

Why Pagan Pride?

Job discrimination. Difficulties with landlords, neighbors. Harassment, up to and including assault and battery. Parents disowning their children; family members turning away. Awkward pauses in conversations. "Why don't you ever come to the office Christmas party?"

Sound familiar? Unfortunately, it does to many people. And each issue listed above is too often faced daily by people of "different" sexual orientations, and "different" religious beliefs.

Like gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, Pagans cannot always live their lives openly and honestly because of the fear that surrounds them. Because the issues and goals are similar -- to reduce societal xenophobia until no one needs to hide his or her "difference", whether that be who he loves or who he worships -- when I wanted to start a movement to promote understanding and acceptance of Pagan spiritualities, the phrase "Pagan Pride" came immediately to mind. Far from trying to either steal from or invalidate Gay Pride, Pagan Pride owes a deep debt of gratitude to the Gay Pride movement for its achievements. We hope we can improve attitudes towards earth-based spiritual practices as much as Gay Pride has towards sexual orientations. Through our information resources, public events, and media contacts, we hope to challenge intolerance through education.

We wish not only to reduce discrimination against us, but to present the value that our paths can bring to society, while emphasizing that we do not seek converts but ask that each person honor the Divine in the manner that seems best for him. Major corporations are adding diversity statements and programs to their human resources areas. They aren't just being tolerant - they are learning to value plurality of opinion, background, and viewpoint, especially in an increasingly global community. But there are still people who would never make a racial slur, or discriminate based on gender, but who still discriminate on the basis of religion, because they believe that there is only one valid religion, or because they simply are misinformed about other religion's practices.

Too often valuable contributions are ignored because of misunderstandings - mistaken beliefs that Pagans sacrifice people or animals, that Pagans practice nothing more serious than wild orgies and debauchery, that Pagans are out to steal souls. In fact, members of modern Pagan and NeoPagan religions tend to value ecology as an extension of their view of the Earth as sacred and all life as interconnected; hold a paradigm that embraces plurality, supports civil rights, and advocates personal freedom; hold ethical standards that require personal responsibility; be well-read and interested in learning; focus on self-help, emotional and psychological growth; and be keenly aware of each person's right to believe as he chooses, believing that to impose one's beliefs on another is harmful.

While some people feel that the phrase "Pagan Pride" is too confrontational, the result accomplished through the word "Pride" in the gay/lesbian community states to me that it is an effective phrase to communicate how we feel. We will not hide in the shadows any

longer, practicing our spirituality privately because we fear reprisals from members of monotheistic religions. We are not ashamed of the Gods we reverence and the ways we celebrate! We are coming "out of the broom closet". Ours is not a path for everyone; you are encouraged to practice what spirituality you will. But we now claim the right to take pride in what we practice.

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