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National Boy Scout Jamboree

'Be prepared" is the motto of the Boy Scouts of America. That motto certainly became the challenge for about 9,000 scouts and scout leaders who assembled for Mass at Fort A.P. Hill on Sunday, July 29. I had the privilege of concelebrating Mass that morning in a steady rain with Archbishop Gabriel Montalvo, the Apostolic Nuncio, and Bishop Gerald Gettelfinger of the Diocese of Evansville, Indiana, who is the Episcopal moderator of the Scouts. Thankfully, the other bishops and I, along with about 24 priests who are scout chaplains, were able to stay dry under a large canopy. The scouts, all in ponchos, stood reverently in the rain and celebrated their faith in the sacred Eucharist. I was profoundly moved by the faith and love of the young men who were not afraid to sacrifice for their faith. I know that the Apostolic Nuncio was also impressed by young men braving the elements as he noted when he imparted the Apostolic Blessing of Pope John Paul II at the end of Mass.

Fort A.P. Hill has become the home of the National Boy Scout Jamboree since 1981. The Fort, as it is properly called, is located at the far northeast corner of Caroline County, which is in the Richmond diocese. The site is well suited for accommodating approximately 35,000 boy scouts from around the country, 27% of whom are members of the Catholic Community. The Jamboree occurs every four years and since I am the host bishop to the Catholic scouts at the Jamboree, I have now attended six such gatherings. I always invite the Apostolic Nuncio, the Cardinal Archbishop of Washington or the Cardinal Archbishop of Baltimore.

The Jamboree also provides me the opportunity to gather with the priest chaplains and some permanent deacon chaplains for the Scouts from around the country. We always meet for dinner at the Columbian Center of the Knights of Columbus Council No. 395. This year I was able to visit with 40 Catholic chaplains because of the hospitality of the Knights of Columbus. Bishop Gettelfinger joined us all for a wonderful meal on Friday before the Jamboree Mass.

I have always had a great love and support for the scouts, both girl scouts and boy scouts. I was a boy scout at my home parish at Blessed Sacrament in Washington, D.C. I dropped out when I went to the high school seminary in Baltimore. In my first priestly assignment at St. Andrew's in Roanoke, I was actively involved in the several scout troops of the parish. This was also true to a lesser degree at St. Mary's, Star of the Sea Parish in Fort Monroe and at the Cathedral in Richmond. Since becoming bishop of the diocese, I have promoted Catholic scouting and continue to encourage parishes and such groups as the Knights of Columbus to sponsor a scout troop. At this time we have 80 troops in the diocese and approximately 2,500 young Catholic people in scouting. Every year I meet with those scouts who are receiving their religious emblem award in Tidewater. This year I am beginning an annual gathering at the Cathedral in Richmond.

I am personally convinced that scouting is needed more today than ever because of the culture in which we live. Young people today tend to lead boring lives. They spend an average of about four hours a day in front of a television set. They spend lots of time indoors rather than exploring the beauties of nature and God's creation. Scouts learn skills that will last a lifetime. I remember learning to tie different kinds of knots, taking hikes, learning to camp out and being responsible for my own cooking. Scouting taught me how to work with others to complete a task or achieve a goal. What I like best about scouting is the camaraderie experienced by young men who achieve at their own pace, rather than being in competition with one another. We live in a culture that is highly competitive. Scouting promotes a win-win situation rather than a win-lose experience. With scouting, all are winners.

I like scouting because of its emphasis on patriotism, both the love of God and love of country. Scouting promotes respect for our nation's flag and the duty we all have to be good citizens. Scouting engenders respect for one another, respect for persons of different religious beliefs, different races and ethnicity. As a scout advances through the various ranks in scouting, a young person grows in self-respect and thereby develops respect for others.

One of the scout laws is that a scout is clean. I remember being told that when camping the scouts are to leave the campsite cleaner than they originally found it. Scouts learn respect for the environment and God's creation. Scouts are close to nature and learn survival skills. A scout learns to keep self "physically" strong, mentally awake and morally upright. He or she learns the scout law which calls one to practice those natural virtues of being trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, thrifty and brave. The scout also learns to be reverent. The various religious emblems for both girl scouts and boy scouts are the result of putting into practice what one learns in religious instruction.

Just recently I have organized a Diocesan Council on Catholic Scouting. I wanted the council as a means of communication and coordination of many scout programs around the diocese. I look to the council to help promote Catholic scouting at the local level.

I want to thank our scout leaders who give so much of their time and energy in behalf of scouting: Father Brian Rafferty, diocesan Scout chaplain; Jim Talbert of Richmond, who serves as executive secretary to the council; Paul Janka, Cecile Green and Dorothy Cogswell all of Tidewater.

The list of scout leaders could go on for several pages. I am grateful to all of them for making all of us proud of Catholic scouting in our diocese.

+ Walter F. Sullivan
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