

COVENANT OF THE GODDESS NEWSLETTER



IMBOLC 2018
VOLUME 43
NUMBER 2



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Sun, Sky and Leaves Knotwork by Spiralpathdesigns

As is consistent with the values and beliefs of our religion, the Covenant affirms our belief in the spiritual and social wisdom of peace in the world. We aspire to stand in fellowship with the people of all religions, cultures, and ethnicities in our shared desire for peace. We do this for the sake of our shared love of the Earth and all living things that dwell upon it.





MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS DUE AT OSTARA

Ostara renewals are due on **March 21, 2018**. The Drop-dead date is **March 31, 2018** after which your membership will lapse and you will need to reapply. Renewal forms are emailed to the email address on file from your last renewal. If you have NOT received this form, please contact the National Membership Officer immediately (membership@cog.org).

CALAFIA LOCAL COUNCIL:

- ❖ Circle Angkur

CHAMISA LOCAL COUNCIL:

- ❖ KariIsis

EVERGLADES MOON LOCAL COUNCIL:

- ❖ Witch & Famous

HILLS AND RIVERS LOCAL COUNCIL:

- ❖ Coven of the Wolfa
- ❖ Moonfire Coven
- ❖ Jodi Affuso

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA LOCAL COUNCIL:

ORANGE COUNTY LOCAL COUNCIL:

- ❖ Coven of Bran-Faol Rennag
- ❖ Greenwood Glen

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA LOCAL COUNCIL:

- ❖ Circle of the Dragon and the Phoenix
- ❖ Ghostwheel

TEXAS LOCAL COUNCIL: NONE

TOUCHSTONE LOCAL COUNCIL:

- ❖ Temple of the Sapphire Sky

NATIONAL COVENS:

- ❖ Dragon Weyr Circle
- ❖ Raven Star Coven

NATIONAL SOLITARIES:

- ❖ Birch
- ❖ Peter Hertzberg

NATIONAL ASSOCIATES:

- ❖ Araminta Star
- ❖ Joel Bjorling



REPORTS OF OFFICERS

FIRST OFFICER

No report given.

SECOND OFFICER

No report given.

MEMBERSHIP OFFICER

No report given.

PURSEWARDEN

CURRENT ASSETS

Chase Main Account: \$70,973.39
 Wells Fargo Interfaith Checking: \$5,588.83
 PayPal Account: \$9,672.07
 Synchrony: \$31,226.39 (as of 12/31/2017)

CURRENT AND PENDING ISSUES & ACTIVITY

We have had a series of delays in getting data to close the books for FY 2016-2017. So, there has not been a customary draw-down from PayPal or a final close of activity for FY 2016-2017. Much of the data is now available and I hope to have a final FY report in the next couple of weeks. I will then make a request for auditors on AIR.

The Synchrony CD will require a multi-step process which will be very slow (snail mail and hand signatures). I will keep us updated on the status.

Once that the final accounting is complete for the previous fiscal year, I will follow-through and create a savings account in Chase and transfer \$25,000 as the Deborah Ann Light gift so it is secured away from the operating budget.

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

Since my last report, I have been investigating alternatives for a PIO page on the COG website. I have decided to create a new page on Wordpress that can be linked to COG.org. It will be similar and share links to other COG local council sites, and pagan sites. I will be reaching out to the membership encouraging the local councils to share their events and activities with me so we can make them more public.

I have been researching Cisco WebEx. Next step is to add actual customer reviews. Stachia and I will have more information in the next couple of weeks. I would like to post a request on AIR to see if membership has used their service.



I have not heard back from Calafia and resent an email to attempt a connection. Checking with them on their meeting schedule to attend one in the near future.

Preparing my presentation for the Conference on Current Pagan Studies on *Integrity and Authenticity through Social Media: A case study examining current digital communications by Pagan organizations and identifying best practices that highlight and maintains integrity and authenticity.*

PUBLICATIONS OFFICER

Tax Season is in full swing and I am considering just setting up a cot in the break room. These 8am to 7pm shifts are a bear!

I am trying to keep the website current, but may lag a bit due to tax season. I'm behind on the Beyond the Veil articles for those who recently passed. Please feel free to send any corrections, new content, or events for the calendar to webweaver@cog.org. Likewise, please send submissions for the newsletter to newsletter@cog.org. If you want to read something other than the lack of local council reports, please send me something!

