

AMERICANISM HANDBOOK

SONS OF THE AMERICAN LEGION



REVISED 2016

INTRODUCTION:

One of the "Four Pillars of Service", Americanism, is possibly the broadest area of service with which the Sons of The American Legion are involved and activities are seemingly endless. To obtain a better sense of what Americanism is and the programs involved, we have compiled some basic material pertaining to Americanism. For a more detailed description of Americanism and the programs that are associated with the Americanism pillar of service visit The American Legion website at www.legion.org, click on Media, then publications, then scroll to Americanism. The American Legion Americanism manual is available as a free download along with various other Americanism program brochures. *The information contained herein is offered as a supplement to The American Legion materials.*

Principles of Americanism:

The characteristic that distinguishes our form of government from others is the recognition of the truth that the inherent and fundamental rights of men are derived from God and not from governments, dictators, or majorities. The unalienable rights, which are the gifts of man from his Creator are: freedom of worship; freedom of speech and press; freedom of assemblage; freedom to work in such occupation as the experience, training and qualifications of man may enable him to secure and hold; freedom to enjoy the fruits of his work, which means the protection of property rights; and the right to pursue his happiness so long as he does not harm others in the pursuit of this happiness. Upon these basic principles, the structure of our form of government was established.

Americanism Defined:

Americanism is the love of America; loyalty to her institutions as the best yet devised by man to secure life, liberty, individual dignity, and happiness; and the willingness to defend our country and flag against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

It is a vital, active, living force. Americanism means peace, strength, the will and the courage to live as free men in a free land. It means a friendly hand to people everywhere who respect our institutions and our thinking. It is not a word; it is a cause, a way of life – the best way of life ever known – a challenge and a hope in this world.

Americanism is an ideal of loyal patriotism, religious tolerance, righteous freedom, fearless courage, honest integrity, abiding faith in the commanding destiny of the United States, and a fathomless love for the principles that led our forefathers to found this country. It is complete and unqualified loyalty to the ideals of government as set forth in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. It is respect for, and ready obedience to, duly constituted authority and the laws of the land. It is freedom without license, religion without bigotry, charity without bias, and a desire to secure the blessings of liberty for our nation and for our posterity.

DETACHMENTS AND SQUADRONS**AMERICANISM COMMISSIONS/COMMITTEES:**

The Americanism Commission or Committee of Detachments and Squadrons are responsible for meeting the challenges embodied in those sections of the Preamble to the Constitution of the Sons of The American Legion which state: "To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America; ... To foster and perpetuate a true spirit of Americanism; To inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state, and nation; To combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses; ... To safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy." All of these

principles are concerns of Americanism commissions and committees. The development of the Americanism program in detachments and squadrons depends to a great extent upon the initiative of the Americanism chairmen. Those members must possess the qualities of leadership, vision, high idealism, and be able to inspire others of the committee and the membership to carry out the requirements of the various activities associated with the Americanism program. Americanism chairmen should be among the most patriotic and active members of detachments and squadrons.

It is recommended that squadrons establish an Americanism Commission/Committee, whose duty shall be the endeavor to realize in the United States the basic ideal of 100 percent Americanism through the planning, establishment and conduct of a continuous, constructive educational system designed to:

“(1) Combat all anti-American tendencies, activities and propaganda;

“(2) Work with their sponsoring post for the education of immigrants, prospective American citizens and alien residents in the principles of Americanism;

“(3) Inculcate the ideal of Americanism in the citizen population, particularly the basic American principle that the interests of all the people are above those of any special interest or any so-called class or section of the people;

“(4) Spread throughout the people of the nation the information as to the real nature and principles of American government;

“(5) Foster the teachings of Americanism in all schools.”

COMMUNITY SERVICE AND SAFETY ACTIVITIES:

The objective of the broad, far-reaching community service program of The Sons of The American Legion is “to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation.” One of the most lasting Sons of The American Legion contributions to American life is that of making our communities better places in which to live.

Community service is a major Americanism activity. Several good projects should be included on the program of every squadron each year. Completed projects add strength and better service to the community. Every community is in need of many improvements, and therein lies opportunity for the local squadron to take the lead in an active, aggressive campaign for community betterment. The squadron should first consult their sponsoring American Legion Post for ideas and assistance. From there they should look over activities promoted by others, decide what the community needs and set out, with the cooperation of other organizations, to accomplish its desired objectives. Active participation in community affairs promotes favorable public opinion, improves the image of The Sons of The American Legion and often increases squadron membership.

Suggested Community Service Activities

Winter – Ice skating, sledding, teen centers, hobby and craft shows, dances, forum discussions on community problems, voting activities and Americanism study courses.

