

## On Pagan Solidarity

*Full Comment*

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January 2013

Pagan community solidarity is incredibly important. We don't have to practice together or hold exactly the same beliefs to defend each other's rights. Pagan religions still aren't very well understood by the public at large, and that means that being Pagan can still be used against a parent in child custody cases, Pagan students can be bullied without retaliation from school administration, and Pagan clergy can be excluded from interfaith events. The only way we can support policies that protect us is to band together under a common label.

It's extremely important to understand, though, that "Pagan" is an umbrella term for a number of related religious traditions, not a single religion. Some people think "Pagan" only means "Wiccan," and that's not the case at all; our community includes polytheists, animists, Goddess worshippers, earth-based practitioners, and more, and despite that diversity, we DO have common cause.

As for solitary solidarity, why not? Solitaries have social needs too, and even if a person's primary religious practice is solitary, they may still enjoy getting together with others for festivals, book groups, parties celebrating rites of passage, and more. Those communities can also lend support to individuals when they're in trouble.

Finally, "institutionalization" is not necessarily a bad word. All "institutionalization" means is "building sustainable organizations." Pagan institutions don't have to be hierarchical or involve fixed religious doctrine. We need to think deeply about what kinds of organizational structures best support our values, it's true, and I think we also need to guard against rigidity in power structures and in belief systems. The Society of Friends (the Quakers) has one model of nonhierarchical organization that doesn't involve paid clergy, and they've existed for hundreds of years. We need to think about how Pagans might form similarly alternative but sustainable structures.