

Claremont 2018: *How Professional do we want Pagan Ministry to be?*
Education, Role, Action
Sam Webster

Who is an M.Div here? How many do we have in our Community?

Let me start with a set of contextual and rhetorical questions:

What is Ministry vs Priesthood?

What kind of power does a Pagan minister have in our community?

What should they have? How does this differ from Priestly power?

What is it to be 'called' and how is that constitutive of a Minister?

Why should we expect new Pagans to share our values?

Why should they expect us to consider them Pagan?

Education

As the folks at Cherry Hill know, I am not a fan of the school. In its early days I worked with it, I've taught a couple classes with it, but had to distance myself from it, sadly, for ethical reasons. It describes itself as a seminary and claims to be able to make masters of divinity.

As it does not do the primary functions of seminary, nor provide the appropriate education for contemporary religious professionals, and nor does it seem interested in achieving those things, I removed my support for this otherwise noble effort.

We see it as a thing you get from being ordained. No, it is a profession without which training, calling oneself a minister is a farce which any other minister can see.

Three things are crucial: Theology, History, and Ministerial Development

1. The sweep of Western, mostly Christian Theology, along with the origins and development of religious thought.
2. The richness (and horror) of western religious history, mostly from the axial age through to the present, eventually leading up to our origins, and the development of Contemporary Paganism to today.
3. And most importantly: Ministerial development, and being broken of the want to help people (for selfish/egoic reasons).

3 Primary Roles: Liturgical, Pastoral, Prophetic

We are good at the Liturgical. We teach priestcraft, but too frequently it is thin, often with little depth of knowledge, and lessons learned are rarely passed along. The west has little critical knowledge or approaches to ritual or practice.

And Ministry itself is an entirely different matter, more focused on the congregants than the Gods.

We are developing competencies in the Pastoral. Cherry Hill, for example, has been delivering on that need for quite some time, decades?

But, the Prophetic is problematic: The need for self criticism, the need to transform with time, the need to evaluate and review are deep and real. But, the current conflict around deplatforming contributors at PantheaCon shows a profound lack of skillfulness around our self-criticism. The approach lacked transparency and justice and can primarily be categorized as abuse. Without due process, there can be no justice.

Action

Pastoral Care (polyglot)

Education (cleaning up our history, applying the richness of the Academy)

Neutral Party, what is the evidence, what are fair and kind responses
Setting the standards for non-abusive discourse and action. Especially because we have no a centralized authority structure, nor clearing house organizations, nor a self-policing professional clerics organization, nor any of the other means other religions use to prevent abuse of authority.

More challenging: Gate-keeping. We are the only religion you can just declare yourself a member of. Normally, someone else has to validate your membership; bring you in, so to speak. Because our lack of this many people can declare themselves Pagan even if they have never met the culture we have been building for 600 years.

Community Development, Professional Development. Are we going to take this up with intention or just let it happen? E.g., this conference: How many times has it met? What papers, publications, or actions have come out of it? Certainly some have gone on to do or publish something, but none that I have seen comes out under its name.

What kind of Paganism will we have? What kind of Pagan leadership will we have? The fundamental answer is *the kind we make*. What will that be?

Abstract

We have very few trained ministers in the Pagan community. We teach priestcraft, but too frequently it is thin, often with little depth of knowledge, and lessons learned are rarely passed along.

Ministry is an entirely different matter, more focused on the congregants than the Gods.

We have issues of abuse. But as we have neither a centralized authority structure, nor clearing house organizations, nor a self-policing professional clerics organization, nor any of the other means other religions use to prevent abuse of authority.

We are the only religion you can just declare yourself a member of. Normally, someone else has to validate your membership; bring you in, so to speak. Because our lack of this many people can declare themselves Pagan even if they have never met the culture we have been building for 600 years.

These circumstances raise critical questions:

What is Ministry vs Priesthood?

What kind of power does a Pagan minister have in our community?

What should they have? How does this differ from Priestly power?

What is ministerial formation? Why is it important?

What is it to be called and how is that constitutive of a Minister?

What value is seminary training and what does it entail?

Can we get help from the liberal traditions?

What value has Cherry Hill for our Community?

Why is its certification important, and quite possibly impossible?

Why should we expect them to share our values?

Why should they expect us to consider them Pagan?