

Church Parade Services and Uniformed Organisations

1 Faith in Uniformed Organisations

Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade are explicitly Christian organisations but engage with many children and young people without a faith background or commitment. Scouts follow a religious policy outlined in their official rules and offer faith-related badges across most sections. Girlguiding emphasises spiritual development inclusively, with a promise that respects diverse beliefs, and badges that encourage exploration of community, culture, and values. These programmes support personal faith journeys while fostering respect for others.

I like going up at the front and taking part in the service (Elizabeth, 9)



[The Faith Journey Model - The Boys' Brigade](#)



[How our faith guides us | Girls' Brigade Ministries](#)



<https://www.scouts.org.uk/por/2-key-policies/#2.4>



<https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/information-for-volunteers/running-your-unit/including-all/religious-differences-and-guiding/>

Explaining Faith and Promises to Children and Young People

Church leaders are advised not to assume all children and young people are Christian, as membership and promises vary across organisations. Promises range from commitments to love God, in early age groups, to broader values like kindness, community service, and spiritual development without specifying religion. Explaining faith can involve analogies such as planting seeds or trusting in unseen forces like gravity or electricity, helping children and young people grasp the concept in relatable terms.

I loved the service (Jason, 5)

2 Church and Uniformed Organisation Relationships

Sustained relationships between churches and uniformed organisations develop through regular interaction and mutual understanding. Churches can support groups by appointing chaplains, nominating representatives to trustee boards, and ensuring communication channels such as newsletters and magazines include children's and youth activities. Such efforts help integrate uniformed organisations within the church community and vice versa.

They make me feel happy (Rylee, 6)



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Building and Maintaining Relationships

Suggestions for churches include providing safe and welcoming spaces, accommodating storage needs and toilet facilities, appointing children's and youth elders (see guidance [here](#)), and maintaining open communication with uniformed organisations. Churches can support by hosting exhibitions, sharing news, allowing use of facilities, and inviting uniformed groups to church events. Uniformed organisations are encouraged to respect church property, communicate their needs and plans, and invite church participation in their activities. Churches may be able to support fundraising efforts, particular badge work, provide extra volunteers for one-off events or help with publicity. Churches can pray for the leaders, the children and young people, and ask about any particular needs or concerns.

*I like singing
(Litza, 10)*

*I liked carrying
the pack flag
(Hudson, 9)*

Structure and Roles in Uniformed Organisations

Uniformed organisations have defined age ranges and leadership roles. Knowing the age range and name of groups connected with your church, and the right language for leaders of these groups, is very helpful in preparing for a parade service. For example, Scouting ranges from Squirrel Scouts (4-5 years) to Scout Network (18-25 years), with leadership roles including volunteer section leaders and assistants. Guiding is single-sex*; some Boys' Brigades are open only to boys, others include girls through The Girls' Association; and Girls' Brigades are single-sex*.

Volunteers play key roles in planning and delivering programmes, and occasional helpers from congregations can provide valuable support.

**Organisations provide gender guidance around inclusivity appropriate to local context.*

<u>Scouts</u>	<u>Girlguiding</u>	<u>Boys' Brigade</u>	<u>Girls' Brigade</u>
<u>Squirrels</u> Age 4-6	<u>Rainbows</u> Age 4-7	<u>Anchors</u> Age 5-8	<u>n:vestigate</u> Age 4-8
<u>Beavers</u> Age 6-8			
<u>Cubs</u> Age 8-10.5	<u>Brownies</u> Age 7-10	<u>Juniors</u> Age 8-11	<u>n:gage</u> Age 7-11
<u>Scouts</u> Age 10.5-14	<u>Guides</u> Age 10-14	<u>Company</u> Age 11-14	<u>n:counta</u> Age 10-14
<u>Explorers</u> Age 14-18	<u>Rangers</u> Age 14-18	<u>Seniors</u> Age 14-18	<u>n:spire</u> Age 14-18



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3 Understanding Church Parades and Their Planning

Why should we have church parades?

Church parades serve as a collaborative platform where churches and uniformed youth organisations unite to worship, grow in faith, and foster mutual understanding. These events not only encourage intergenerational participation but also promote engagement between church leadership, uniformed groups and their leaders, and congregations through coordinated planning and inclusive service design.

