

YMCA RAG/LEATHER PROGRAM

THE BLUE RAG

Instructions:

This is not a part of the ceremony that is to be read aloud, but should be studied carefully by all Ragers who have parts in conducting the Ceremony.

In the presentation of the rag, there is a very close, inter-personal relationship with a strong emotional impact. Your sincerity in what you are doing and saying as you take part in the ceremony and as you welcome the Ragger into this new step is an element, which makes for a meaningful experience.

READING

People with special parts should speak loudly, clearly, and slowly. As you prepare, if there are words that are unfamiliar to you, ask about them. Remember to speak in a warm, personal tone. Be sure to read your part over in advance several times so that you know what you are saying.

HOW WE LEARN

We learn best by the "feeling" that moves between us, rather than by just what we say. Show a deep feeling of affection for those who are accepting the blue rag.

Explanation during the ceremony appears in parenthesis and are not to be read aloud.

This ceremony should be held in a secluded spot away from camp, including in any one ceremony only the number of people for which space is available at the Ragers' Point.

FOR INTERNATIONAL USE

Under "Devotion to God," you may wish to substitute the words: "My Country" for "America" or insert an appropriate international poem.

PERSONNEL NECESSARY FOR THE BLUE RAG CEREMONY;

Keeper of the Point
Four Counselors
Voices one, two and three
Guides for the candidates
Chaplain

Ideas For Making Your Rag Ceremonies Special

Use music.

PERSONALIZE: i.e., "Tom, whom do you bring?"
"I bring Kathy and Ben, who wish..."

Use readings, scriptural and others that are personalized to reflect the individual's counseling sessions. Use them at the end, or interspersed throughout the ceremony.

Speak slowly and clearly, use pauses.

Be purposeful and serious; no unnecessary talking.

Open and close with prayer.

Everyone should be standing or sitting behind or to the side of the candidates when they take off their blindfolds, so they have an unobstructed view of the point.

Whenever possible, have one person guide each candidate up the trail. This is more personal and intimate than the "chain gang" method and eliminates the need for spoken instructions on where to walk.

Be conscious of rustling papers, etc. Plan ahead when pages will be turned.

Go over the sequence of events at the point beforehand, to eliminate uncomfortable pauses while we figure out "What's next."

At night, candles provide a nice light at the point if it is safe and regulations permit.

Put a rag on the cross that symbolizes the ceremony in progress.

Keep the blindfold on the new Ragers until all wishing to speak privately with him/her have had the opportunity. Ask the newcomer(s) to sit and be comfortable during this time.

Allow time after for the new and old Ragers to share some personal thoughts before the ceremony is closed.

Leave the newcomer(s) alone at the point after the ceremony. Be sure to tell them that you'll be waiting a few yards down the trail.

The Blue Rag – A Challenge of Loyalty to God Country, One’s Best Self, and the Ragers’ Creed

CEREMONY

GUIDE: (New ragers to be blindfolded)

You are now leaving behind the noise of everyday life and entering upon a journey that will make you aware of the presence of God. We want you to join us in a quiet and serious hour with God. I urge you to be silent so as to hear Him speak through the stillness, through the voices or others, and from within your heart. The blindfold is merely to help you free yourself from distraction. Listen to the voice of God. Be aware of your feelings, to be aware of what is happening to you as you proceed along the trail. You may be feeling a certain amount of apprehension, perhaps even fear. Think of these words from Isaiah 41:10:

“Fear not, for I am with you.”

Let us pray. (Guide offers a short prayer.)

(Guide leads Ragers(s) to the Counselor of the Outer Gate.)

COUNSELOR OF THE OUTER GATE: Guide, whom do you bring along this trail?

GUIDE: Counselor of the Outer Gate, I am bringing one (those) who wish(es) to accept the challenge of the Blue Rag.

COUNSELOR OF THE OUTER GATE: You were asked to learn the Ragers’ Creed in studying for the Blue Rag. You will recall the first line:

“I would be true, for there are those who trust me.”

Being true includes being true to one’s God, to one’s Country, to others, to one’s self. To be worthy of trust, we must strive to earn that trust. William Shakespeare in “Hamlet” wrote:

“This above all: to your own self be true, and it must follow, as the night follows the day, you cannot then be false to any man.”

