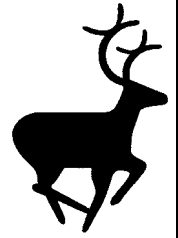




The Journey...



Official Newsletter of Church of the Spiral Tree - an Ecumenical Pagan church

President's Point

2012 is just around the corner. It should prove an interesting year with all the theories regarding the meaning of the Mayan calendar and calendars from other ancient cultures. There is no doubt that our precious Mother Earth is going through some mighty big changes, but then planets are not stagnant objects. They have a life of their own as recognized by most of us involved with Earth-based religions. According to the articles on geology that I have read, Mother Earth is reaching a peak in a cycle of approximately 100,000 years as it heats up and cools off. Of course there are cycles within cycles. At this time, the Earth is in a heating phase of the cycle, which is not at all being helped by greenhouse gasses, pollution, and the destruction of the precious rainforest. As a result, I am certain that 2012 is going to be an eventful year in many ways but especially in climate and geological events. I cannot claim to know nearly enough about geology and planetary cycles to make any definite predictions, nor would I want to. However, I do find that there are some with a lot of fear and apprehension about the events in the year to come. Basically, all we can do is the best we can to help ourselves and each other as events occur.

I do find it almost amusing when some prophets predict "the end of the world." Mother Earth has been around 54 billion years. I don't think she is going anywhere. Life as we know it, well, that's another subject all together. In Earth-based religions, we recognize that our beings, our energy, are deeply connected with the energy of our planet. Hence, we may be in for

another year of wild rides with crazy weather, earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunamis, etc that affect our moods and outlook. I think it is important to know that as beings that are more based in energy than matter, somehow, we will get through this time and hopefully come out the other side as more enlightened beings with a greater appreciation and reverence for our connection to and responsibility for our Dear Mother Earth. I do not think this should be a time of fear. It should be a time of anticipation. Challenge brings strength and growth. Challenge often brings out the best in human beings. Let us all go forth into 2012 with an attitude of eager anticipation and confidence that, as our planet evolves, so shall we as individuals and as a race. Happy New Year wishes to Mother Earth and all her creatures.

So Mote it Be.

- **Cathy Rankin, President, CST**

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Yule 2011, #45

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CST Directors:

President	Cathy Rankin
Vice President	Linda Kerr
Secretary/Treasurer	Stephen Bradford
Member-at-Large	Charissa Iskiwitch
Member-at-Large	Cynthia Jurkovic

CST Staff:

CST Admin Assistant	Linda Kerr
Sacred Grove Academy Director	Patricia Greer-Middleton
Sacred Grove Educational Consultant	David Michael M.Ed.
Pagan Prisoner Ministry	Charissa Iskiwitch
Military Affairs	Vincent Andrews
Ministerial Director	Cynthia Jurkovic
Newsletter Editor	Linda Kerr
Webmaster, CST & Sacred Grove	Linda Kerr
CST Founder/Advisor	Linda Kerr

Circle of Life

☞ Birthdays for January-February-March! Happy Birthday to the following CST members:

Shyra W. (January 1)
Michael H. (January 11)
David I. (January 12)
Charles S. (January 19)
Jennifer R. (January 25)
Jacob C. (February 2)
Jenna B. (February 4)
Jesse G. (February 5)
Danielle C. (February 8)
DC W. (February 9)
Kevin A. (February 15)
Johnna A. (February 25)
Catherine R. (February 25)
Joanie T. (March 3)
Jeremy F. (March 5)
Evelyn F. (March 6)
Leah R. (March 7)
Andrew P. (March 8)
Cliff L. (March 11)
Cathy R. (March 11)
Dennis M. (March 15)
Pat G. (March 22)
Siryn D. (March 22)

Newsletter Deadlines

Our newsletter, "The Journey," is an important outreach tool to our members; as such, CST is committed to publishing this newsletter on a regular quarterly basis. Publication dates and deadlines are as follows:

March 21 (deadline: March 1)

June 21 deadline: June 1)

September 21 (deadline: Sep 1)

December 21 (deadline: Dec 1)

Please note that these deadlines are **firm!** Any submissions received after these dates will be published in the following newsletter.

Our Board of Directors meetings are held around the cross-quarter days (Imbolc, Beltane, Lammas, Samhain), to allow updates and news from these meetings to be published in the next newsletter.

Who Are We?

Church of the Spiral Tree (CST) is a non-profit, volunteer-staffed, ecumenical Pagan/Wiccan church, designed to foster and celebrate a sense of community and family among Pagans, both locally and in other regions of the country/world. CST celebrates the unique Pagan family: parents, children, elders, and extended family. It is an ecumenical church in that it encompasses all traditions, and is non-exclusive. It welcomes all who revere the Earth Mother and who respect themselves and others, regardless of which tradition one is affiliated with.

CST was incorporated in August 1997 to provide a legal, tax-exempt status to the Pagan community. This status enables us to offer to the community a variety of open rituals that anyone may attend, to ordain ministers, and to extend our tax-exempt status to sub-groups of CST. One of our projects has been the forming of a Pagan cover school program for homeschooling families in Alabama: (Sacred Grove Academy). CST also has a Community Relief Fund, so we can collectively donate money in the name of an established Pagan church to individuals in need and to disaster relief efforts, including the American Red Cross. CST is also pleased to offer a Pagan Prisoner Ministry, which provides outreach to incarcerated members, and a Military Affairs Committee, which offers support to deployed Pagan military personnel.

Info About Our Services:

Ministers: CST, being a church, may ordain any member age 18 and over as a minister. The fee for this is \$50.00, and you must be a current paid member and must have been a paid member for at least one year prior to applying for ordination. This ordination is for life; you do not have to maintain your membership to continue to be a CST minister, but we would really appreciate it. Each year we have to renew our "Registered" status in various states in order for our ministers to be legal, and your continued membership fees help pay for this. Ministers are entitled to perform legal weddings, baptisms, and funerals. Ordination as a minister does not automatically confer "Elder" or "High Priest/ess" status upon anyone.