Blessings,
Stachia Ravensdottir

CORRESPONDENCE OFFICER

I have been responding to inquiries forwarded to me from Info@cog.org. These range from general information requests, to pleas for magical help, to suggestions for the COG website, to requests for interviews, and more.

I am keeping a binder with all correspondence and replies, for the use of future NCOs.

Needed next are:

1. An NCO Manual
2. An information packet for incarcerated correspondents
3. A very general information packet about Wicca/Witchcraft

I will be working on these over the next couple of months.

I also sent to the Board three proposals distilled from the last Leadership Institute, for the improvement of COG. I understand these will be on today's Board agenda.

Blessed be, Amber K

NATIONAL RECORDER

The minutes of the prior Board meeting, the Grand Council minutes, updated bylaws and policy manuals were all forwarded to the Publications Officer prior to the December publication deadline. According to the Policy Manual, as Recorder I am supposed to supervise the Review Committee, but I am waiting for instructions to proceed from the Board as there were some questions about the Review Committee and what exactly it will be doing that have not been answered. I have sent the Recorder Manual to Lady Emrys (a prior National Recorder who volunteered to review it) and am awaiting her response.

WELCOME TO COG



Please welcome:

- ❖ None this issue

NATIONAL BOARD MINUTES

~ January 14, 2017

Attendance: First Officer (Canu), Second Officer (Lady Circe), Membership Officer (Thea Bristlebroom), Pursewarden (Manny Tejeda-Moreno), Publications Officer (Stachia Ravensdottir), Correspondence Officer (Amber K), and Public Information Officer (Janine Nelson) were all present. Recorder (Morgana RavenTree) was unable to attend.

The meeting commenced at 6:00pm EDT.

A quorum of the current Board members was present.

Evaluation Of Leadership Institute Goals And Items For Cog: Three goals from the Leadership Institute were discussed:

1. Streamlining the full Membership process and creating a nonvoting membership
2. Job description and funding for professional staff person
3. CoG National Board comprised of Local Council representatives (current officer positions would become volunteer staff).

Streamlining the full Membership process and creating a nonvoting membership: This is within the purview of the Path to Membership Committee. Streamlining this process needs to be a priority. This goes along with creation of a nonvoting membership which would include some perks like a tote bag, the newsletter, etc. This is something other nonprofits have done. You support the organization financially and receive benefits in return. "Streamlining" could mean responding more quickly when applications are accepted for publication, or is there something we can do ahead of that to make the process more efficient. This dovetails with the issue of nonvoting members. This



issue may be handled by the Path to Membership Committee and they can contact local councils to come up with proposals. They may also contact to find out how they handle nonvoting memberships (i.e. do they do the administrative work in-house or do they outsource the administrative tasks).

The National Membership Officer Thea noted that there is also a concern that "membership" is a protected class and there are people in the Covenant who may have issues with using that word for nonvoting "members".

The National Correspondence Officer Amber K asked who will be responsible for checking with other nonprofits, do research on implementation and draw up proposals.

The National First Officer Canu and National Pursewarden Manny discussed the issue of barriers. Manny says he does not believe members sense the crisis we are in now. There doesn't seem to be a sense of what to do about this in the long term. Also, there are barriers to becoming a member and we seem to confound the role of clergy with the role of member. Canu responded that membership is not focused on clergy, but we do some things internally so that for officer positions there is a focus on members who are eligible to be clergy. He added that the main barrier is people saying they are witches or Wiccans, but those are different barriers than when we started the organization. Manny said the issue of barriers and the criteria to join CoG is not consistent with ethical agreement of becoming a member, including letters of recommendation, etc.

Amber K asked again who will carry this forward and who is on the Path to Membership Committee. Thea responded that the committee has fewer than 10 people and this won't necessarily happen before the next Grand Council. The committee should be able to come up with a strawman proposal, but she won't be able to start that until March. Canu said the committee members are Azrael, Canu, Deborah Bender, Zenah, Diana Kempert, Kasha, Jack Prewett, Monica Di Franco, Darius, and Thea. Canu will volunteer to bring it to the Path to Membership Committee and try to be the point person. It may take a couple of Grand Councils to resolve these issues. National Second Officer Lady Circe commented that people in this organization are too hung up on words like "member" and she anticipates pushback. National Publications Officer Stachia added that any time we try to make something quicker, someone makes an objection that they need time to review someone's applications. We can't streamline if we insist on waiting 60 days for people to object when an application is published in the newsletter. Canu said at some point a modern organization must have a better way of vetting members. We should review our bylaws if we really require people to be witches or Wiccans. We have been viewed as exclusionary.

