

CALL TO THE CHURCH: Using Religious Emblems to Fulfill the Great Commission



Is your church searching for ways to engage youth and increase church attendance? Is your 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, denominational scouting associations, and we the Sixbeyes stand ready to assist you in planning, implementing, and celebrating a viable disciple-making extension in your community.



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Shan Sixbey and her husband Pastor Brian Sixbey from First United Methodist Church Fox Hill are an incredible duo. This husband wife team has received the God and Service Award, Cross and Flame Award, the Building Faith in Youth Award, and the Torch Award. These awards show the passion that they have for reaching young people through the scouting programs.

Resources:

P.R.A.Y.'s [Getting Started Toolkit](#)

Visit P.R.A.Y.'s [Denominations](#) page to find national scouting associations



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