I like holding the flag (Meya, 7)

A parade service often involves formal elements such as the ceremonial carrying of flags or colours during hymns, which requires prior coordination and practice to ensure smooth execution. The service should be inclusive, incorporating music, scripture readings and prayers that engage all ages, with a designated leader sensitively shaping the service for both church members and children and young people as participants.

Parade services are often linked to events that combine civic and faith elements, such as Remembrance Sunday, Harvest Festival, and church festivals that are celebrated in the wider community such as Christmas, Easter and Mothering Sunday. Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade have enrolment services.

Points to Consider for Inclusivity

Given the diverse religious backgrounds within youth organisations – some explicitly Christian like The Boys' Brigade and The Girls' Brigade, and others, like the Scouts and Girlguiding, open to all faiths or none – parade services should be sensitive and welcoming to multifaith, atheist, or agnostic members. Inclusive prayer practices, such as allowing personal expressions of thankfulness without direct religious references, or silent reflection followed by optional affirmations, help create a comfortable environment for all attendees.

I would like to go out and do some crafts during the service (Sophia, 7)

Meeting Faith Commitments and Scheduling

While attendance at parade services alone may not fulfil faith-related badge requirements, involvement in planning and leadership can contribute to these achievements. The frequency and timing of parades should be agreed mutually, considering factors like competing activities and family commitments; holding the service at alternative times to traditional Sunday mornings, such as evenings or midweek meetings, might increase youth participation but could affect church attendance. Other ideas include a pre-camp service, hosting a sleepover and/or breakfast before the service, and combining with a celebration or fun after, with lunch and an afternoon of games and activities.

Reading in the church to everyone is exciting (Lacey, 9)

Where do we start?

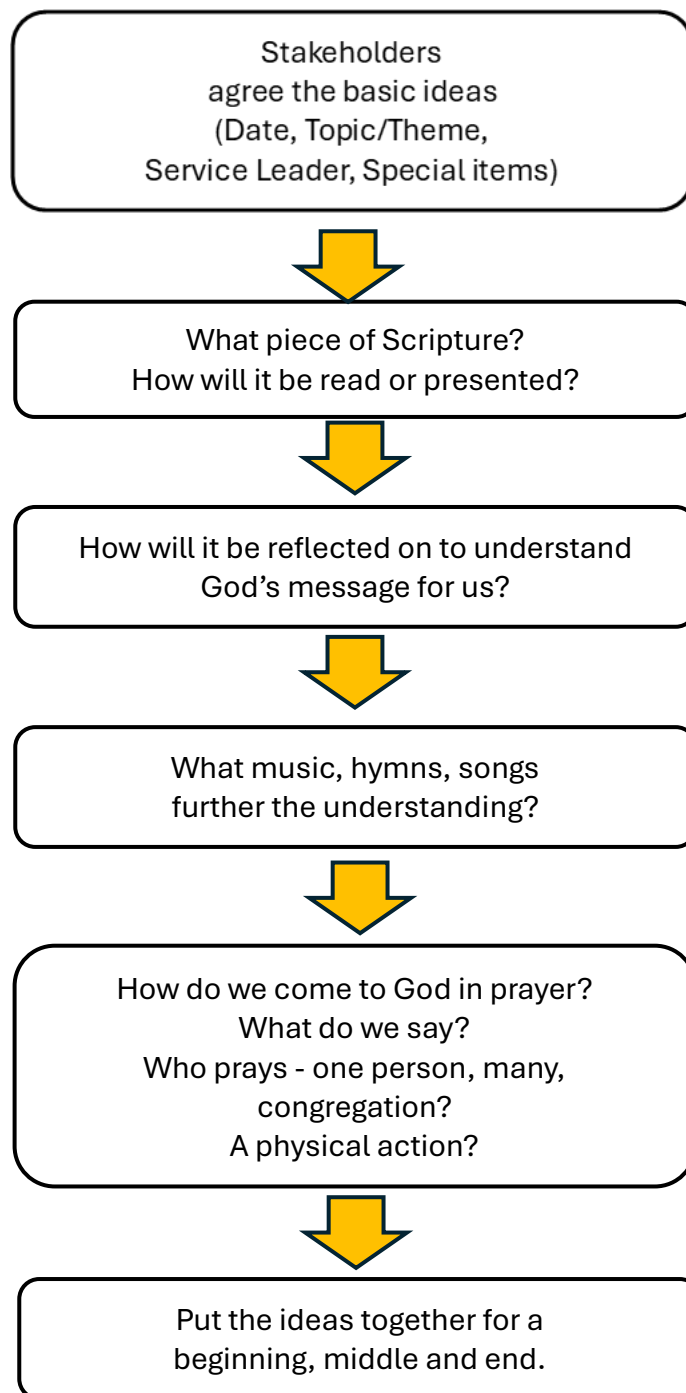
A parade service requires coordination and cooperation between the church leadership and the uniformed group leaders. It should offer engagement for the children and