Subordinate Organizations:

The main form of a local CST group is a Grove. This can be formed by at least three paid church members, who apply to CST for a charter. If you are interested in forming a Grove, simply find two other like-minded friends, and encourage them to send in their membership to CST, then apply to us for a Grove charter. The application and first year's fee is \$35.00. Note that whomever forms a Grove and runs it, including writing and performing rituals and teaching mysteries, does not automatically become a "High Priest/ess."

If you have important news that you would like to share in Happenings or Circle of Life in the Ostara edition of "The Journey," please email your info to Linda Kerr at info@spiraltree.org, or mail to CST, P.O. Box 8396, Columbus, GA, 31908, no later than March 1, 2012.

Church of the Spiral Tree News

New BoD Members

We want to welcome and thank our new Members at Large to the CST Board of Directors, Charissa (Cris) Iskiwitch and Cynthia Jurkovic. Both of these ladies are bringing years of experience in Pagan leadership and education to the BOD and thus to CST. Currently, Cris is actively working on recruiting, networking, fundraising, and expanding the Pagan Prison Ministry in ways that just were not possible for Cathy and Linda to do alone with their other responsibilities as president and vice president. We have assigned Cynthia to lead the project to develop a program to screen, educate, and credential future CST ministers. As CST is growing and expanding, it is important that we have some process by which we can be sure our ordained ministers are representing CST in a positive way. Ministers that are already ordained through CST will be grandfathered in but are welcome to work the program if they so choose. Both of these ladies are extremely capable and just a wonderful asset to CST and its members.

Upcoming Radio Show Interview

On Monday, December 19, Rev. Cathy Rankin and Lady Charissa Iskiwitch will be guests on the Community Voice at AM 1330 WLBB in Carrollton, GA, with Colin Worthington at 8:30AM. They will be there to talk about Paganism and Pagans in the community. They plan to focus on what Paganism is as a religion or spiritual path and how Pagans are in the community as normal everyday people that the average person sees everyday. Worried at first that this was a reporter trying to sensationalize the Turner family situation, Lady Charissa researched the radio station's show, and found that it seems to be a nice half hour long show that focuses on items of interest to the community. Colin has done topics like World Alzheimers Day, interviewing candidates, talking about upcoming events, etc. She then called him and spoke with him about what he was looking for, making it clear that they could not talk about the Turner incident beyond what is in the publicly issued statements. He assured her that he does not want to cause anyone in the family any more trauma and is really more interested in finding out more about Pagans. He seemed genuinely interested. So Cathy and Lady Charissa are going in, and will be prepared with talking points and answers to questions he might ask. Hopefully we can report further on this in the Ostara issue.

Turner Family Assistance

Church of the Spiral Tree was honored to be able to provide assistance to the Turner family in Bowden, Georgia (see article on next page). CST was able to offer funds from our Community Relief Fund for immediately-needed gas, groceries, and repairs to the family's home, and aided by Pagan Assistance Fund Grove (PAF, CST's newest grove), has also donated furniture, food, and clothing to the family. Dragon Hills Grove is providing labor and materials for needed repairs. PAF is giving toys to the family for Yule that were donated to PAF's Toys for Yule Program; Green Gate Grove and Dragon Hills Grove each collected quite a few toys over the past few months. CST also gave the Turner family a complementary one-year family membership, so that the family knows that they are not alone; that Pagans are a community that help provide and care for their own. As members, the family is automatically eligible for assistance through the CST Community Relief Fund which is designated specifically for CST members as funds are available. Further monetary donations to either CST's Community Relief Fund or to PAF would be appreciated, so that more help can be offered as needed, not only to the Turner family, but to other Pagan families in need.

New CST Staff

Reverend Vincent Andrews is now the official CST Chaplain of Military Affairs and liaison for Fort Benning. Vincent has been approved to represent CST as a direct faith based group leader which is a requirement to lead rituals on a military base. Anyone that has been to one of Vincent's rituals know what a great ritual leader he is. Vincent and his wife Regina are retiring in Columbus, so having him to work with the U.S Army and Fort Benning is a true blessing. Rev. Marcus Rice, our first and previous Chaplain of Military Affairs, did an awesome job of laying the ground work for this ministry and has acted as a resource for Vincent. Marcus, Kim, and their children may be living in Arkansas but they are sorely missed here and will always be a huge part of CST as life members. We have every confidence that Vincent will continue to successfully build an awesome program on the foundation that has been laid.



The Turner Family, Bowden, Georgia

You may have heard about the saga of the Turner family in Bowden, Georgia. At Samhain, when their Pagan orientation became known, they began experiencing prejudice and discrimination in the local public school system. Below is the original article published December 3 that drew attention to their plight, followed by a statement released on December 7 by North Georgia Solitaries (NGS), Covenant of the Goddess (CoG), Dogwood Local Council (DLC), Lady Liberty League (LLL), and Circle Sanctuary. Following a meeting at the school between the school officials, the mother, and the task force which pulled together to provide support to the family, a statement was released on December 13 by the Bowdon Elementary School, Carroll County School District, and members of the Turner Family Support Task Force as represented by LLL, NGS, CoG, DLC, and Circle Sanctuary. Finally, as of press time, we are able to publish an upcoming statement from Circle Sanctuary, CST, CoG, DLC, LLL, and NGS.

Please note that throughout this time period, Lady Charissa Iskiwitch, founder of North Georgia Solitaries and the Pagan Assistance Fund, and newly-elected Member-at-Large of Church of the Spiral Tree, has been heavily involved. She was instrumental in gathering support for the Turner family, after contacting the family and creating the Facebook page "Turner Family Support" (<https://www.facebook.com/turnerfamilysupport>). She contacted Selena Fox with the details of the case, at which point they formed the task force between the various organizations, and together were able to bring about a positive resolution for this family in less than 10 days. We are proud that Lady Charissa is associated with CST.

Children Have Rights Too!!!

Submitted by Anonymous on Sat, 12/03/2011 - 11:04pm
<http://atlanta.indymedia.org/local/children-have-rights-too>

Christopher Turner, an 11 year old student from Bowden, Georgia, is your every day kid. He plays basketball down the street with his friends, he is a straight A student, and he likes to go to church every Wed. with his friends because he finds it fun and like to socialize. What makes a straight A student who loves school to be fearful of returning to school?? Bullying, plain and simple.

