to get deeper into the Bible. P.R.A.Y. states that they firmly believe that time spent in the Bible can be precious time with God. RP3 means **Read** the Bible, but also to **Picture** the passage being read and studied, to **Ponder** its Meaning and to **Put** what you've learned into action; **RP3** !

The RP3 program used Bible stories featuring a specific object; i.e. water, birds, books with lessons to make the Biblical story easier to understand and remember. The RP3 program is different from the standard P.R.A.Y. programs in that it teaches Bible stories, what they are about, what they mean and how they influence our lives. The God and ... series focuses exclusively on our relationship with God.

The patches offered in RP3 are separate from the standard P.R.A.Y. awards and do not have the same guidelines as the Jesus and Me, God and Me, God and Family, God and Church and God and Life have. The programs are shorter in duration and can be earned by all ages, and do not require workbooks or an application review process by clergy. These guidelines make this patch series ideal for a weekend campout and retreats.

Although the patches are separate from the P.R.A.Y. awards, they can be used in conjunction with them and fill the gaps that exist between the different age levels. The patch series can also be used with unchurched youth who may not be ready to tackle more demanding award curriculum and, of course, does provide some hands-on Bible experience and generate success and excitement for advancing to the P.R.A.Y. awards.

The following are the current RP3 patches with more in the works.



Birds of the Air



Boulders



Wind of the Spirit



Trees



Tents and Shelters



Holes



On The Road



Making Room



The Good Book



Out of the Water



Fire

Planning a P.R.A.Y. Culture

First you want to have a culture in your church actively supporting the development of faith in your youth. The youth can be members of your church or members of youth groups (BSA, GSUSA, BBBS) that meet in your church. Admit to yourself and to the governing body of your church that this is a charge given directly to us from Christ!

If you have any youth in your church you can use the P.R.A.Y. programs. You can use the basic P.R.A.Y. programs for nearly all age groups in your church. The books for leaders and students are readily available. There are many activities to be performed in these studies which make learning about God and our individual relationship fun. Of course the RP3 program simply takes a Bible and a leader willing to study the Word with the youth.

We often say in Scouting, and I am sure in other places as well, "if you fail to plan, you plan to fail." So it is here. Decide in your youth curriculum that you will use either P.R.A.Y. or RP3. Put dates on your calendars, promote it on social media, invite parents to participate. If your church has Scouting programs and you are planning the P.R.A.Y. courses, invite them!

If you have not budgeted it, look to your UMM or your UMW for support and/or plan fundraisers. Your UMM and UMW will make great Counselors (teachers) and great representatives of your church! The bottom line for a P.R.A.Y. culture is to involve your church.

P.R.A.Y. Program Class setup

Most of the P.R.A.Y. God and Country programs are planned to run approximate an hour and for about six weeks. They can be run at church (if open) or in a community room in the library or at the leader's home. Never, ever forget TWO DEEP LEADERSHIP. There are many examples where a retreat at a park (with or without a camping trip) can manage the entire program in a weekend! What a great opportunity to get out in God's wonderful nature.

Virtual P.R.A.Y.

Well this is what all have come to see! Virtual P.R.A.Y. Can it be done? Yes and very successfully. Several virtual programs have been successful in running the programs online. You can register students in several ways. The simple way may be just call them. However, a quicker, more manageable registration through Eventbrite, DoubleKnot, SignupGenius, or Blackpug.

Retain as much structure as possible during the duration of the program. Develop the schedules and deliverables with the families before session one. Be sure to send the weekly assignment the week before. Do it via email or use GoogleClassroom (www.googleclassroom.google.com) – to do so you must have a Google (Gmail) account.

There are applications to run the programs but I know we all know ZOOM. We do have experience running P.R.A.Y. programs and I can help getting you going. A sideline ... I have good friends in Atlanta and Juneau who have run successful ZOOM programs and can help.

When you plan your sessions make sure you have several adults online. Of course, your counselor (teacher) is one. Having a second adult will support youth protection requirements and will provide an administrator to watch for remarks or questions. Also, my experience has been having at least one parent in the room. That does several things. It matches the protection plus also has the parent/guardian seeing and hearing what their child is learning about God and their faith. A win/win!

Upon confirming the youth registration make sure you have an assistant (for two deep, for online support), buy-in from your clergy, support from both church adults and parents, the materials for the specific course (handbooks and supportive materials to make the program items; i.e., pizza boxes and images, shoe boxes, etc.). The P.R.A.Y. website has plenty of resources to use and enhance the delivery of each program.

Just like the in person courses this should be five or six forty-five minute to one hour in duration. Similar to the real time / back to normal classes they can easily be scheduled over one or two weekends.

Uniform Recognition

Each registered scout will receive a certificate and a medallion (if the family wants that) and certainly the coveted youth religious emblems square knot. The knot is one of just a handful that can be earned as a youth and worn on their adult uniform (if they become a leader in Scouting then). The knot is ecumenical and worn by all youth who earn the religious emblem of their faith. You may be a Muslim. You may be Jewish. You may be Catholic or a number of other faiths. The youth religious square knot is the same.

The non-scout registered students should each receive a certificate (as part of the program cost).

In fact, if you can see this chart, the religious recognitions are available for most all faiths in the world. Yes, wow! That's a lot.



If you are a scout leader and have led a program or class you are eligible to have the appropriate religious square knot for your Scout shirt. Just as with the youth, the adult religious square knot is the same no matter your denomination or faith.



Youth Religious Emblems Knot



Adult Religious Emblems Knot

In Closing

Using John Wesley's most famous words, "Do all the good you can, in all the ways you can, to all the souls you can, in every place you can, at all the times you can, with all the zeal you can, as long as you ever can." All the good...offering these programs to the youth in and around your church. All the ways ... a different, active, vibrant program showing a relationship with God. To all ... once again, all your youth

and the youth in the neighborhoods around your church. Every place In the church, in the home, somewhere else, even the internet. All the times....make it work to the maximum number of youth. All the zeal....have the passion, see the joy, experience the growth. As long...put the programs on your annual calendar.

You are certainly, as Steven says, welcome to contact me for additional tips, to come to your church (virtually or otherwise) to discuss the programs. If everything we have shared here is not enough or you would like to really get the program going in your church visit www.praypub.org. You will find absolutely everything you would want or need to know on the P.R.A.Y. website.