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young people and the wider congregation. In the planning process there needs to be dialogue between all stakeholders so that the service is seen to be inclusive. Well in advance of the service, consideration of the choices of music, how the scriptures will be read and explored, how prayers are brought, and how people of all ages might participate, needs to be made so that all feel engaged. Many of our churches nowadays have a variety of people involved in leading worship; who hosts, or coordinates, the parade service needs consideration early in the planning process. This person will play a major part in shaping the service and how it will be received by church, the children and young people and their leaders.

*I enjoyed carrying
the Union Flag
(Wayne, 10)*



*You feel like a
big community
(Caitlin, 13)*



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How to Engage Children and Young People

If possible, ask the children and young people (either directly or through the leaders) what topic the service should be on, what they care about or what links to the badges they are working on. If possible, ask those who have been before what they like and how they feel a service could run differently. Encourage them to prepare elements of the service.

Wow, having chocolate was a winner (Ben, 7)

Effective parade services incorporate fun elements such as quizzes, drama, interactive activities, and creative use of church spaces. Worship leaders are encouraged to use novel ways to introduce themes, involve children and young people in prayers and readings, and create memorable experiences like pet parades or holding services in alternative venues. Presentation tools like projected images, videos and music can enhance engagement.

What to Avoid

Avoid practices that disengage children and young people, such as lengthy talks, excessive hymns without visual support, segregating children and young people, or assuming literacy skills. It's important not to exclude families, neglect pre-visits to uniformed group meetings, or overwhelm the service with formalities. Delegation and involving children and young people in prayers, readings and other activities are recommended to foster participation.

They are too long (Alice, 8)

Reasons Children and Young People Avoid Parades

Common reasons include complex family arrangements, conflicting sports or events, differing worship practices, or perceptions of indoctrination. Understanding these factors can help churches adapt their approach to be more welcoming and relevant.

Whacking the piñata was something else (Casper, 6)

4 Summary

In summary, church parades represent a valuable opportunity for churches and uniformed youth organisations to collaborate in faith development, community building, and mutual support. Thoughtful planning, inclusivity, and engagement strategies are essential for successful and meaningful parade services that honour the diverse backgrounds and commitments of all participants.

I would like a parade service more (Andrew, 6)



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Appendix

Resources for Supporting Faith and Parades

Various resources are available to support children and youth in faith development and parade planning. These include [prayer booklets](#), [illustrated prayer prompts](#), and online materials from the [United Reformed Church Children's and Youth Work](#). Additionally, hymn and song selections can be accessed through platforms like [CCLI](#) and [Hymnary](#). Many service planning tools, such as [Rootsontheweb](#), align with the Revised Common Lectionary cycle that many churches use.

The URC Guide and Scout Fellowship offers support: [Welcome – URC Guide and Scout Fellowship](#)

Boys' Brigade, Girls' Brigade, Scouting and Guiding websites provide specific programme and badge-related activities and ideas to integrate faith and community impact.

FUNDING

Small grants are available to local churches from URC to support strengthening relationships between local churches and uniformed groups: [Children & Youth work grants – United Reformed Church](#)

URC Guide and Scout Fellowship also offers small grants to Scout and Guide units to build links with their local church: [Grants to Scout and Guide Units – URC Guide and Scout Fellowship](#)

Posters with a prayer for uniformed organisations are available for free from URC Bookshop: [Uniformed organisations prayer poster – URC Bookshop](#)

Ideal gifts for uniformed organisations or children's/youth groups or events



URC Children Together drawstring bags
£3.25 plus P&P



URC Children Together cloth badges
£1 plus P&P



URC Youth cloth badges
£1 plus P&P

Available on request from
children.youth@urc.org.uk