

Girl Scouts centennial  
Washington National Cathedral  
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**The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori  
Presiding Bishop and Primate  
The Episcopal Church**

A hundred years! Happy birthday, Girl Scouts! I became a Girl Scout more than 50 years ago, and what I remember of those early years has made a big difference in my life, as I hope it has for you. Learning to identify birds, or how to plant trees, tie knots, or build a fire, are important skills that teach us about the world around us. So are the things we learn in Scout troop or by going to camp. We meet girls from different cultures and backgrounds, we try different foods, and we learn to live together in community. I still remember the strange and wonderful peanut butter and honey sandwiches I ate at Girl Scout camp at age 7, and crying when I had to go home at the end of the week!

The skills of living together in community are the most important thing we learn – those gifts of character like dignity and respect, and helping others. A flight attendant on the plane yesterday asked me what I was working on, and when I told her, she said, “I was a Girl Scout, and so is my daughter.” You can meet them everywhere! Having courage and a sense of responsibility to help people do make the world a better place. Those gifts of character make life worth living.

I heard recently about students who are doing what they can for a classmate with a brain tumor<sup>1</sup>. That’s not all – this sixth grader’s mother died three years ago, and his father has lost his job. The student has started treatment, but it’s a very deadly kind of cancer. His father has gone overseas, looking for work. The student, his stepmother, and stepsister asked the school for help when they were evicted from their home. The other students have been raising money to help in any way they can. Three first grade girls are baking cookies to sell in their neighborhood, and they’ve convinced some people to pay quite a lot for each cookie. Others are jumping rope and getting sponsors to pay pledges for their efforts. Some are simply asking people to help. In less than three months, these students have together raised more than \$80,000 for their friend and his family.

Like some other cookie merchants we know, those girls and their classmates are pretty good examples of the promise Girl Scouts make. They understand that their friend is in a load of difficulty, and they’re doing what they can to help. They are taking responsibility to help make the world a better place.

Anyone can help. Right after the earthquake in Haiti a couple of years ago, I was visiting a church gathering in Cuba. Every day of the meeting they took up a collection for disaster relief in Haiti. And they kept saying, “We don’t give out of our abundance, we give out of our

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-lopez-sickboy-20120425,0,889920.column?page=1>

poverty.” They understood that they were doing the same thing as the widow we heard about in the gospel of Luke.

That ‘poor widow’ wasn’t necessarily old. In Jesus’ day, she could have been a teenager, for girls were married even as children, which still happens in some parts of the world today. People didn’t live very long, and if her husband died, she couldn’t just go out and get a job. The poorest people in that society were widows and orphans and immigrants, and without a husband or father, she would likely end up as a beggar or a street person. Yet this widow is willing to share everything she has. She puts in her two cents worth, and it makes a world of difference.

That’s a big part of what it means to be a Girl Scout. We promise to serve God and our neighbors, and to help make this world a better place by living in caring and respectful ways. Every faith represented here has something very significant to say about that way of living. Our relationship with God teaches us how to love, and that looks always like caring for the world and people around us.

That widow, and the schoolchildren, and the people in Cuba, used what they had to help the people around them. They gave themselves away for the sake of others, and they did it in ways that are profoundly respectful of their own dignity and the dignity of others. That is the foundation for a worthy life, and a meaningful one. Use what you have been given – who you are, and the gifts and skills you’re developing – to make a difference. That is how we serve God and our neighbors – by loving them.

Do that, and I expect that Girl Scouts will still be helping girls grow into mature and confident women, sharing and serving the world around us a hundred years from now. There is nothing in life more important than using our compassion to help heal the world.