We need to have something ready to discuss at next Grand Council.

Job description and funding for professional staff person: AmberK said we have been discussing this for years. We need to have a job description and specific proposal for funding such a person, but we need someone to be a point person for this. Thea suggested starting from the previous proposal that was passed at Grand Council. AmberK said it was approved at Grand Council at the one before last, but it hasn't been implemented. Manny said it would be helpful to have someone to help process receipts, enter QuickBooks. He's concerned we can't pay enough. He sees this as more of an Executive Director position, but we only have \$12-13K available. A fair compensation is beyond what we can pay. AmberK said there's what we think is fair compensation and then there's the question of what a candidate thinks is fair compensation. Someone who is retired may want supplemental compensation. Manny countered that he was talking about what Labor Law says and how the IRS decides what is adequate compensation. The more this person does the more difficult it is to claim this person is an independent contractor, not an employee. National Public Information Officer Janine noted that the proposal resulted from research about this position. We would review after a year. We should look at the proposal made 2 years ago and look at the details and where we are right now. Amber K will be point person and provide an update at the next meeting.

CoG Board comprised of Local Council representatives If we have a Board comprised of representatives from Local Councils, the officers would still be doing much of the administrative work. We wouldn't lose National Officers, but gain a policy board.

Amber K said we need a proposal, something in writing that people can look at. An open question is how that would fit into the bylaws. Canu suggested National Members should be represented, too. The members need to have something in writing they can review.

Conflict of Interest Forms: Manny needs to modify form. Morgana looked at it as well. This is in progress.

Purchase of D&O Insurance: Manny reported that this is also in progress.

Webmeeting Alternatives: Janine looked at Cisco's WebEx and put together some bullet points on what she found. She received some input from Thea, who also has practical experience with using WebEx. Up to 25 people per meeting costs \$29/month or 200 people per meeting costs \$39/month. We could save up to \$10 with an annual plan. Stachia asked WebEx about discounts for nonprofits but they haven't responded. She can show what it looks like. Thea said zoom has almost all the same features but hides them. WebEx has a



“sample” where we can try a meeting so that may be a way to do it.

Appointment of a Religious Awards Coordinator and Location of Materials: AmberK was already appointed as our new Religious Awards Coordinator and requested the materials from the past coordinator. She hasn’t received them yet. Canu said Becky asked to be reimbursed. AmberK said she contacted Becky and assured her she would be paid. AmberK will follow up.

Credentials and Wall Certificate; Handfasting Certificates: Thea wasn’t given preprinted forms. She would like any example copies, including electronic ones to prepare them for printing. Anna Korn is helping her with credential renewals. Stachia sent Thea some electronic forms she had.

MerryMeet: Lady Circe asked where the email to National Second Officer, MerryMeet or Grand Council go. She also asked about a MerryMeet web page. Stachia said Touchstone paid for the URL last year. Whoever hosts MerryMeet is responsible for content. Lady Circe also needs to get on the PayPal account for MerryMeet. Manny said it would be easiest to set up a new PayPal account. The MerryMeet website was not on WordPress.

Schedule of National Board Meetings for 2018: this schedule was published in the Yule newsletter.

Newsletter Formatting Requirements: Stachia doesn’t have a problem with the formatting variants she receives. The Officer Reports are published in the newsletter separately, so they don’t need to be in the minutes.

Review Committee for Policy Manual: This was discussed at last NCLC meeting. NCLC would like to offer to take on this project with Morgana as the nominal Chair of this project. Thea or Anna will contact Morgana.

Board Members Receiving Attendance Funds: Generally, Board members can share a room with any other person, not just another Board member. It is intended to cover a Board member at a double occupancy rate.

Morgana also asked (by email) at what point we should start booking flights/hotels for Grand Council. Attendees will book their own rooms, and we’ll have a link to register with the event which will be published by Ostara to ensure hotel rooms are in our block and get our rate. Attendees can book flights at any point.

