

## **A Word About Andrew J. Schweighardt**

Andrew and his family have been members of our church family since 1989. He was confirmed in 1997 and has participated in many church activities over the years, including youth group, the Living Nativity, VBS volunteer, and ushering. Most recently he has been regularly attending Session meetings to gain insight into the functions of the church. As a youth, Andrew's church commitments often overlapped with his involvement in Scouting. In 1996 he worked closely with Pastor Gary Albertson to earn the God and Church Award, the religious medal of the Boy Scouts of America. In 1999 Andrew completed his Eagle Scout project at the church, which required the construction of shelving units for the church basement. His Eagle Scout Court of Honor was held at the church, with Pastor Robert Duncan offering the invocation and benediction for the ceremony. School obligations have absorbed a great deal of Andrew's time in recent years, but in December 2011 he successfully defended his Ph.D. dissertation at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. The prayers and support of the congregation were gratefully acknowledged in his dissertation.

**Andrew J. Schweighardt**  
**Scout Sunday**  
**First Presbyterian Church of Greenlawn**  
**February 12, 2012**

### **A Place to Call Home**

In 2010 we celebrated a special Scout Sunday because that year marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Boy Scouts. This year, we celebrate two milestones in scouting – the founding of the Girl Scouts and the presentation of the first Eagle Scout badge to Arthur R. Eldred, both of which occurred in 1912. In a special article published in the Eagle Scout Magazine to commemorate the anniversary of the first Eagle Scout award, this achievement was described as “Boy Scouting’s highest rank and an icon. Men who have earned it count it among their most treasured possessions. Those who missed it by a whisker remember exactly which requirement they didn’t complete. Americans of all stripes know that being an Eagle Scout is a great honor, even if they don’t know just what the badge means.”

Recognizing these special anniversaries in scouting is important. It allows us to reflect on Scouting’s history and take pride in our roots, but it also provides us with an opportunity to ponder what the future may hold for this great organization. We can also ruminate about Scouting on a smaller scale – where was Troop 877 a year ago? Where is it today and where will it be in 2012? I think I speak for many people in this Church when I say how proud we are of the boys and leaders in Troop 877. You are an integral component of our church and we value the relationship that we have with you. Just as scouting has enriched the vitality of this church, it is our hope that this church also contributes something meaningful to your troop.

I recently finished reading a book called *The Shack*, by William Paul Young. It is about a man who suffers a great tragedy in his life – his daughter is abducted and murdered. In his efforts to overcome his despondency and anger towards God, he returns to the site of his daughter’s abduction. There, perhaps in a dream-like state, he encounters three characters from whom he seeks advice: God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Many of us, including the main character of the book, share the misconception that the trinity is a hierarchy, with God at the top and somehow able to exert control over Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Confused, the main character acknowledges that God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are one, but adds “Isn’t one of you more the boss than the other two?” The Holy Spirit responds, “...we have no concept of final authority among us, only unity. We are in a *circle* of relationship, not a chain of command...” The trinity is a relationship that operates synergistically and harmoniously, and this is not unlike the relationship between scouting and the church. Our missions are intertwined, our commitment to service is what binds us in the pursuit of a common goal, and our partnership is mutually beneficial.

When I was in Scouting, my troop was chartered to a fire department. For a brief time we held our meetings at the fire department, until we were politely asked to meet elsewhere because we were scratching up the floor with our shoes. I’m thankful for the support our troop received from the fire department over the years, but I honestly can’t remember a single time when a member of the fire department came to one of our meetings, attended a court of honor, counseled our leaders, or expressed any interest in the well-being and advancement of the boys in our troop. Even though we were chartered to the fire department on paper, we held our meetings at various places over the years, usually local schools. I can’t help but feel that we, as the boys of the troop, missed out on a valuable relationship that we could have had with our charter organization.

A few years ago, I read *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck for the first time. In the early 1900s it was common for landowners to rent small pieces of their land to tenant farmers, who lived on the land and farmed it as if it was their own. Eventually, the landowners learned that it was more profitable to lease larger sections of their land to commercial farmers, most of whom had no connection to the land other than the fact that it was their job to farm it. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck describes the eviction of the old-fashioned tenant farmers and the subsequent arrival of the new generation of commercial farmers, along with their hired hands and industrial farm equipment. He talks about how the drivers of the modern farm tractors had no attachment to the land – they operated their machinery almost robotically, and they “loved the land no more than the bank loved the land.” The modern farmers were so detached from their crops that, come harvest time, “no man had crumbled a [a chunk of earth in his hands] and let [it sift through] his fingertips. No man had touched the seed, or lusted for the growth. Men ate what they had not raised, had no connection with the bread.” One of the farmers in *The Grapes of Wrath* ponders the value of farming a small piece of land with which one is intimately acquainted:

“Funny thing how it is. If a man owns a little [piece of] property, that property is him, it’s part of him, and it’s like him. If he owns property only so he can walk on it and handle it and be sad when it

isn't doing well, and feel fine when the rain falls on it, that property is him, and [in] some way he's bigger because he owns it. Even if he isn't successful he's big with his property. That is so."