Consider this: You who are blindfolded have shown your complete trust in us. Those who trust us that deeply are certainly worthy of trust themselves...of passing through this gate.

The second line of the Ragers’ Creed is:

“I would be pure, for there are those who care.”

“Pure” to a Rager means to be a real person. It means a person who can be counted upon, who won’t let you down when you need him...his actions and his words are the same.

“It is not what he has, nor even what he does, which directly expresses the worth of a man, but what he is.”
(Henri Amiel)

You may now proceed to the second counselor, but as you proceed, consider how you feel...what sounds are you aware of?

SECOND COUNSELOR: Guide, whom do you bring along this trail?

GUIDE: I am bringing _____, who wishes to accept the challenge of the Blue Rag.

SECOND COUNSELOR: The third line of the Ragers' Creed is:

"I would be strong, for there is much to suffer."

When we speak of strength, we are speaking of strength of character, as well as body.

"Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from a courageous will."
(Mahatma Gandhi from "The Prophet")

The fourth line:

"I would be brave, for there is much to dare."

You face dares every day of your life. They appear in the form of challenges. Bravery means facing life and managing to overcome obstacles that occur throughout your life.

"No man is worth his salt who is not ready at all times to risk his life in a great cause. And the duty of life is to face it fully and honorably as we possibly can."
(Theodore Roosevelt)

We challenge you to go out and meet the challenges of life with courage and self-confidence.

You may now proceed to the third counselor.

THIRD COUNSELOR: Guide, whom do you bring along this trail?

GUIDE: I am bringing _____, who wishes to accept the challenge if the Blue Rag.

THIRD COUNSELOR: The fifth line of the Ragers' Creed is this:

"I would be friend to all the foe, the friendless."

"Blessed are they who have the gift of making friends, for it is one of God's best gifts. It involves many things; but above all, the power of going out of one's self and appreciating whatever is noble and loving in another."

(Thomas Hughes)

We read from the Bible:

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."
(John 15:12-15)

I challenge you to be a friend to all. Sometimes those who are hardest to be friends with are the ones who most need friends.

This sixth line of the Ragers' Creed is this:

"I would be giving, and forget the gift."

"You give but little when you give of your possessions, it is when you give of yourself that you truly give. It is well to give when asked, but is better to give unasked, through understanding."
(Kahlil Gibran from "The Prophet")

You may now proceed to the fourth counselor.

FOURTH COUNSELOR: Guide, whom do you bring along this trail?

GUIDE: I am bringing _____, who wishes to accept the challenge of the Blue Rag.

FOURTH COUNSELOR: The seventh line of the Ragers' Creed is:

"I would be humble, for I know my weakness."

"Nothing will make us so charitable and tender to the faults of others, as by self-examination, thoroughly to know our own."
(Fenelon)

You need to know yourself first in order to know and accept others.

The final line of the Ragers' Creed is:

"I would look up, and laugh, and love and lift."

To a Ragger this means life and our ideal of the way to live it. The opposite is to look down, to not care.

One man put it this way:

"There are two ways of living; a man may be casual and simply exit, or constructive and deliberately try to something with his life. The constructive idea implies constructiveness not only about one's own life, but about that of society, and the future possibilities of humanity."
(Jullian Husley from "Essays of a Biologist.")

By living our lives in constructive ways we can hope to change things for a better world.

"Life, be it happy or unhappy, fortunate or unfortunate, is the only good that man possesses and he who does not love life is unworthy of life."
(Casanova from "One Love of Live")

You have completed your journey throughout the four gates. You may now enter the Ragers' Point.

KEEPER OF THE POINT: Guide, whom do you bring along this trail?

GUIDE: I am bringing _____, who wishes to accept the challenge of the Blue Rag, and has (have) met four counselors along the trail.

KEEPER OF THE POINT: You have traveled a difficult trail to reach this point. You have heard the meaning of the Ragers' Creed. You are being challenged to live by the traits set forth in the Creed...trust, character, strength, courage, friendship, giving, humility or self-knowledge, and the desire to live a better life. I congratulate you on your desire to accept these challenges.

Listen now to three voices:

VOICE #1: DEVOTION TO GOD

"Live your life while you have it. Life is a splendid gift. There is nothing small in it. For the greatest things grown by God's Law out of the smallest. But to live your life to the fullest, you must discipline it. Make your thoughts, your acts, all work to the same end, and not self, but God."