Elist for Paying For MerryMet: Jack asked if an elist be set up for paying for MerryMeet. Canu asked Stachia to have Jack contact him with a request for a list to be setup for this purpose so work can start.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:41pm EDT.

TRANSITIONING FROM COVEN TO SOLITARY



AMBER

Orange County AoS
California

Transitioning from Hearth of Ember

First publication – Yule 2017
Second Publication – Imbolc 2018

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATIONS



NONE

Local Council
State

LOCAL COUNCILS



CALAFIA

~ No report

Last published minutes in the Ostara 2017 edition.



CHAMISA

~No report

Last published minutes in the Yule

2017 edition.



EVERGLADES MOON

~ No report

Last published minutes in the Mabon 2017 edition.



HILLS AND RIVERS

~ No report

Last published minutes in the Mabon 2017 edition.



NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

~ No report

Last published minutes in the Litha 2017 edition.



ORANGE COUNTY

~ No Report

Last published minutes in the Beltane 2017 edition.



SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

~ No report

Last published minutes in the

Mabon 2017 edition.



TEXAS LOCAL COUNCIL

~ No report

Last published minutes in the Samhain 2017 edition.



TOUCHSTONE

~ No Report

Last published minutes in the Mabon 2017 edition.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

I am stepping down as Chair of the Social Justice Committee. By the time of the January Board meeting I will have announced it on AIR. As I have expressed before, it was never my intention to lead this committee and it was certainly never my intention to set up a blog (I didn't even know how). I believe I was "chosen" to be Chair because I am one of the few Pagans of Color left in the Covenant. The committee was formed shortly after the Black Lives Matter debacle and at the time, that seemed to be important. I now believe either a) I'm the wrong person for this job, or b) there is no serious commitment within the Covenant to social justice issues. Probably both. I'm OK with that, because in spite of the urging of the person who first proposed the formation of this committee, social justice was never a mandate of the Covenant. I have struggled to keep this committee and the blog going for nearly 2 years, and I do mean STRUGGLED. It's time to face reality and turn my attention to other matters. I don't think it helped that when the committee was formed, and at the 2016 Grand Council, the "members" insisted that "social justice" should go beyond "racial diversity" and include elder rights, environmental issues, women's rights, gay rights, etc. Many people who promised me articles for the blog (indeed they insisted we have a blog in the first place) never came through.

If anyone disagrees with me about the value of having a Social Justice Committee, I invite you to prove me wrong and step up to leadership of this committee. I will be happy to turn over the blog to anyone who thinks they can make a go of it.

Meanwhile, I intend to start a new blog, not connected to COG (and therefore unrestricted by its policies) focusing on issues more relevant to me, including issues of racial and ethnic identity, racial bias, and yes, comic books (it's been a hot topic for certain segments of comic book fandom for a while now)."

INTERFAITH

THIS IS WHY I PARTICIPATE IN INTERFAITH WORK

By Andrea Kendall

On January 17th I participated in one of my favorite local interfaith activities. A group of us are invited to a Religions of the World class at Warner Pacific College which is a liberal Christian Liberal Arts school.

We are invited at the beginning of the semester and at the end. The first time we are invited we sit in front of the class, talk about ourselves, what brought us to interfaith, what keeps us in interfaith, and the challenges we face in our interfaith journey.

This year the panel included my friends on the *Interfaith Council of Greater Portland*

- Muslim - Shaylene Haswarey (also known as the *Hijabi Jump Rope Mom!*) Who attended for the first time
- Atheist - David R Gray (he goes by Dave), who has a great signing voice
- Christian - David Mitchell, who plays a mean trumpet
- Retired Christian Minister - Barbara Campbell, who shared her church with a very liberal Jewish group and created a service to mourn the death of Rabbi Jesus
- Christian and co-runner of our local group - Kyra Butler, who also manages a Domino Pizza store
- An offshoot of the Mormons - Valerie Walker (head pastor) & Daniel (new kid on the block), Valerie lets us use her amazing church. Daniel fresh out of seminary school
- Wiccan - Andrea Joy Kendall, always the one willing to go first

After the class, my favorite Religions of the World teacher, Cassie Trentaz, sent us the following feedback.

Thank you to you all who could make it yesterday.



I know we're never able to do as deep of a dive as we'd like. So many stories were left untold. And yet, your presence and what you did share was incredibly important for starting off this semester well. I cannot pay you what your presence is worth, but here are a few things that students said on their "gut checks" at the end of class about what stuck out to them, as a token of their gratitude and mine:

"I really enjoyed this class. I was thought-provoked and am inspired."