When bullying happens it is usually taken care of by the school, but what happens when a mother's cry for help gets no answer? What happens when the faculty at the school are the ones doing the bullying? Nothing apparently, except for even more discrimination and harassment.

Towards the end of October the Turner family was getting very excited for Halloween, or for them Samhain. For them it is not just a time to get free candy and dress up for a night, but rather it is a holiday to give thanks and to remember ancestors for the lives they lived. Samhain fell on a Monday, and like any other religious holiday, Christopher did not attend school. The next day Christopher's teacher, Mrs. Ross, pulled him out of class and proceeded to drill him about Paganism, ending the conversation with "Paganism is not a religion." Remember, this is an 11 year old student, with no parent present while being harassed about his religion by someone who is suppose to be an educator.

Christopher's mother, a single mother of three, immediately called the Carroll County Board of Education. She was transferred to Mr. David Goldberg, assistant Superintendent. He apologized and assured her that her son had every right to Freedom of Religion in school. He promised that a meeting would be set up between the teachers of all three of her children with the principal of the school present, but she was never given the opportunity to also be involved in these discussions. Is this what our school system has come to? Secret closed door meetings about our children, belittling students in front of their peers, pulling 11 year old children out of classrooms in order to bash them for what they believe in? It's a pretty disgusting way to run our education system, but I guess that's how Carroll County likes it. Who needs religious freedom anyway? Certainly not Pagans.

It didn't stop there for little Christopher's nightmare. Thinking the worst was behind, Christopher went back to school, but there was another surprise from Christopher's teacher. On November 29th Mrs. Ross informed her class that they would be doing an essay on "How Christmas started". In the good ol' fashion of history, she informed the class that they couldn't have anything on their report pertaining to Paganism. Intrigued, a female student in Christopher's classroom asked what paganism is. In response to the question, Mrs. Ross looked directly at Christopher, not the student asking the question, and replied "anything that is non-biblical is paganism." According to David Goldberg, assistant superintendent of Carroll County Board of Education, Christopher was assured religious freedom. Is this religious freedom? Can a school force a student to write only about "biblical" essays when his religion is different than that of Christianity?

Understandably, Christopher didn't know what to do, especially when later that day he got suspended on the bus ride home for speaking Spanish. He was speaking Spanish with other Spanish speaking students and was told by his bus driver, Mr. David Ayers, that he couldn't speak Spanish on the bus. Christopher being part Hispanic, continued speaking with his friends, who were not given the same warning. After being kicked off the bus and being given two day of ISS (in school suspension), his mother was told by the bus driver "If he (Christopher) continues to speak in a language that I can not understand then he will get in trouble." Not only will this 11 year old child be bashed by his teacher for his religion, but now he will get suspended for speaking a language that he has every right to speak. Is this YOUR America?? If you can stand for this type of

treatment for our children then our country is in serious trouble.

Since this time, Christopher has been back to school once. His mother has tried to call his teacher and Mr. Goldberg, but no one will call them back or give them the time of day. Christopher cries every night thinking he has to return to this bullying and discrimination from the same people he feels should be there to protect him. It is sad that with everything children have to overcome in this day and age, that they have to be fearful of the one thing that is there to give them an opportunity in life. We can not stand for this!

This family is in need of help. Please call and blow up the phone lines and email boxes of the people responsible for leaving this child fearful of attending school. No one should have to deal with this type of harrasment!

Statement from NGS, CoG, DLC, LLL, Circle Sanctuary December 7, 2011

After concerns spread about some problems with accommodating Pagan students needs at Bowdon Elementary School (BES), there was an overwhelming show of community support for the Turner family of Carroll County in western Georgia, USA. Many local Pagans and associated organizations reached out to assist the Turners by providing emotional support and offering practical advice. The Turners have been deeply touched by this out-pouring of spirit and wish to express their sincerest gratitude.

In addition, a Task Force of local and national Pagan organizations have come together to help resolve issues between the Turners and BES. The Task Force also hopes to provide the school with Pagan accommodation information and materials with the hopes of avoiding misunderstandings and other problems in the future. Represented in this group are the North Georgia Solitaries (NGS), both the local and national chapters of the Covenant of the Goddess, Circle Sanctuary and Lady Liberty League.

Currently, Carroll County Schools, led by the assistant superintendent, has expressed an active interest in resolving the current tensions and is planning to meet with Ms. Turner. The family and the Task Force are requesting that those with concerns about their situation do not directly contact the school or its employees. It is important that everyone involved have the maximum space needed to focus on resolving this conflict in a positive way. However, all concerned individuals are welcome to show their support for the Turners through the Turner Family Support Facebook fan page or through the simple use of prayers and energy toward a peaceful resolution and healing.

Statement from Bowdon Elementary School, Carroll County School District, and members of the Turner Family Support Task Force as represented by Lady Liberty League, North Georgia Solitaries, Covenant of the Goddess, Dogwood Local Council, and Circle Sanctuary December 13, 2011

The Turner Family, Task Force, and School District want Bowdon School to be a positive, supportive environment which fosters the emotional and educational growth of all students.

With education, cooperation, and open dialogue, all things are possible.

At times, a lack of life experience and/or other circumstances can make it difficult to perceive how words and actions might cause offense or upset. The parties involved acknowledge that words and deeds can be hurtful even without the intent of making them so.

In an effort to reach a positive and collaborative resolution to recent events, an alliance of the parties involved has come to pass which will set the stage for future education for school staff, students, and parents on the topic of equality and respect for all students and families in the Carroll County School System.

First, a sincere apology for recent events and misunderstandings has been given by School Administration and accepted by the family.

Second, the Bowdon Elementary School guidance Counselor will educate staff and students about honoring and accepting the differences that make us individuals.

Third, procedures have been put in place to ensure classroom activities don't alienate students. As part of this, the administration and teachers will have yearly training about the District's Code of Ethics and the responsibilities of each staff member to preserve the integrity of every students' rights.

We appreciate the hard work and open dialogue of all the parties involved to create this positive resolution. The Turner children will return to school. The Carroll County School District will continue to strive to be a place that fosters the emotional and educational growth of all students regardless of religion, race, national origin, gender or disability.

