

The Five Rings:

A Manual
for Pagan Ministers

The Five Rings: A Guide To Pagan Ministry



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A Manual for Pagan
Ministers

by Shanddaramon



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PREFACE

The Five Rings: A Guide To Pagan Ministry

Introduction

n 2001, my wife and I moved to North Carolina where I became a Director of Music and Arts at a large Unitarian-Universalist Church. While there, I was the only one on staff with experience in Paganism so I became the director of Pagan Studies as well. I began teaching Wednesday night classes and soon a regular group of students began to develop. Over the next four years and with my help, the students decided that they wanted more than just weekly lessons and formed themselves into a state recognized non-profit religious and educational corporation. We began doing regular rituals, workshops and retreats and those students worked themselves through the five degree system that I created and was already working through myself. Priests and Priestesses of the Sacred Order of Living Paganism (as we called ourselves) did more than lead rituals, however. We began to focus on spiritual advising and direction for others in our group and beyond. While working at the church I studied pastoral techniques and learned about the duties of a minister. I put those lessons into practice as I was called upon to help people who desired to work with someone with a Pagan background. We did public service work and we reached out to other groups as well. In my last year of working with them, they legally ordained me through the Order and, since then, I have gone on to run rituals, do advising, and lead weddings and memorials as a Pagan Minister.

I think the time is right to begin to think of ordaining others as Pagan ministers because they are needed in this world at this time. Pagan ministers believe in the sanctity of Earth and at a time when Earth is being overheated and disemboweled we need people who can spread the message of her sacredness. Pagan ministers believe in respecting all sacred paths that do not spread hate or harm. In a time when the majority of the world's conflicts are due to religious differences, we need people who will spread the message of diversity and tolerance. The purpose of this book is to provide a means of study for people who wish to help others through a Pagan theological outlook. It is my hope that the many Pagan spiritual groups that are currently active will work toward training and ordaining some of

their members so that there will be a core of qualified Pagan Ministers available to provide aid to others.

What Is A Pagan Minister?

Let us begin by first tackling the question of what exactly is a Pagan minister. In other religions the role of minister is very clear. It is defined both by teaching and tradition. Neo-Paganism, however, is a modern religion (based on some ancient concepts). There is no modern teaching and tradition to clearly delineate the role of a Pagan minister. To define a Pagan minister we must define both the idea of Paganism and the concept of a minister working within a Pagan theology. Let us begin by defining the concept of Neo-Paganism. There are quite a variety of people who define themselves as Pagan and the spiritual paths they follow can be quite diverse which can make it difficult to define Paganism for all Pagans but I do believe there are three spiritual concepts that apply to many Pagan paths. I call these principles the Three Pillars of Paganism and I have named them: Sources, Choices, and Cycles.

The Three Pillars of Paganism

1. Sources: Divinity exists within and beyond all things making all existence and all beings sacred.
2. Choices: Because of our inherent sacredness we are free to choose our own ways but we know that we are responsible for the consequences of our choices. It is through our choices that we define our lives and who we are.
3. Cycles: All things change in cycles and we celebrate and honor those natural cycles both personally and communally.

Frame 0.1 – The Three Pillars of Paganism

It is my view that many, if not all, Pagans accept these three basic principles in their individual or group paths. How they relate to the divine, whether through deities or metaphors or symbolic

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representations, or how they identify the ethical guidelines for their choices, or what particular seasonal or life cycles they choose to celebrate is what often defines their particular paths. Though I express this idea about the basic concepts of Paganism, I realize there will be those who call themselves Pagans but who may disagree with all or parts of my definition. This, too, is part of modern Paganism. We understand that spirituality is personal and it is up to each and every individual Pagan to define his or her spiritual path. However, since a Pagan minister may be asked to help people who identify themselves as Pagan but who work from any number of traditions or personal paths, it helps to have some type of theological foundation from which to work.

But what is a Pagan *minister*? I make a distinction between a Pagan minister and a Pagan priest or priestess. A Priest or Priestess is one who is trained and experienced in actively participating in group rituals. A *High Priest* or Priestess has the training and experience to successfully lead others in group rituals. A Pagan *Minister* should be confident and capable to lead group rituals but should also have some additional skills and training for they serve additional needs.

The word *minister* has a Latin root that means to be a servant. A servant of what? The answer to this comes from looking at the word minister not as a noun but as a verb. To minister means to “To supply or to things needful; especially, to supply consolation or remedies; as, to minister to the sick” (Webster's Dictionary). A Pagan Minister, then, works to help fellow Pagans and others who are in need of spiritual, physical, mental, or emotional assistance in their lives. There are many specific ways in which a minister can provide this kind of help. He or she can be a counselor, a listener, an advisor, a spiritual guide, a leader of specialized rituals such as funerals and Handfastings. The Pagan Minister offers blessings and consolations; is a teacher, a mentor, a retreat leader, or a role model. Specifically, a Pagan minister seeks to aid people using an earth-centered theology.