"I thought it was awesome how vulnerable they all were and also very honest."

"What stuck out to me was Dave had a very good message about being compassionate. I think that is very needed today."

"There seems to be a shared joy about learning about others' faiths and beliefs."

"What stood out to me was the Muslim woman and her story about her brother-in-law and her decision to make change in her family and be an open house. That's something I see myself doing."

"This was a beautiful thing."

"I just don't see this very much these days."

"I learned so much and gained some faith in humanity after listening to today's speakers."

"I'm thankful for each person's willingness to move on from people who have judged their beliefs and practices."

"gut check = different communities coming together is possible. Thankful for your vulnerability."

"It stuck out to me that people from all sorts of religions and backgrounds can come together and have civil conversations."

"What stuck out to me was the sentiments shared by each member during anyone's story."

"I enjoyed hearing Dave as a person of non-faith on an interfaith panel. It made me feel like I'm not the only one."

"I enjoyed hearing Barbara's story about being able to join with another faith to do an important ceremony together. Every person in this group has passion for each other and what they believe."

"I am a person full of questions."

"I'm thankful that you took time to spend with us and being light hearted about the subject. 'Nobody has the whole story' really stuck out to me."

"I have been exposed to interfaith my whole life and it is so amazing to see people acting on this type of love."

"I was greatly surprised to find out something like this group exists. It was good for me to break some stereotypes today."

"I wish the world could be like this."

"Everyone was so open in discussing everything which was comforting. It was also very comforting to hear someone of the Muslim faith supporting the LGBT community. I don't think I've ever really heard that and I needed it."

"It was really nice to see people of different religions and beliefs not only talking about their beliefs but also being so close and together."

"I am grateful to hear about the Wiccan culture. I had no idea."

"What stood out for me was how proud each and every single one was when it came to speaking their mind."

"It's inspiring how cooperative and loving you all are toward one another. Very genuine. Thank you for your real kindness."

"I felt love and openness in the room. It was powerful."

"Thank you for sharing your stories. That's how we can all learn."

I know that was not 40+ but those not quoted shared sentiments expressed by their peers. Thank you from us all. Be watching for an invitation to return to class at the end of the semester (23 April) to hear from the students more one-on-one about their learning this term.

I am grateful for you all.

Cassie.

Knowing that these young minds will be part of the leaders of tomorrow. That in my own small way I am shaping the way they see the world, is all the motivation I need.

Anyway, I just wanted to share this with you all.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

THE OLD WAYS: IMBOLC

From Vol 23 Issue 2

Imbolc 1998

By Doug & Sandy Kopf

Contemplate the Sun in early February. The days are growing slowly longer. The Sun is waxing in His power, but you will not become truly aware of His strength until after Spring Equinox. On the Earth, the Sun's new warmth is beginning to melt the snow in the mountains. The rivers and streams are filling with the Waters of Life. The dormant seeds are warmed by the Sun and nourished by



Mother Earth, even though they may still be hidden under a blanket of snow. They begin to germinate and grow but, depending on where you live, may not become visible for many weeks.

This is a time of hope and expectation. It represents new life, purification and new beginnings. Our ancestors rejoiced at the first indications that the promises of Yule would soon be fulfilled. Today, Imbolc is often seen as a time for Dedications and Initiations: rituals of new beginning. Many groups celebrate Imbolc as a Festival of Lights. White or pale blue candles may be lit during the ritual and taken home to burn later, when a magickal new beginning is needed. This is a good time to make a personal rededication to the Craft and to the Goddess, reaffirming vows or making new ones.

This is also the time to invoke the Maiden by all Her Many Names. All of the Maidens have in common the aspects of youth and virginity. They represent the freshness of the new season, as the warming Sun and melting snows reawaken the Earth to life. It can be very effective to fill a Cauldron with dry ice, then melt it by pouring warm wine from the Chalice onto it. Use the melted liquid to bless magickal items such as tools and crystals.