A Week in Bowden, Georgia: Our Final Thoughts

Circle Sanctuary, The Church of the Spiral Tree, Covenant of the Goddess, Dogwood Local Council, Lady Liberty League, North Georgia Solitaries

December 15, 2011

Text written by Miraselena, PIO of Dogwood local Council, Covenant of the Goddess

In the wake of frustration, unity often rises. Out of the hands of chaos, humanity can shine. We found both to be true this week. The power of solidarity and the compassion of humanity broke free from a very unfortunate situation in the small, rural town of Bowden, Georgia; where a Pagan child allegedly experienced religious discrimination.

"I have worked on many religious freedom cases with Lady Liberty League since its founding in 1985. Never before have I seen a Task Force come together so quickly with so many different organizations involved. It was truly historic for our community," notes Reverend Selena Fox, founder of the Lady Liberty League.

The Bowden situation attracted the attention of both local and national Pagan organizations; all of whom simultaneously came together to assess and manage the problem as a single Task Force. Locally, these groups included Dogwood Local Council, North Georgia Solitaries, Pagan Assistance Fund, and The Church of the Spiral Tree. Nationally, the organizations involved were Covenant of the Goddess (National), Lady Liberty League and Circle Sanctuary.

"Many of us had known of each other but had never worked together. We are not only representatives of different organizations, we are also from different Pagan traditions, or denominations, as it were. And we managed to work together to affect change," added Lady Arsinoe, First Officer of Dogwood Local Council, local affiliate of Covenant of the Goddess.

And the work did pay off. On December 12, Carroll County School System officials and concerned School personnel met with the Turner Family, accompanied by members of the Task Force. The meeting lasted over 3 hours with much discussion and collaboration; after which, all parties felt satisfied with the results. In a statement issued on Dec 13th, the School Administration offered their apologies for the actions or lack of actions that led to this unfortunate point. And, within the privacy of the meeting, various school personnel expressed similar apologies directly to the family.

Moreover, the School Administration demonstrated a sincere willingness to work with the Turners going forward and to put systems in place to alleviate many of their concerns. Unfortunately, we are not at liberty to disclose the details of these actions because of the involvement of minors. Such private information is normally reserved for approved school personnel and primary caregivers, in this case, Ms. Turner.

However, we can say with confidence that, as a Pagan community, we have made significant steps forward in the education of our educators.

"In all my Civil Rights work within school systems, I have never seen an administration willingly to work toward a peaceful solution and then, collaborate on a joint statement. As Pagans, we need to fully understand and appreciate the magnitude of this aspect of the Bowden case," adds Selena Fox.

While these steps alone will not prevent future cases of religious discrimination, they are small steps on our path to freedom and full acceptance. And a small step forward is the beginning of the journey to understanding.

As the Turner children return to school, resume classes and reunite with friends, our thriving Georgia Pagan community will continue to offer them needed support. Both North Georgia Solitaries and The Church of the Spiral Tree have extended their hands of friendship and spiritual strength during this Yule season and beyond.

"I've found in my work through NGS...that there are many really good organizations in Georgia. I think the general public would be surprised to know how many of us are in this area," remarked Lady Charissa of NGS, on the Turner Family Support fan page.

Dogwood Local Council, local affiliate of the Covenant of the Goddess, is making plans to provide their services to the Carroll County School System as an educational resource for future questions concerning Pagan students. And, Lady Liberty League and Circle Sanctuary will continue to monitor the Bowden situation as the transitions are made into the New Year.

Over the past week, we, the Task Force, have been absolutely amazed at the coming together of the local, national and international Pagan community through the Turner Family Support fan page. At this time of peace and unity, we thank each and every one of you for showing your support in whatever way was possible. The demonstration of solidarity and cooperation was historic and will not be forgotten. In addition, on last night's Pagan Warrior Radio, Stephanie Turner, the child's mother, personally thanked the entire Pagan community as well as the Task Force for all of our efforts.

Over the next few months, please continue to send your energy to the Turners and to all those victims of religious discrimination within our schools. In addition, send your positive energy toward the effective change in religious discrimination cases, so that we may all grow together.

While the strides we made this week will not universally end the problem, the demonstration of solidarity across traditions, geographical boundaries and organizations may have just begun a new chapter in our history. And, furthermore, this unification resulted in one of the most positive of gifts that we could give to ourselves – an open door to educate those people who educate the next generation. Not only is this a gift for our community today but, more importantly, it is a gift for the community of tomorrow.

Blessed Be and Yuletide Blessings!



Yule Ritual

By Alan (Nevar) Sain

Opening the Circle:

We gather here, around Yule Log
To welcome back the reborn God.
Shortest day and longest night.
Unwelcome spirits leave us tonight.
Sacred fire, burning tree,
Frozen ground, we welcome thee.
In the air, we see our breath,
On Winter's water, snow we step.
We honor Dark, to balance Light,
The Oak King lives, His candle alight.
We cast this circle, tree times round,
Protect this place, our sacred ground.
In perfect trust, in perfect love,
As is below, so it is above.

God Invocation:

We honor the Harvest Lord, slain God on Samhain.
The Divine King's candle, unlight here again.
Vanquished by brother, the Holly King fell,
The season has changed, and all will be well.
We honor the Horned One, our fire died with Thee.
Now, in celebration, we light the Yule tree.

(God candle is lit from Goddess candle. Each celebrant goes to altar, lights votive from God

candle, then sets candle on Yule log. Celebrant intones (as candle is placed):

"The Yule Log is burning, God's candle we light!"

(Priest continues:)

The Yule log is burning, God's candle is alight!
Standing triumphant, the Oak King won the fight.
We invoke thee, by bud and stem and leaf:
Dianus awaken! No longer sleep!
We call to Apollo with sacred poetry,
to Janus of Doorways, with both rod and key.
We call to Uranus, the sky up above,
and child of promise, born into love.
The Sun God is risen, the King is divine,
Now let us celebrate, with cake and good wine.
Here is the winter, gone is the fall,
From clouds up above us, Zeus watches us all.
To the heroes' protector, Odin we pray:
May your runes defend us and give wisdom this day.
Here to celebrate, Dionysos we call,
Lord of misrule, be here with us all.
Here in our circle around the Yule tree,
We stand with the Gods, so mote it be.