Pagan Ministering

A Pagan minister can help people to:

1. become closer to nature;
2. respect and revere Earth and all her children;
3. define a personal spirituality;
4. connect with natural energies;
5. live in and with natural and cosmic cycles;
6. make meaning of the stages of transition in life;
7. heal through the use of spiritual energy;
8. grow the whole self through the four elements;
9. work through cycles of pain and joy;
10. access differing views of the divine and deity;
11. see changes in personal situations and relationships as acts of magick;
12. take responsibility for choices made; and
13. prevent harm to self or others.

Frame 0.2 – What A Pagan Minister Can Do

The purpose of this book on Pagan Ministry is to group those and other functions into five roles which I call the five *Rings* of Pagan Ministry: Caring, Sharing, Declaring, Preparing, and Repairing. You may notice that this list is very similar to the roles of ministers in other religions with one major deletion. Since much of Pagan worship happens in a ritual there is no need for preaching. Preaching was originally done to teach people about a religion through the words of an authority — the one giving the sermon usually. Pagans believe that the individual is the authority on his or her spirituality. Since long periods of talking can be detrimental to an effective ritual, giving sermons is not usually an important function for Pagan ministers.

The Five Rings of Pagan Ministry

1. Caring:
 - a) Pastoral Listening
 - b) Counseling
 - c) Advising
2. Sharing:
 - a) Spiritual Direction
3. Declaring:
 - a) Leading Special Rituals
4. Preparing:
 - a) Teaching
5. Repairing:
 - a) Taking Spiritual Retreats
 - b) Leading Spiritual Retreats

Frame 0.3 – The Five Rings of Pagan Ministry

The skill of Caring calls the minister to engage in pastoral listening which is a deep spiritual listening practice. In the act of Caring the minister offers advise and counseling when it is sought. The Pagan minister works with the Seeker (the one seeking help) to solve problems and face decisions based on his or her spiritual outlook. Sharing is the ability to lead someone in the practice of spiritual direction. Spiritual direction is a method used by many religions to help people live their lives more closely in accordance with their spirituality. Ministers are often also called upon to lead special ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. Pagan ministers are needed to do Handfastings, Handpartings, funerals, memorials, and other types of specialized rituals and blessings. This skill is what I call Declaring. Pagan ministers are also needed to lead individual and group spiritual classes and study groups in the role that I call Preparing. Finally, Repairing is the skill needed to allow the minister to take care of him or herself. In learning how to do this, the Pagan Minister can also teach others how to take a spiritual respite from life by leading group spiritual retreats.

Why Do We Need Pagan Ministers?

As Paganism continues to grow, so will the need for Pagan ministers. More than that, however, I believe that Pagan ministers can offer a true spiritual alternative for people who are in need. As we become a global and culturally mixed society, there is a need for alternative spiritual viewpoints and for people who can apply these alternative viewpoints to help others in their quest for wholeness and truth. Unfortunately, the focus of much of modern Western society is on materialism, individual achievement, constant activity, and appearances. None of these things by themselves are inherently bad but an over emphasis on them does not develop a sense of wholeness and connection to others, the self, the world, and the source of life beyond these things — which is the essence of a spiritual life. The dominant Abrahamic religions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) have long insisted this idea to be true and have offered people ways to counteract the drive toward rampant individualism. However, their focus on a purely transcendent theology does not, in my opinion, offer a complete range of spiritual options. If we are truly going to honor the democratic ideal that people are free to worship as they please then we must also be willing to honor the ideal of offering a wide range of spiritual solutions to life's challenges. Paganism is one such offering and it is my dream that it will become a serious and viable alternative for those who truly need it. That dream can be accomplished through the work of Pagan Ministry.

In the growth of every religious community, there will come a time when someone special is needed to help others put their spirituality into action as an aid to growing and overcoming challenges. These needs can often be met through ritual, either individually or in groups, but sometimes extra help is needed. There may be additional difficulty encountered in making a transition, making an important decision, or overcoming a challenging obstacle in life. Some may need extra help in living out an alternative spiritual perspective while others may need assistance finding ways to grow in Spirit. Some desire to take time away from the busy demands in their lives to find a deeper way to connect to the universe. These are all special ways in which a Pagan Minister can be of service to others — especially to other Pagans.

How Does One Become A Pagan Minister?

I believe there are four requirements for becoming a true Pagan minister and becoming a person that is capable of successfully being in service to others.