This festival has many names. It was celebrated among the Celts as Imbolc (meaning 'in the belly' and pronounced 'Immel') or Oimelc ('ewe-milk'), among the Greeks as Antihestia, the Festival of Flowers and among the Romans as the Feast of Juno Februata, the Virgin Mother of Mars. The month of February takes its name from this Goddess and the following month, March, takes its name from Her Son. The Antihestia gives us the lovely custom of wearing crowns of flowers for this holiday. The custom in Greece was to place a flower crown on any child who had reached the age of three during the past year. It was also the time for tasting (and giving gifts of) the new wine.

Candlemas, another name for the festival, was originated by the Christian Church. Roman Pagans held candlelight processions in honor of Juno, thus offending the Patriarchal Christians. When they refused to stop, Pope Sergius tried to turn the festival to a form of Christian worship by renaming the holy day and declaring it a celebration of the Purification of the Virgin Mary. He wrote, "Undo this foul use and custom and turn it to God's worship and our Lady's... so that now this feast will be considered solemnly hallowed through all Christendom." Old custom held that a woman was "unclean" for forty days after childbirth and this holiday fell forty days after the date chosen to celebrate the birth of Jesus. (The Church later tried to abolish the Candlemas celebration, declaring that Mary could not be rendered unclean by giving birth to the Son of God and thereby needed no purification, but the attempt was unsuccessful.)

Many modern Witches have adopted the name Candlemas to their own use (turnabout's fair play!) because it is prettier, easier to pronounce and easier to spell than names like Imbolc and Oimelc.

February 2nd is celebrated in Scotland and Ireland as the Feast of St. Bride (in the Highlands, February 13th). Bride (or Brigid) was canonized by the Church when they were unable to banish Her from the hearts of the people. The accepted date of the celebration is also the one fixed by the Church. The actual date usually falls somewhere around the fifth of the month. It can be determined by using the dates of the Solstice and the Equinox, then finding the mid-point. This is the first actual day of Spring. Contrary to popular belief in the mundane world, the Spring Equinox in March is mid-spring, rather than the beginning!

In Ireland, the day may be celebrated by the filling of a basket with soft grass and flower petals to make a "Bride's Bed." An image, or "corn dolly", known as a brideo'g, is then created and laid in the bed. When the bed has been made ready, the women open the door and invite the Goddess to enter. They say, "Bride is welcome! Bride is come!" In some areas, the brideo'g is left near the hearth overnight. A wand, usually a rowan or birch branch, is placed in the bed with the image, in hopes the Goddess, Herself, will make Her presence known during the night. In the morning, if marks from the wand are found in the ashes of the fire, it is considered a good omen. At least one group in our area carries out this practice. It is a moving ritual, well worth trying. While you are making the brideo'g, use this chant:

*Brigid, You of many names,
We become Your living flames!
Light the candles, sing Her praise.
As was done in elder days,
Light the candles, Sing Her Praise!*
(by Pat Devin)

The customs in Wales also involved candles. One of them is a very practical one. Sometime in autumn, the oldest woman in a household ceremoniously presented a lighted candle to a younger woman, for use in the outhouses. On February 2nd, the young woman returned a lit candle to the giver. It was considered that artificial light was no longer necessary after Canhwylau (Candlemas). Another custom required the lighting of two candles on either side of a chair. Each family member would then sit in the chair and take a drink from a horn goblet. The vessel was then tossed backwards, over the head. If it landed upright, it signified a long life for the person who threw it. An early death was in store, if it landed bottom up.

The rowan tree, also known as the quickbeam, bears several connections to Imbolc. In the Sacred Tree Alphabet, rowan is the second tree, Iuis. The corresponding month begins January 21



and ends February 17, placing the festival in the middle of the rowan month. This is the festival of the "quickenning" of the Earth, and the rowan is known as the Quickenning Tree, or the Tree of Life. The bonfires lit in honor of Brigid traditionally contained rowan wood. (The Gaelic word "luisiu" means "flame.") The magickal red berries of the rowan tree are said to contain sustenance equal to that of nine meals, to heal the wounded and to add a year to the life of a human who partakes of them. Therefore, this time of the reawakening of the Earth to life bears a logical association with the rowan, the Flame of Life.