Spring and Summer – Boys State, bicycling, golf tournaments, hiking, concerts, street dances, parks, playgrounds, festivals, planting trees, marksmanship, fishing tournaments and the development of swimming and wading pools and bathing beaches.

Fall – County fairs and exhibits, educational facilities, educational entertainment courses, organize a Boy Scout troop, Color Guard activities and other participatory school programs, and election activities.

These are only a few of the activities and programs that will contribute to the creation of community spirit and harmony. These suggested projects can be developed with a minimum expenditure of funds through coordination and unity of effort, coupled with imagination, initiative and resourcefulness on the part of the squadron membership.

Community Betterment

Get Out the Vote Program (GOTV): Each election is important and it is also important that all eligible voters exercise their right of franchise by casting his or her ballot. On this premise, the “Get Out the Vote” program was initiated. The concept is to organize teams in the community to see that each voter is properly registered, and on Election Day, each registered voter casts their ballot. The Sons of The American Legion can take an active role working at polling places, volunteering, helping to get voters to the polls, and encouraging everyone they come in contact with to take on their democratic responsibility and cast their vote.

Service to God and Country program:

The American Legion’s Service to God and Country program emphasizes a vital part the church must play in every community. It has a threefold goal: encourage regular attendance at church or synagogue; daily family prayer and devotion; and religious training of children. The Service to God and Country program is basic Americanism. It is not a fostering of religious worship in order to appease any element of our citizenry or to draw attention from any less desirable social activities. Since it is essentially basic Americanism, it is strictly non-denominational. When our Founding Fathers established our form of government, they based the practical workings of this government upon a new and untried political philosophy. It was a philosophy of government that had long existed in the minds of men, but had never been tried in a practical manner. They based our form of government upon the idea that the great Creator of man had endowed each and every human being with “certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” and they established the function of government as that of protecting these God-given rights.

The following literature is published by the National Americanism Commission and available through American Legion Emblem Sales.

Call 1-888-453-4466 or visit <http://emblem.legion.org> for current prices.

- “Service to God and Country” (Stock No. 755.112)
- “Chaplain’s Prayer Manual” (Stock No. 755.111)

The American Legion Chaplains “How to ...” Guide (Stock No. 23-011) may be ordered by contacting National Americanism and Children & Youth Division at acy@legion.org or (317) 630-1212.

Four Chaplains Sunday:

The first Sunday of February is set aside to honor the four religious leaders who bravely sacrificed to aid and comfort their comrades.

On Feb. 3, 1943, the United States Army Transport ship, “Dorchester” – a converted luxury liner – was crossing the North Atlantic, transporting more than 900 troops to an American base in Greenland. Aboard the ship were four chaplains of different faiths: Reverend George Fox (Methodist), Rabbi Alexander Goode (Jewish), Reverend Clark Poling (Dutch Reformed) and Father John Washington (Roman Catholic).

Around 12:55 a.m., a German U-boat fired a torpedo that struck Dorchester’s starboard side, below the water line and near the engine room. The explosion instantly killed 100 men and knocked out power and radio communication with Dorchester’s three escort ships. Within 20 minutes, the transport sank and more than 670 men died. As soldiers rushed to lifeboats, the four chaplains spread out, comforting the wounded and directing others to safety. As Dorchester sank, the chaplains were seen linked arm in arm, praying.

Fox, Goode, Poling and Washington were posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the Purple Heart, and in 1948, Congress declared Feb. 3rd henceforth to be “Four Chaplains Day”.

STANDING YOUTH ACTIVITIES:

The youth activities programs of The American Legion are designed to build physical, mental and moral alertness in youth; to cultivate in young America strong character, wholesome ideals and an appreciation for their heritage of freedom; and to develop devotion to civic responsibility. The respect and zeal for democratic institutions acquired by youths participating in the highly commendable “learn by doing” programs of The American Legion has received national acclaim.

American Legion Baseball:*Great American Tradition*

American Legion Baseball (ALB) began in 1925 and held its first national tournament the following year. Today, more than 4,600 teams and about 93,000 youngsters participate in all states and Puerto Rico. ALB consists of two divisions – seniors (19 years of age and younger) and juniors (17 years of age and younger). ALB strives to teach practical lessons of good sportsmanship and citizenship. Loyalty, respect for rules and decisions rendered, fair play, courage and physical fitness are emphasized in this activity. American Legion Baseball depends upon its posts, individual Legionnaires and other Legion family organizations, including The Sons of The American Legion to promote the activity. Enthusiastic leadership, coaches and players are available in almost every community where an American Legion post is located.