Minister Requirements

1. A Calling
2. Personal Strength
3. Proper Training
4. Ordination

Frame 0.4 – Four Requirements for Becoming a Pagan Minister

The first of the four requirements is that Pagan Ministers feel a calling to ministry. When I say a calling I do not mean words from on high by an imposing deity (although some may have that experience). I am talking about an inner calling — a deep yearning of the soul that asks you to do more with your life than focus on your own needs. This inner calling makes you want to help others. A calling can also done by a spiritual community who recognizes the abilities of a potential minister and helps to train and lead that person to serve their members in their needs. Are you the person that all your friends or neighbors turn to when they need someone to talk about their problems? Do you feel an ache in your heart every time you see someone in pain or in need? Do you feel most fulfilled in your life when you are helping someone else? Then you may have that kind of calling. Not everyone is called and it takes a certain kind of person to want to dedicate time and energy to the spiritual growth and welfare of others. Ministering to others is difficult and challenging and it takes a strong personal commitment that is usually only made after a person feels deeply called to the work.

Besides feeling an inner drive to help, an effective minister must have personal strength; he or she should be strong physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. A Pagan minister would see these qualities as attributes of the four elements: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. The necessary physical qualities of a minister include good

overall physical health, an ability to balance work and rest, and self-control. Mental qualities include good mental health, an ability to be patient and tolerant, good communication skills, and a sense of overall justice. The emotional strengths of a minister include a positive attitude toward yourself and others, a sense of humor and joyfulness, and an ability to be caring towards others. Good spiritual health includes a strong spirituality, and an ability to bring peacefulness and hopefulness to others.

True ordination is done through a spiritual group who both recognizes the ability of a potential minister and the need of the group to have this person minister to their members.

A Pagan minister should also have some training beyond that of being a Priest or Priestess. In addition to knowing about Pagan spirituality, ritual design and practice, and many other basics of a Pagan practice, a Pagan minister should also learn how to develop good

listening skills, advise or counsel others, offer spiritual direction, and lead special rituals such as weddings or Handfastings. He or she should learn about the stages of spiritual development, the basics of what makes a well balanced and adjusted individual, and about the dynamics of groups. These, of course, are just the basics and all ministers should be committed to always learning more.

The Pagan minister also needs to be ordained and I do not mean becoming ordained by clicking a button on a web page. True ordination is done through a spiritual group who both recognizes the ability of a potential minister and the need of the group to have this person minister to their members. Ordination originally meant to be accepted into a spiritual order — a dedicated group of spiritual seekers. Only a Circle of Pagans can determine whether or not someone has the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual skills needed to become an effective minister to other Pagans. A minister is meant to serve a spiritual community with outreach to the greater community and to other potential ministers and that can and should only be done within a community that accepts and calls that minister. True ordination should be a recognition of a group's calling and of a

Preface

person's training and experience to aid others. In order for a person to be officially sanctioned as ordained clergy by a state in the United States, that person must be ordained through a religious non-profit corporation that has been registered by that state. The appendix at the end of this section lists the steps required for creating such a corporation. One reason for seeking such an official ordination is so that a Pagan minister may lead legal wedding ceremonies but in many states ordained ministers are not always required for such a service. Other than that, people can minister to others without a state sanctioned ordination. Even so, I strongly suggest that a person who wishes to dedicate his or her life to the spiritual health and well being of others become ordained either officially through the state or through an ordination ritual organized by a spiritual group.

In the spiritual group I helped to start, we required that a minister be trained in the first three of five degrees that all members worked to attain. The idea was that this developed their Pagan spirituality first through learning and doing a variety of spiritual practices. Those seeking to be ministers were required to do additional training, however, and had to learn and practice the skills of pastoral listening, pastoral advising, divinatory advising, spiritual direction, and how to lead special rituals. Only after this training, which included many hours of practical application of these skills, could a person apply for ordination through the Order. The person who completed this training then applied to the officers of the Order and, if approved, became a candidate for ordination. If the candidate completed all the requirements and if the officers were convinced that the person was ready, he or she was ordained by the group through a special ordination ritual. Those requirements included logging at least 20 hours of time practicing these ministerial skills with others and getting letters of recommendation from people who they had helped. In this way, new ministers had to demonstrate their ability to successfully help others and be a positive impact on the Pagan community and on the community as a whole. Furthermore, ministers had to maintain a code of ethics knowing that ordination could be rescinded by the group if those principles were ever violated.

Becoming a minister in any religious tradition is a serious matter. The decision to become a minister should not be taken lightly and the process needed to hone the skills of a truly effective minister

should be challenging and extensive. A minister is one who is called upon to be trusted with the intimate aspects of an individual's spiritual life. As in any other profession, a minister needs to demonstrate that he or she is worthy of that trust and is capable to be of help and not hindrance. A Pagan minister can offer people who are Pagan or open to Pagan theology a unique alternative perspective on the world. Through the skills of Caring, Sharing, Declaring, Preparing, and Repairing, a Pagan minister can be a strong influence in the spiritual development of other Pagans and can serve as a positive model to others.