Our ancestors predicted the weather according to the conditions on Candlemas day, as is shown in the following nursery rhyme from the Middle Ages:

*If Candlemas day be fair and bright,
Winter will have another flight;
But if it be dark with clouds and rain,
Winter is gone and will not come again.*

This has survived into modern times. In the United States, February 2nd is commemorated as "Groundhog Day." On this day, it is said, the groundhog (notably, Puxatawnee Phil) comes out from his winter sleep. If he sees his shadow (i.e., the day is sunny), he will run back into his hole, and winter will continue for six more weeks. If he is not frightened by his shadow (the day is overcast and cloudy) he will remain outside and winter is done! Of course, our British and European ancestors had never seen a groundhog. The little burrowing animal, sacred to Brigid and seen as a weather predictor, was a hedgehog. When the first settlers arrived on this continent and found no hedgehogs, they adopted the groundhog to fill his place.

The groundhog (or hedgehog) custom may, actually relate to something much older: the worship of serpents. It is sometimes said that, early on Bride's Morn, the **serpent** comes out of the hole. There is an old hymn, of which only one verse has been found:

*Early on Bride's Morn,
The serpent shall come from the hole,
I will not molest the serpent,
Nor will the serpent molest me.*

However, the words vary according to area and one version is:

*On the day of Bride of the white hills,
The noble Queen will come from the knoll,
I will not molest the noble Queen,
Nor will the noble Queen molest me.*

The comparison of the two verses could indicate that, in some early era, the festival that we celebrate at Imbolc was dedicated to a Serpent Goddess.

So, now we know that flower crowns, lighted candles, rituals of new beginnings and Groundhog Day are all customs rooted in The Old Ways. Bride is Welcome! Bride is Come!

THE MUSEUM OF THE BIBLE AND THE 'CHRISTIAN NATION' FALLACY

From Wall of Separation,

8 Jan 2018

By Rob Boston

Katherine Stewart, a friend of Americans United and author of the very compelling book *The Good News Club: The Christian Right's Stealth Assault on America's Children*, penned an interesting opinion column for yesterday's *New York Times* about the new Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C. If you haven't yet read the column, I recommend that you take a look. You'll be enlightened – and probably disturbed.

Stewart writes that the museum, which opened last year, masquerades as an objective look at Bible but in fact has a clear political perspective.

"If you walk in thinking that the Bible has a single meaning, that the evidence of archaeology and history has served to confirm its truth, that it is the greatest force for good humanity has ever known and that it is the founding text of the American republic – well, then, you will leave with a smile on your face and a song in your heart," she observes.

Stewart asserts that the museum "is a safe space for Christian nationalists" and notes that the facility has already hosted two conferences led by Religious Right figures – California pastor Ralph Drollinger, who has long run a fundamentalist Christian ministry aimed at government officials, and the actor Kirk Cameron. Cameron's event was pitched as a "national family gathering" but stressed the idea that the United States can only survive if everyone embraces far-right forms of Christianity.

None of this is surprising when one remembers that the museum is the brainchild of Steven Green, president of the Hobby Lobby chain of craft stores. Green, you will recall, was so determined not to allow his low-wage retail workers to get access to birth control through the company health care plan that he took his case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court and won.

Given Green's extreme right-wing religious and political views, it's not surprising that his museum would host groups that parrot the "Christian nation" line. But it's still disappointing, and here's why: The real story of the development of religious freedom in America is an incredible one; it's a story all Americans deserve to hear.



Consider this: The Massachusetts Bay Colony, founded in 1620, was an intolerant Puritan theocracy, and its harsh view of church-state relations was exported to other colonies. Yet 166 years later, the Virginia legislature passed Thomas Jefferson's *Statute for Religious Freedom*, a measure that protected freedom of conscience for all people, Christian and non-Christian. The Virginia Statute clearly influenced James Madison's version of the First Amendment's religious liberty provisions, which became part of the Constitution in 1791.

The story of how theocracy gave way to a nation that is a haven for religious freedom is remarkable. It's filled with larger-than-life characters like Roger Williams, Jefferson, Madison, John Leland and a host of others – politicians, pastors, judges and laypeople who joined the struggle for religious liberty but whose names might not be remembered.

We should be proud of their accomplishment. The founders (and the men and women who supported their ideas) left us not a "Christian republic" where the rights of others would merely be tolerated but a country that is a true beacon for freedom of conscience. Today we have a nation where Christians of all stripes, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Pagans, Wiccans, atheists, agnostics, Humanists and people who aren't sure where they stand are free to worship (or not) as they see fit, a place where no person can be molested by the government because of his or her theological beliefs. Our laws recognize no heresy, and our government has no official theology.

