

On Pagan Solidarity

Full Comment

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Only a few hours ago I stood with nine other religious leaders in the office of our governor, Nikki Haley, South Carolina, for photos on the occasion of her proclaiming January to be “South Carolina Interfaith Harmony Month.” Now, I deeply dislike Haley’s politics, and obviously I have far-ranging theological differences with my colleagues who were present. Nevertheless, all in the room were in strong solidarity, allied in our understanding that diversity of religions is a rich asset, to be celebrated, as well as a Constitutional right worthy of protection.

How does this relate to Pagan solidarity? To me it is obvious: if my interfaith group can find common ground and achieve something so unprecedented (trust me, here in the Bible Belt, this was highly unusual!), then what might we Pagans accomplish if we were less concerned about our differences?

It’s really time for us to get past our knee-jerk reactions to the things we didn’t like about religion when we were growing up. It’s also time to quit thinking that being counterculture means being against everything (it’s not, but that’s another conversation). Solidarity does not have to mean institutions, although I would point out that institutions do not need to be the bad guy, either. Pagans are perfectly capable of having healthy institutions which serve our needs and goals; indeed, we participate in such institutions every day in our real-world lives. Why not cooperate and collaborate in our spiritual communities? Why wouldn’t we want to enjoy the benefits of stronger infrastructure, better accountability and healthy leadership? Furthermore, I would call for Pagans to increase their visible participation in existing community organizations. Many of us already do so, and this puts a positive public light on spiritualities which are often feared simply because of our cloak of secrecy.

So, you can see that I don’t see solitary spiritual practice as precluding community solidarity. Solidarity is the practice of supporting and helping each other, not necessarily agreeing with each other. We are a social species; we flourish when we cooperate. Members of groups must have their own solitary core if they are to be effective members; likewise, solitaries benefit from the published teachings and public events put on by those affiliated with groups. We are interdependent, no matter how we define our practice. Let’s get on with it and get better at it.