American Legion and Scouting:*Working Together for America's Youth*

The American Legion's support of Scouting began at its first national convention when the Legion officially recognized Scouting as a positive program for our nation's youth. Support has remained constant through the years with local posts chartering more than 2,500 units that serve more than 68,000 young people. Hundreds of other units benefit from financial and other forms of support from American Legion posts. The American Legion and Scouting Square Knot Award recognizes The American Legion, Auxiliary or The Sons of The American Legion members who are actively involved in Scouting.

Junior Law Cadet Program:

Many departments conduct a week-long Junior Law Cadet Program in conjunction with their state police or highway patrol academy. The program titles vary in wording, such as “Student Trooper Program,” “State Police Youth Week,” or “Law Enforcement Academy,” however, they share the same mission. Each focuses on educating youth about law enforcement, providing a day-in-the-life of a trooper in training and instilling a respect for law officials. Most departments host their program at a law enforcement training center with law enforcement officers conducting the physical fitness and classroom education training. Cadets will learn officer survival techniques, defensive tactics, firearms safety, precision driving, law enforcement technology, accident and criminal investigation, and more. Cadets are high school boys and girls who possess good moral character, self-discipline and a desire to learn about law enforcement.

American Legion Junior Shooting Sports:*Gaining in Popularity*

The American Legion's Junior Shooting Sports Program is a national activity administered through Legion-sponsored clubs organized to provide gun safety and marksmanship training for young people. The program, open to boys and girls, emphasizes proper shooting and safety techniques using .177 caliber air rifles. The program is recognized by shooting sports groups as one of the premier amateur shooting programs in the country. Any recognized youth group (school or club) with responsible adult

leadership can become involved with this program. The group/club must be sponsored by an American Legion post and affiliated with the national organization.

American Legion Boys State and Nation:

Youth Learning About Government

Boys State

American Legion Boys State is one of the most respected and selective educational programs of government instruction for high school students in the nation. It is a program where each delegate learns about the operation of his local, county and state governments. Boys State has been a program of the National Americanism Commission since 1935. Forty-nine states conduct this program serving almost 20,000 young men each year. The American Legion Auxiliary sponsors a similar program for young women called Girls State. At Boys State young men learn about the rights, privileges, duties and responsibilities of a franchised citizen. The training is objective and practical with city, county and state governments operated by elected and appointed officials placed in office by citizens of their respective Boys State. Activities include legislative sessions, court proceedings, law enforcement presentations, assemblies, bands, chorus and recreational programs. American Legion posts interview and select participants for their Boys State program after receiving recommendations from school officials. Costs are usually paid by an American Legion post, Sons of The American Legion squadron, a local business or another community-based organization.

Boys Nation

Two of the most outstanding participants from each of 49 Boys State programs are invited to American Legion Boys Nation. This activity, held annually in the Washington, D.C., area, also emphasizes citizenship education. However, it centers on the study of the federal government and its supporting agencies. Like American Legion Boys State, Boys Nation is an exercise in a two-party system of government. Each delegate becomes a senator and is assigned to one of two mythical political parties. The boys' caucus, organize into committees, conduct hearings and act on bills they introduce into the Boys Nation Senate. Organization of parties, party conventions, and nomination and election of officers all provide practical experience in government. These and similar activities create an understanding of, and an appreciation for, the U.S. system of government.

The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program:

"A Constitutional Speech Contest" -Learning About Constitution; Earning Dollars for College

The Oratorical Scholarship Program is designed to help high school students develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of the Constitution of the United States. Other objectives are leadership, ability to think and speak clearly and intelligently, and preparation for acceptance of the duties, responsibilities, rights and privileges of American citizenship. High school students are eligible to compete, subject to the rules established by the National Americanism Commission. The contest has two phases: prepared orations of eight to 10 minutes in length, and an assigned topic presentation from three to five minutes. The national competition is conducted over a weekend, usually in April, in Indianapolis. Scholarships are awarded at most levels of competition.

Flag Education Program:

Care and Respect for the American Flag

The American Legion's Flag Education Program is designed to build patriotism in our youth and all Americans and to develop a thorough understanding of proper flag display and courtesy. Flag education

has been a major activity of The American Legion since its inception, with thousands of flag education programs presented each year in classrooms across the country. Flag education in the schools fills a great need since more than half of the states mandate some form of instruction on flag education to their school districts. The Legion has produced a flag education DVD "For Which It Stands," an instructional resource for students in upper elementary and junior/middle school grades. The "kit" consists of an interactive DVD, a 40-page teacher's guide for the professional educator and an outline for use by volunteer presenters. The American Legion encourages and supports efforts to display the U.S. Flag in our nation's classrooms.