That diversity shows that our system has worked, but that's not the only piece of evidence. Around the globe, people suffering under the iron heel of religious oppression look to America's arrangement of religious freedom protected by a church-state wall with awe and longing.

The Museum of the Bible does touch on some of these historical topics in a small exhibit, but as Stewart points out, the events it is hosting and the museum's overall approach indicate that an honest representation of the evolution of religious freedom is not the facility's true intent.

That is unfortunate. What bothers me about the "Christian nation" crowd is not only that they don't recognize our country's incredible achievement, but that they treat it with disdain. They remain enamored with the Puritans' vision, and they are seduced by a line that has been promoted by every theocrat at every point in history: My religion is right, and therefore it should be embraced by the government and forced onto others.

For hundreds of years, this belief held sway in Europe. And, because there were competing versions of what constituted the "right" religion, it spawned no small amount of conflict, war and violence.

The development of freedom of conscience and religious freedom in the United States showed that there was a better way. The story of how we got there is inspiring and remarkable. It's a shame there's no single museum in the nation's capital to tell it.

WHAT'S HAPPENING AROUND COG?

REACHING FOR THE MOON

Greetings, CoGKin! EMLC is taking a quick break from prepping for Grand Council to bring you the Imbolc episode of Reaching for the Moon your favorite podcast put together lovingly by your Florida WitchKin.

In this 39th episode of the podcast you'll find:

- FOODOO - where Qabal (your National Pursewarden) teaches you how to make Spanish Hot Chocolate
- WORKSHOPS - featuring Shaylee's wonderful Intuitive Tarot class
- COYOTE'S CORNER - in which we learn about the Cairns of Bridget with Coyote Morningstar
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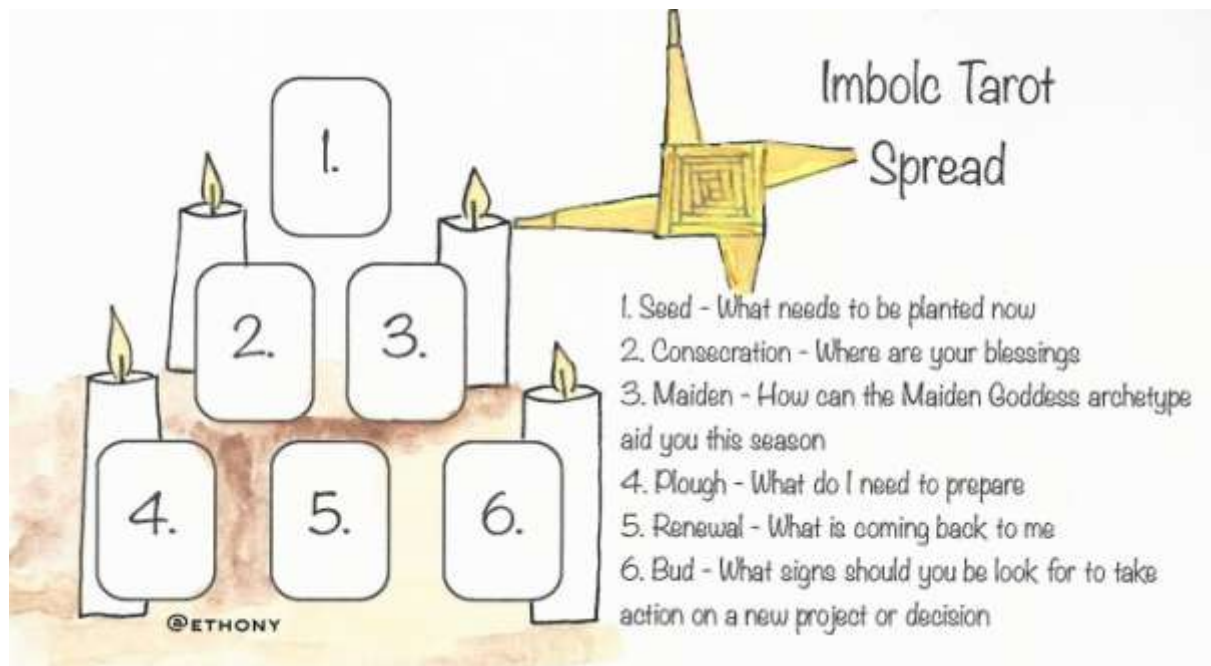
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