Book Reviews:

"The Witch's Bag of Tricks" by Melanie Marquis was an insightful and enjoyable read. I recommend taking a look in this bag of tricks to witches new and old. If your magick seems to have grown dull or to lack the fire you remember, the advice in this book is just what you need. For solitaires, it is the voice of an Elder that has been there. The sound and practical wisdom in these pages covers everything from personalizing your art to overcoming addiction. Let this little magickal tome put the spark back in your craft and the Witch in your life.

Review by John 'Stardust' Cooper

"The Witch's Bag of Tricks" by Melanie Marquis was a really good read. It is well written, well thought out, and well researched. Melanie Marquis appears to follow the ways of the Old Path, even by the way she uses the spelling of the word "Magick." It seems that this lady is unique in her study of the Craft and it is refreshing to see that the Ancient ways are not lost. Ms. Marquis makes you stop and think about the basis of all life as having purpose from the most mundane to the elaborate. Also, she has uniquely beautiful insights in the ways she reaches the most experienced practitioners and you really say "Oh, she has something here!" She also makes it so that even a beginning student can grasp just exactly what she is talking about. Ms. Marquis covers every aspect within the Craft. And, she leaves nothing uncovered. She even asks questions at the end of the chapters to make you really ponder the answers. I, for one, will stay an avid reader of her works.

Review by Randy Floyd

About Books & Book Reviews:

A special thank you to author Melanie Marquis for donating two copies of her book "The Witch's Bag of Tricks" to CST for review at the Atlanta Pagan Pride Day. Obviously, our reviewers really enjoyed the book. Good luck in all your future literary endeavors.

The Church of the Spiral Tree welcomes donations of books from authors and publishers to be reviewed. All reviews are published in our newsletters. Not all, but many of our reviewers are incarcerated pagans who are delighted not only to receive a free book to share with their groups, but to be given an opportunity to contribute to the Pagan Community in a unique and positive manner.

If you are an author or publisher that would like to have your book(s) reviewed, please feel free to send a copy of the book to Church of the Spiral Tree, Book Reviews, PO Box 8396 Columbus, GA 31908. CST will be happy to forward a copy of the newsletter with your review to you either by snail mail or email. You will also find the review in the newsletter on our website at www.spiraltree.org.

Imbolc/Candlemas

by Lady Ishara, ©2011

As we reach the halfway mark between Winter Solstice and the Vernal Equinox, we pause on the Wheel to celebrate and observe the Sabbat of Imbolc, Oimelc, Candlemas, Brigid's Day, or St. Bridget's Day. The translations of the words Imbolc and Oimelc literally mean, "first milk," "ewe's milk," and "in the belly." This is the time when the ewes begin to lactate in preparation for the birthing of their young. Sheep were primary herd animals in Celtic lands, as were cattle, but this time of year is lambing season, hence the connection.

Candlemas was a later name for the celebration when the church assimilated this Pagan holy day. A custom they observed was to make the candles they would use for the year and take them to church to be blessed on this day. Candlemas literally means, mass of candles...and as with Imbolc, it is a fire festival celebrating the obvious return of light in the growing length of the days and the imminent return of warmth, planting crops, and birth. By midwinter, the people could see and feel the tides of the seasons changing. They were "over the hump" of Winter and most likely, some pretty lean and conservative times, and so it was a cause for celebration and prime planning time for the work to be done in the new season of growth and harvest.

Imbolc is one of the four cross quarter holy days on the Celtic Wheel of the Year. The fixed date of Imbolc is the eve of February, January 31st, but is commonly celebrated on February 1st or 2nd (Groundhog Day). The Celtic peoples reckoned the beginning of the new day at sunset. Astrologically, the midwinter date floats according to when the sun is 15 degrees into the sign of Aquarius, the Water Bearer; which is an air sign. All manifestation begins on the mental level, so the correspondences to birth, rebirth, planning, and beginnings of all types in general fit in quite perfectly with the energies of this turning of the Wheel. The astrological date for all of the cross quarter holy days usually falls within the first week of the month that they are observed, but it is far easier to use the customary fixed dates. Some of the information I have gleaned for the dates suggest that the observance of all of the Sabbats would have been held during the full moon of the month of the Sabbats because the moon would have been a more reliable marker of time for people who knew little to nothing about astrology. It's commonly understood that regardless of the actual date, the seasonal tides can easily be celebrated within a week or so before or after the actual date as the seasonal phases do not change so quickly as the phases of the moon.

In the relatively mild climate of the South, our winter weather is not nearly as severe as in more northern regions (thankfully!). We have greenery around us year-round, but still we see the seasonal changes in the dropping of leaves from the trees and many plants dying back or going dormant. The first signs of spring are subtle, but they are appearing now. Camellias and other plants are beginning to bud out and bloom. Azaleas won't be far behind. Some animals are beginning their mating

season. Listen for unusual calls and behaviors of the Winged Ones.

The essence of this turning of the Wheel is about the Great Awakening of the Earth, *in the northern hemisphere*. Remember the seasons are opposite in the southern hemisphere! For us on the northern half of the Earth, we are beginning to tilt with the axis, back toward the sun, while those on the southern hemisphere are tilting away, bringing on their fall season. As the season progresses from early spring to late spring, by Ostara, the Vernal Equinox, these energies amplify substantially! Everyone should be familiar with the term "spring fever" and all that it implies. ;-)

Traditionally, Imbolc is a time to begin planning for the season of growth and activity. It is a time for initiations, dedications, forming the plans and thought seeds you wish to nurture to fruition, the time for clearing out the old to make way for the new! It's time to focus on what we wish to grow both spiritually and physically. It's time to prepare our gardens and/or yards (if you like to grow greenery) and tend to the work necessary for that purpose. It's also when you might make plans to follow through on those New Year resolutions or begin a new project (or several)!