VOICE #2: DEVOTION TO COUNTRY (For international use change "American" to "My Country")

America is a unique way of life symbolic of the creative arts.

America provides the brushes, oils, pigments, and the canvas on which you can paint your life as you want it to be. You choose your own colors, your own form, design, and pattern.

America is any tune you want to play with fife and drum, fiddle or horn to establish the beat and rhythm of the upward march to high goals.

America is a book in which you set down your life by the way you live it. You are the principal character. You LIVE your own biography. You are free to be hero or villain, great or mediocre.

America is a stage, and the role you play in the drama of life is up to you.

America is a sports arena, and the rules are written so everyone has a chance to win.

America is an engineering achievement, a bridge over which you can cross the chasm of despair.

America is an architecture with which you can build the tower of your dreams.

America is a sculptor's hammer and chisel with which you can fashion yourself into the person you aim to become.

America is an art of living through which you can reach higher, think bigger, grow greater, and live deeper than anywhere else on earth.

VOICE #3: DEVOTION TO ONE'S BEST SELF

I have to live with myself, and so
I want to be fit for myself to know.
I want to be able, as days go by,
Always to look myself straight in the eye.
I don't want to stand with the setting sun,
And hate myself for thing I have done.

I don't want to keep on a closet shelf,
A lot of secrets about myself,
And fool myself as I come and go,
Into thinking that nobody else will know,
The kind of man I really am.
I don't want to dress up myself in sham.

I want to go out with my head erect,
I want to deserve all man's respect;
But here in the struggle for fame and wealth
I want to be able to like myself.
I don't want to look at myself and know
That I'm bluster and bluff and empty show.

I can never hide myself from me,
I see what others may never see.
I know what others may never know,
I never can fool myself, and so,
Whatever happens, I want to be
Self-respecting and conscience free.

KEEPER OF THE POINT; Perhaps the best way to sum up that which is presented in the Ragger's Creed is this passage from the Bible:

"Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure,
Whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence,
If there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

If you wish to accept the challenge of the Blue Rag, please respond, I do.

You may now take the position of the Blue Ragger, kneeling on your **right** knee. Think, for a few moments about the personal challenges which you have taken.

(While tying the Rag, a few words of encouragement should be shared with the new Ragger. As soon as the Rag is tied, have the person sit down, still blind folded, and be comfortable. Other Ragers may wish to speak personally with the new Ragger. When all Rags are tied and everyone is finished with their personal talks with the new Ragers, the Keeper of the Point asks for the blindfolds to be removed. Ragers may take their appropriate positions around the emblem or everyone may sit outside the circle.)

You see before you the Emblem of the Ragger. Each Ragger takes the position appropriate to his Rag. It is traditional that no Ragger enters the portion of the Rag Emblem reserved for other Rags. The circle stands for the circle of friendship of all YMCA's and people around the world – wherever they may be. The square represents the foursquare life of a true Ragger: physical, social, spiritual, and mental. The triangle stands for strength because it is the strongest geometrical figure known to man. Because of this strength – we have named the three points: Body, Mind, and Spirit – to remind you to keep the challenge that you have accepted for yourself. And at the center of our emblem and at the center of our hearts – lies the cross. It appears so that we won't forget the wonderful lesson that Jesus taught to us through His life – His example and His words. (An appropriate story may be told.) Shall we repeat, or sing, the Ragers' Creed?

I would be true, for there are those who trust me;
I would be pure, for there are those who care;
I would be strong, for there is much to suffer;
I would be brave, for there is much to dare.
I would be friend to all – the foe, the friendless;
I would be giving, and forget the gift;
I would be humble, for I know my weakness;
I would look up, and laugh, and love and lift.

We will ask our Chaplain to lead us in short prayer, followed by all of us joining in the Lord's Prayer.

As you leave this place as a Blue Ragger remember that you should no longer be the same person that you were just a short time ago. You have now taken upon yourself a new stature, that of being loyal to God, Country, One's Best Self and the Ragers' Creed. May God bless you richly in this new step that you have taken for Him. (The new Ragger(s) may remain at the point to meditate after the others leave.)

Revised 5/2014