

A SCOUT'S DEVOTION

by Keith Monroe

The idea was modest when 13-year-old Evan Hunsberger visualized an Eagle Scout service project as a Good Turn for two military bases near his home in Orange, Calif. Evan's inspiration was a frayed book, *Strength for Service to God and Country*. The pocket-size devotional had been used by his grandfather, Eugene Hunsberger, during service as a Navy corpsman (medic) in World War II, a pharmacist's mate in Korea, and for more than 60 years as a Scoutmaster.

Originally issued by Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, a United Methodist Church publisher, the book contained a page for every day of the year, with a Bible verse, a short prayer, and an inspirational message or story by a leading Protestant clergyman or other leader of the era. Eugene Hunsberger had read pages to lonely or wounded servicemen in hospitals and later to Boy Scouts during campfires. Hundreds of chaplains had used the book, but it went out of print after the war in Korea ended in 1953.

Evan learned that most chaplains lacked a similar source for providing spiritual comfort to the men and women in today's armed forces. As a service to the military, and a tribute to his grandfather (who gave his blessing to the project but died before it was completed), he decided to print a new edition of the book for distribution at the nearby Los Alamitos and Camp Pendleton military bases.

Evan wrote letters, made telephone calls, and sent e-mails in an effort to obtain the needed permissions to reprint the original text and obtain additional material. His fellow Boy Scouts from Troop 241, classmates from Servite High School, and his parents, brother, and sisters all helped him update the original text and add new material so all faiths could use the book's new version.

Evan sought new prayers from theologians, priests, rabbis, and Muslim clerics, and he received more than 40, including ones from Cardinal Roger M. Mahony, Duke Divinity School professor Karen Westerfield Tucker, United Methodist Bishop Ernest Lyght, Dr. Robert H. Schuller of the Crystal Cathedral, and Calvary Chapel's senior pastor Chuck Smith. New prayers were added for Jewish holy days, like Yom Kippur, and Islamic holy months, such as Ramadan.

Progress was slow at first, but interest—and the project's scope—grew as more people became aware of the effort. The General Commission on United Methodist Men agreed from the start to Evan's request to sponsor the project and promote wider distribution of the new edition, which would be published by Providence House Publishers of Franklin, Tenn.

A computer company in Orange scanned the original pages to computer disks for free. Each weekend for three months, four Scouts from Evan's troop and 12 to 30 others, including adult leaders, college students, and classmates, corrected hundreds of typographical errors on the more than 400 scanned pages. Then there were four more months of editing from school, home, and office, and five months of formatting.

Following the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, the Department of Defense agreed to order up to a million copies, for distribution to military personnel around the world. The National Council of Churches and other interfaith groups and chaplains' organizations offered to help distribute the book to police and fire departments and other outlets. The General Commission on United Methodist Men began a nationwide effort to raise \$3 million to fund the publishing of the books for the military.

For his efforts, Evan, who is Catholic, was honored by the United Methodist Church with its Good Samaritan Award. The award honors youth who demonstrate the attributes of a minister to others

through outreach or humanitarian assistance. On Memorial Day, three years after Evan began his project, the first 10,000 copies of the new book were scheduled to be sent to military bases.

And in June, Evan—who had postponed completing his Eagle requirements to concentrate on his project—finally received Scouting's highest rank.