Imbolc is sacred to the Goddess Brigid. Known by many names over the course of time and by various cultures, this most ancient Goddess never lost her appeal or power. In northern Britain, she was called Brigantia; the Patroness of the kingdom by the same name, and their warriors who called themselves Brigants. There she was seen and revered as an eponymous (horse) Goddess, wise and crafty, a supreme strategist, fierce in battle, and as a protector. In Gaul, modern France, she was called Brigindo. In other parts of the continent she was Brig and Brigan. In Ireland and other Celtic cultures she was Brid (pronounced: *Breed*), Bride, Brigid, Brigit, and then was disguised thinly by the Christian church as St. Brigit. The Saint Brigit created by the church has most of the same attributes as Brigid, and stories of the Saint proclaim her as Mary of the Gaels and as Mary Magdalene's midwife. Also of note is the story of how St. Brigit was made a Bishop and that she supposedly bestowed this status to others as well—a position *never* conferred to women within the constraints of the church! Incidentally, a requirement for her Bishops, was that they be goldsmiths.

The oldest name found for her is Breo Saighead (pronounced: *Bree-o Say-hit*). Her name has been translated as meaning, "fiery arrow," "shining one," and "bright one." Another name for her is Brigh, meaning "power."

Brigid, by any name, has come to be associated with sacred wells and with fire. Rivers have been named after her, and many a sacred healing well across the European continent bears dedication to her. Many Christian churches were built upon sites of her sacred shrines and wells. In Kildare, Ireland, an order of nuns dedicated to Brigid kept her sacred perpetual flame burning in

her shrine there. This flame was squelched during the reformation in the time of Henry VIII, and was at long last re-ignited in 1993. Brighid's flame is tended there now and all over the world by certain orders of women who are dedicated as Brighid's Flamekeepers. Brighid is a tri-form (triple) Goddess, often depicted as three sisters, not like the progressively aged tri-form Maiden, Mother, and Crone; but as three women all with the same name, and whose primary aspects are smith craft, healing arts, and poetic inspiration. She is the Matron Goddess of healers and doctors, midwifery and childbirth/fertility, forging and smithing, crafting of all kinds, and the Bardic arts which include story telling, poetry, and music. This artistic type of inspiration gives a muse-like quality to her many aspects. She is a Goddess of Wisdom and Excellence.

It's interesting to note that there are two Brighid's wells at Kildare. One is the original dedicated to the Goddess. The other well is dedicated to St. Brigit. Brighid's modern flamekeepers are both Christian and Pagan, in two separate orders dedicated to the Goddess and the Saint. Brighid seems to be one of very few Goddesses who has successfully bridged religious traditions in such a way.

Brighid is said in one version of Irish mythology, to be the daughter of the father figure God of the Tuatha De' Danann, The Dagda; or, "The Good God," 'good' used here in the sense that he is highly skilled in many ways. The Tuatha De' Danann are the people of the Goddess Dana. They defeated the Fomors, and later were defeated by the Goedelic peoples, the Gaels.

In the Fenian Cycle of Irish mythology, Brighid is the daughter of The Dagda, and she is married to Bres MacElatha (an Irish Celtic vegetation God), as a way to bridge the peace. Bres is half Formorian, fathered by the Formorian King Elatha; and half Tuatha, mothered by Eriu (an Irish Celtic Goddess of Sovereignty and an aspect of the Morrighan). Bres and Brighid had a son named Ruadan—"the red one." At the first battle of Moytura, the Tuatha King, Nuada, lost his hand, some accounts say his arm, and so became unfit to rule. The kings had to be physically perfect, and so Bres was selected to be the king after Nuada had to step down. Bres didn't meet the requirements of generosity and so was satirized by the Bard Cairbre, and soon developed boils on his face. Bres then was imperfect and had to abdicate from the king's position, which led to the second battle of Moytura. In this second battle, Ruadan was killed and it is said that this "is the first time crying and shrieking were heard in Ireland" as Brighid mourned the loss of her son. This is also referred to as 'keening.'

Another version of the story is that The Dagda is the son of Brighid. I find an interesting parallel between these versions of the relationships between Gods and Goddesses and the same type of stories told of Ra and several Egyptian Goddesses, such as Hathor. It appears that over time, many such Great Mother Goddesses went through a changing progressive demotion of being Mother, then Wife, then Daughter of the supreme God of certain cultures. Brighid has survived through the test of time, integration of other tribes pantheons with her own, and even through Christianization and growing patriarchy.

The customs associated with the celebration of Imbolc include the lighting of fires and candles; of extinguishing and reigniting one's hearth flame from a central sacred fire; of making offerings of milk spilled onto the Earth, or of feasting on milk products; of scrying by flame and water. This is also a good time to do house cleansings and blessings, and to consecrate a besom for ritual purposes. The making of Brighid's Crosses as a house charm is also popular, as are making and/or Blessing candles for ritual purposes, and the custom of lighting candles in every window of the home and letting them burn all night was also done at Imbolc. Doing this is an extreme fire hazard and I do not recommend it! Women would leave their shawls or in later times, a piece of fabric, outside their doors on this night to have it blessed by Brighid as she wandered the land during her sacred festival. This very old custom is referred to as making Brighid's Mantle. It was believed that the shawls blessed by the Goddess would afford fertility protection in the coming year to the women who wore them, to assure conception and healthy pregnancy and childbirth. Strips of fabric so blessed were often used for household protection charms.

Making Bride's Bed:

In Scotland, she was called Bride, and then St. Bride; hence where the word 'bride' comes from, associating her with the Maiden and with brides in general. It has become popular at this sabbat to make a doll from grain stems or corn husks that is dressed in white and lain in a decorated basket, often with a priapic wand laying on top or next to her. This is to symbolize that the Goddess is renewed and prepared to meet her love once again in the ever cycling relationship of the Goddess and the God.

In this cyclic relationship, Imbolc is not yet the time for consummation, but is the reuniting of the Goddess renewed in her Maiden aspect, and the Young Sun God who has grown in age and strength from being an infant at Yule to approaching manhood. I envision both God and Goddess as being in their adolescence, that age where hormones rage, sexual attraction begins and awareness of the self develops on all levels. It will be the Sabbat of Ostara when the Sacred Couple join together. For now, they meet and the courtship begins in the innocence of youth.

Imbolc Correspondences:

Colors - red, yellow, white, light green

All early blooming flowers - Hellebore, Aconite, Witch Hazel, and Paper Whites are examples.