Flag Literature:

The following flag literature is published by the National Americanism Commission and is available from American Legion Emblem Sales. Call 1-888-453-4466 or visit <http://emblem.legion.org> for current pricing:

- "Let's Be Right On Flag Etiquette" (Stock No. 755.200) Contains Flag Code and American Legion interpretations of proper flag etiquette in situations not specifically covered by the law.
- "Flag Code" (Stock No. 755.201) Illustrates and describes the correct way to display the American flag.
- "For Which it Stands" (Stock No. 755.400) Consists of an interactive DVD, a 40-page Teacher's Guide and an outline for use by volunteer presenters.
- "Our Country's Flag" (Stock No. 755.300) A 20-page educational comic book relating the history, significance and proper treatment of the United States flag. Ideal for the classroom.
- "I Pledge Allegiance" (Stock No. 755.302) A 16-page educational comic and activity book teaches the meaning and importance of our Pledge of Allegiance.

SCHOOL AND STUDENT PROGRAMS:

Promoting Importance of Education

American Legion posts are encouraged to play an active role in the activities of the schools in its community. Legionnaires are encouraged to keep abreast of the many changes required to maintain a successful school system.

American Legion Legacy Scholarship...For Children Left Behind

The Legion has established The American Legion Legacy Scholarship for children of servicemen and women who die while on active duty with the U.S. armed forces on or after Sept. 11, 2001. The application is available on the Legion's website, www.legion.org, or by written request to The American Legion Legacy Scholarship, The American Legion, and P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206. Contributions to the fund may be sent to the above address.

American Education Week

The American Legion and the National Education Association addressed illiteracy in our nation in 1921 by organizing American Education Week in an effort to draw attention to the importance of education in this country. It also recognized teachers and students who performed above the norm.

Veterans in the Classroom

Veterans in the Classroom is an initiative spearheaded by The American Legion to organize a nationwide effort to connect veterans with schools and ultimately put them in the classroom. In so doing, students learn firsthand from veterans about life in the military, the horrors of war and how the service of America's veterans affected their lives and the lives of others. Students gain a greater respect and understanding of the veterans' sacrifices and commitment to service. It also allows students to focus on the true meaning of patriotism as they study real issues of America's history.

Reinvigorating Veteran Awareness

Reinvigorating Veteran Awareness is an initiative spearheaded by The American Legion to organize a nationwide effort to allow America's youth to better understand the men and women who served to protect our freedoms. It allows students to better recognize the contributions and sacrifices our veterans have made, and are making, to preserve our freedom. It also helps our youth to be aware of the issues our veterans deal with upon return to society.

PATRIOTIC HOLIDAYS:

Arbor Day

The exact date for the observance of Arbor Day is set by proclamation. However, it is generally observed throughout the United States during the months of April and May each year. The Sons of The American Legion should take the lead each year in the observance of the day because it's an appropriate time for the planting of trees as living memorials to the war dead of the community.

Flag Day

June 14 is the birthday of the flag of the United States of America. Every Sons of The American Legion squadron should observe the day with appropriate ceremonies. It is suggested that the program be scheduled to include a "Pause for the Pledge" of Allegiance at 7 pm, EDT, to coincide with Flag Day activities held at historic Fort McHenry in Baltimore, Maryland.

Methods of promoting Flag Day include the following:

1. Provide flags to area schools in your community.
2. Organize a student flag squad to raise and lower the school flag each day.
3. Promote the ownership and display of a U.S. flag in your community.
4. Distribute copies of the "Flag Code", "Let's Be Right on Flag Etiquette", and "Our Country's Flag"; all three publications available from Legion Emblem Sales.

Independence Day

To celebrate our nation's independence – the birthday of our great republic – Sons of The American Legion squadrons are encouraged to sponsor and conduct appropriate activities in their communities.

Memorial Day

Thousands of American Legion posts with the assistance of Sons of The American Legion squadrons conduct Memorial Day services in their respective communities. They decorate veterans' graves and scatter flowers upon the water in memory of the sailor dead.

It is suggested that all speeches used in Memorial Day services be strictly in the nature of a tribute to or eulogy of the dead of all wars, as distinguished from Veterans Day speeches, which are to commemorate military service.

Veterans Day

Veterans Day will always have a very deep personal significance to many members of The American Legion, The American Legion Auxiliary and The Sons of The American Legion. All squadrons are strongly encouraged to observe the day with appropriate ceremonies. Some may choose a community observance while others may opt for a school program.

TEN IDEALS AND FIVE STAR PROGRAMS: Material from existing handbook

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