This farmer realized that, while small farms which are run without the benefit of modern equipment may be relatively inefficient, they foster a connection between the farmer and the land that cannot be replicated. Troop 877 may be small, but in a way, this has fortified the bond between our church and your troop. It's the place where you hold your meetings and fundraisers. It's where many of you have labored for hours towards the completion of an Eagle Scout project that has helped to beautify our church. It's where the boys of your troop have proudly attended a Court of Honor to receive a much anticipated merit badge, or a hard-earned advancement in rank. It's where all of you meet at 6 o'clock on a Saturday morning before departing for a monthly trip. It's where you work side-by-side with members of our church on our fall and spring workdays. And of course, it's where you set aside a special Sunday each year to worship with our church family. Our church is your home. Those of you who have reaffirmed your dedication to the future of Troop 877 and our church as your chartering organization recognize that having more names on a roster means very little if the character of your troop, or its commitment to the values of scouting, are compromised.

Something is lost when a farmer has no connection, other than a paycheck, to the land which he farms. Likewise, it is equally disappointing when a scout troop is deprived of a valuable relationship with its charter organization. This void left by the absence of the bond between a troop and charter organization is even more lamentable when, as a result of the broken bond, the scouts suffer the consequences of being without civic, spiritual, or moral guidance.

A big part of scouting is teaching young people how to make the right decisions. This is a formidable task, but it is one that is made easier, I think, when a troop can rely on the church for support. A conscience is something that a young person develops over the course of many years, a compass that is consistently refined as one becomes more adroit at distinguishing the good choices from the bad ones. The ability to make the right decisions is something that, without effort on our part, will continue to evade us. Since the beginning of time, humans have struggled with this. In Christianity, the story of Adam and Eve is probably one of the most poignant examples. One of my favorites is the story of Hercules in Greek mythology. In *Myths and their Meaning*, the editor says that

"The career of Hercules was, on the whole, one of service to his fellow men. It is related of him that, in his early life, there appeared to him in a vision two women who stood at a crossroad.

'I am Pleasure,' said one, 'and I have many gifts for you. Here are ease, luxury and wealth; grateful friends, a happy home, and children that will remember you. You shall want for nothing, you shall endure no toils, you shall never know sorrow. Come with me.'

'I am Duty,' spoke the other. 'Choose me and you shall be ever acquainted with hardship. Rest shall be a stranger to you. Often shall you suffer pain, and grief will often rend your heart. But mankind will remember you with gratitude. You shall become a hero to your people. Your name shall live forever. Come with me.'

Unhesitatingly, in his vision, Hercules chose the path of duty; and duty is still sometimes called 'Hercules' choice.'"

People with no religious grounding or no exposure to scouting have the luxury of being able to blame their bad choices on poor parenting or a misguided youth. Last year, Troop 877 Eagle Scout Cole Ellenbogen spoke about the Parable of the Sower in the Bible. As the sower spread his seeds, some fell into rocky areas where there wasn't much earth for the roots to grasp. The sun scorched the plants that sprung from those seeds. Other seeds fell among the vines, and the seedlings were strangled as they vied for access to the sunlight. This story can be distilled down to a theme of opportunity – those whom luck smiles upon are blessed with opportunity and the rest are doomed to a miserable existence that ends badly. As Scouts, you can never say that opportunity wasn't placed before you. Your seed has been planted in fertile earth. You have had every advantage, and it is your job to mold success from the tools that Scouting has given you.

The 1964 edition of *The Standard Work and Lectures of Ancient Craft Masonry* says that

"... true manhood is in your own hands. Too many think that reputation ensures it; do not wait for that. Seek the true definition of a man and then exemplify it. Do not have two characters, one for your fellows and another for privacy. Be a true man in your own home as well as out in life...Let nothing be more intolerable in your sight than the letting down of yourself to a lower level."

I have talked today about how one of the fundamental skills in scouting is learning to make the right choices. A novelist named Herman Wouk said in one of his books that a leader is "forever teetering along a tiny path of correct decisions and good luck that meanders through an infinite gloom of possible mistakes." Making the right choices is not a concept that comes immediately within the grasp of a young person, but instead is gradually absorbed and indoctrinated over the course of many years. It is a process that comes easier when a troop has its foundation in an organization with similar and overlapping values, such as a church. There are few partnerships better equipped for helping a young person to navigate the challenges of youth than a scout troop and a church. Scout troops can be chartered to almost any organization in our community, whether it is a school, church, local business, Rotary Club, VFW, or YMCA. Perhaps there is a reason, though, that of the 115,000 scout troops and packs nationwide, almost 70% are chartered to faith-based organizations like a church. My troop was chartered to a fire department that we never really set foot in. Over the years, our meetings moved from place to place, and we never had a place that we could call "home". My old scout troop recently held an Alumni Night in which all former scouts were invited to reunite with old friends and share fond memories of our days in scouting. How sad it was that one of the hardest parts of organizing the reunion was deciding where to meet.