Use the local flora as your own guide.

Direction on the Wheel - Northeast

Sabbat across the Wheel from Imbolc - Lammas

Associations - Beginnings, creating ideas/planning, starting new projects, dedications, initiations, renewal, cleansings and blessings, besoms, fire, water, creative/artistic inspiration, healing, forging/smithing, crafting; 'in between times, and places' such as dawn/dusk, thresholds, Mid-Winter, etc.

Continued on Page 11

Contacts:

You get a free contact listing with your membership. You may also submit your listing at any later time. As an additional service, you can send letters to CST, and we will forward them to your intended recipient.

P.S.: If you do not see your listing here, it is because we never heard back from you regarding whether you wanted your listing to remain or be removed (emails were sent to all with listings earlier this year). So just to be safe (rather than sorry), we have removed everyone's listing who did not respond. If you would like your contact listing to appear in the future, simply email us at <info@spiraltree.org>.

A Brother to My Sister:

Serving the nemeton of Phoenix Grove in Oregon House, California.

abrothertomysister@gmail.com.

Andrew Polywacz #314644:

I'm Celtic Wiccan, seeking new friends on similar paths to help me learn more about the Craft. Fox Lake Corr. Inst., HU #6C, P.O. Box 200, Fox Lake, WI 53933.

Beth Price:

shellyp_ms@hotmail.com.

Bryan Price:

bryansp_ms@hotmail.com.

Lady Charissa: As an ordained minister, I offer Handfastings, Handpartings, Wiccanings and Crossings. As a Reiki Master and healer I offer healing in many ways. I offer a variety of workshops for groups or at festivals and co-own Star's Bazaar, an online metaphysical store with my husband, David. You can find more about the workshops and services she offers at www.starsbazaar.weebly.com. My group, North Georgia Solitaries, offers Sabbat celebrations, workshops and socials that are open to anyone that wishes to attend. Information on NGS can be found at www.ngsolitaries.com.

Clifford Joseph Bowling

#020405: Wanted: D/W/M eclectic Wiccan with interest in Thelema, Kabbalah, Greek/Roman/Sumerian/Babylonian/Egyptian paths, seeks similar female to share knowledge and thoughts. Zephyrhills Corr. Inst., D2116L, 2739 Gall Blvd., Zephyrhills, FL 33541-9701.

Dana Ston:

DanaVictorSton@aol.com.

Dennis Joe Menn Jr.

#1529921: TDCJ Robertson Unit, 12071 FM 3522, Abilene, TX 79601. Also myspace.com/DeathofDesota.

Lady Eibhlean and Lady Aracos Arendel: GryphonSong Clan, Atlanta, GA.

piperpettus@yahoo.com.

Jason Braasch #364347:

Looking for Pagan resources such as magazines, catalogs, music, correspondence courses. Also looking for legal help for group. Stanley Corr. Inst., 100 Corrections Dr., Stanley, WI 54768-6500.

Jayson Schertz #B50630:

Pagan in prison. I am following a Druid/Wicca path. Can't get much to study/learn in here. Anyone willing to correspond with me or teach me, please do. Blessed be. Menard, P.O. Box 711, Menard, IL 62259.

Jeremy Moss #129379: 38 yr old Pisces, vegan Wiccan maile. Amateur portrait and astrology artist. Send clear photo and info for "stellar portraits." \$15 per reading. Write for more info. Visualize whirled peas! Buena Vista Corr. Fac., Box 2017, Buena Vista, CO 81211.

John Herman Cooper

#191141: I am the teacher of the Pagan/Wiccan group at Staton C.F. I am interested in the growth of Paganism into a valid culture in its own right. F3-26B, P.O. Box 56, Elmore, AL, 36025.

Kevin Anderson: (334) 297-6243.

Malon Lynn McCaslin

#671223: I can be contacted by writing me at my prison address: Estelle Unit, 264 FM 3478, Huntsville, TX 77320-3322.

Mary Ann Muller:

MarMulRN@aol.com.

Matt Farley #1446657: TDCJ is not geared towards rehabilitation anymore. To anyone who cares, please send information on correspondence courses to me at Smith Unit, 1313 CR 19, Lamesa, TX 79331. Blessed Be!

Michael Lee Harris #221321:

Wiccan pagan, My path is Celtic. Interest in reading Wiccan pagan books, Circle magazine, Pagans and the Law by Dana D Eilers. Fox Lake Corr. Inst., Box 200 HU One, Fox Lake, WI 53933-0200.

Phillip James Bartley

#HJ6640: Eclectic Wicca, god & goddess studies, witchcraft, some Qabalah studies. S.C.I. Huntingdon, 1100 Pike Street, Huntingdon, PA 16654-1112.

Randy Floyd #124991:

True seeker of the Old Paths within the Craft; will correspond with any true seekers. STSRCF, 1045 Horsehead Rd., Pikeville, TN 37362.

Randy Scott Bailey #48123:

Arizona State Prison, Florence, Central Unit, P.O. Box 8200, Florence, AZ, 85132.

Richard Allen Hartsock

#1202681: Ordained Wiccan High Priest for the Nocturnal Tradition specializing in eclectic witchcraft, spiritualism, divination, and shadow work. Keen Mountain Corr. Center, P.O. Box 860, Oakwood, VA 24631-0860.

Richard Mainprize

#84C0434: Groveland Corr. Fac., P.O. Box 50, Sonyea, NY 14556-0050.

Richard Peebles #523160:

I will correspond with Wiccan gay or straight males and females alike; I only ask to write and make friends. Wheeler Correctional Facility, P.O. Box 466, Unit 100-M, Alamo, GA 30411.

Ron Jay Wilcox #035258:

Anyone wishing to connect with me, write me at Lake Butler Reception & Medical Center, II-4217COW, P.O. Box 628, Lake Butler, FL 32054.

Russell Ray Jones #382494:

Solitary witch seeking information on Voodoo, amulets, talismans, charms, etc. STSRCF, Unit 6, 1045 Horsehead Rd., Pikeville, TN 37367.

Contacts (continued)

Siryndolphinsong-

Bradford: Siryn can be reached at Bio-Buzz in Albany, GA, where we have a vast array of metaphysical and root-working supplies. Also offering in-depth classes, workshops, and seminars, at some of which Siryn shares different topics on the many paths she has traveled, and the specific tools she utilizes today. She is available as a speaker at other venues on request. Siryn is an intuitive reader who offers Tarot, Aura, and Obi (shell) readings, and in-depth palmistry at the store, and has other readers available. She is a Usui Reiki Master/Teacher with Lightarian incorporating crystal healing, chakra cleansing, pendulum clearing/balancing,

guided meditation, energy work, Ifa based root work, and spiritual/healing advisement. Her work as a minister includes all rites, most rituals, and she is willing to travel. Siryn is founder of the CST grove S.T.A.R. (Sacred Tribe of Ancient Roots), and creator of the Pagan Family Reunion (PFR). Siryn can be reached at Bio-Buzz, 612 N. Slaphey Blvd., Albany, GA, 31701; (229) 395-9718; la.siryndolphinsong@yahoo.com.

Stephen Bradford, aka Tyernan WaterOak: An intuitive medium and natural healer. Within my Eclectic Witch and Yoruba Path, I do Tarot readings, rootwork, chakra balancing, crystal healing, energy work, and Reiki. I own Bio-Buzz Botanica, a metaphysical supply and service oriented business in Albany, GA. As an ordained minister, I offer

legal communions, handfastings, handpartings, Wiccanings, and requiems (passing on rites). At the store and across the US, I offer ongoing classes, workshops and various teachings. Bio-Buzz is also the home of Albany Pagans and the Magickal Mystery Tour, which is an ongoing discussion of anything metaphysical and spiritual related topics. I offer these services and classes with help from the community at my other store in Auburn, AL called DreamScapes, our second location of metaphysics and spiritual supplies galore. Look for me in the Panhandle of Florida and North Georgia quite often too! Stephen A. Bradford, 612 N. Slaphey Blvd., Albany GA 31701, (229) 438-5878 or (229) 395-0963. Email: tyernan2003@yahoo.com.



Letters from Pagan Prisoner & Pen Pal Members

Below are some of the letters we've received recently from our incarcerated CST members and/or Pen Pal members. Please consider becoming a pen-pal today! Note that some letters are edited for length and content.

Hailsa, I received a copy of your newsletter and received positive vibes for it, especially the Cymbro-Norse Samhain Ritual Ceremony.

I wonder why as an Heljarskin Odinist why it is you state it is not an Asatru ceremony? I feel drawn to it and used it this past Samhain to explore the experience. Though I more than not likely have enough experience to enjoy its full benefits, I did feel close to my ancestors of Danish-Hungarian heritage. Thank you all for that.

Vance

I just wanted to take a moment and thank everyone at CST and the PPM for the Samhain card. Little things like that mean a lot to us on this side of the wall. Thank you very much.

Brightest Blessings.

Phillip

Hello and greetings to you. The reason I am writing is that I just received a very nice postcard wishing me a Happy Samhain. I thank you very much for your thoughts and Samhain wishes. Hope the New Year is a very good one for all of you and full of blessings. Enclosed please find some stamps which I would like to donate so you can help more persons who need literature, letters, etc. I do not have much, yet I want to help out however I can. Blessings be upon all of you, and I thank you for the very cool card.

Russell



Imbolc (Continued from Page 9)

Animals associated with Brigid and Imbolc - Migrating birds that stop locally on their way to their summer homes like buntings and robins; swans, snakes, sheep, cows

References:

The Witches Goddess - Janet and Stewart Farrar

The Witches God - Janet and Stewart Farrar

Encyclopedia of Gods - Michael Jordan

A History of Pagan Europe - Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick

CST Calendar:

CST and its affiliate Groves welcome church and community members, beginners, newcomers, solitaires, and anyone else interested in participating in rituals honoring the Sabbats and new & full moons. You need no experience or knowledge to participate, but we do request you come with an open mind and heart, and show respect for your fellow participants. We usually share a potluck dinner after each ritual, so those who come are asked to bring some type of food to share. Please wear something comfortable and appropriate for outdoors. Ritual robes are welcome but not necessary. Children of all ages are welcome. You do not have to be a member of CST to participate! Donations to the Church are entirely optional but appreciated.

Note: the schedule below is subject to change! Firmer times and locations of all rituals will be available closer to the date of the ritual. Please visit <<http://www.spiraltree.org/upcoming.shtml>> for up-to-date information, directions, and links to RSVP for each ritual.

EVENT	DATE	TIME	SPONSOR	LOCATION (HOST)
New Moon ritual	Jan 7	TBD	GGG	TBD
Full Moon ritual	Jan 11	TBD	STAR	Albany, GA
Full Moon ritual	Jan 21	TBD	GGG	TBD
Chakra workshop	Jan 25	6:00 EST	STAR	Albany, GA
Imbolc ritual	Feb 4	5:00 EST	GGG	Salem, AL
Meet n' Greet	Feb 8	6:00 EST	STAR	Albany, GA
New Moon ritual	Feb 18	TBD	GGG	TBD
New Moon ritual	Feb 22	TBD	STAR	Albany, GA
Full Moon ritual	Mar 7	TBD	STAR	Albany, GA
Full Moon ritual	Mar 7	TBD	GGG	TBD
Ostara ritual	Mar 17	5:00 EST	GGG	Salem, AL
Tarot workshop	Mar 21	6:00 EST	STAR	Albany, GA
New Moon ritual	Mar 24	TBD	GGG	TBD

DH = Dragon Hills Grove (Carrollton, GA); GGG = Green Gate Grove (Columbus, GA); STAR = Sacred Tribe of Ancient Roots (Cartersville, GA); TBA = to be announced

Board of Directors' Meetings: The next BoD meeting will be in February 2012, in Salem, AL. BoD meetings are held four times a year; check website at <<http://www.spiraltree.org/upcoming.shtml>> for date of next meeting.

Upcoming Festivals (Not CST events): Moondance - May 10-13, 2012, Cherokee Farms, LaFayette, GA

Church of the Spiral Tree
P.O. Box 8396
Columbus, GA 31908

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED