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This information brochure was compiled by the South African Pagan Rights Alliance (SAPRA).

SAPRA was formed in 2004 as a faith-based (Pagan) human rights activist alliance.

SAPRA, a designated ‘religious organization’ by the Department of Home Affairs, currently fulfils several important functions in line with its constitutional mandate, namely, to promote the guaranteed liberties and freedoms enshrined for all South African Pagans in the Bill of Rights and assist South African Pagans, whose constitutionally guaranteed rights and freedoms have been infringed due to unfair discrimination, to obtain appropriate redress.

Download SAPRA’s Constitution HERE
WHAT IS

PAGANISM?

Part I. Pagan

Etymology and usage

The word pagan comes from the Latin words ‘pagani’, meaning 'rural', and 'pagus', meaning 'country-district'. It was used in a Christian inscription of the early fourth century to describe rural civilians of Rome who had not converted to Christianity. The 'pagani', more often than not, practiced ancient Roman, Greek, Celtic, Teutonic and Egyptian religions, religions closely associated with Nature (as is evidenced in what we now know about pre-Christian beliefs, Gods and Goddesses, and their relationship to natural places, elements and forces (wind, wave, rain, fertility etc.).

The general use of the word in ancient Rome however made no direct reference to religion at all. A pagan was simply a person who dwelt in the country and in this Roman context may have referred equally to members of very divergent belief systems and spiritualities.

Within a fourth century Christian context a pagan referred specifically to non-Christians not only in Rome but throughout the Mediterranean world. Subsequent Christian colonization and the work of Christian missionaries broadened the usage of the words paganism and pagan to include pre-Christian and non-Christian religions and peoples of Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas. The reader should bear in mind that adherents of these religions did not refer to their faiths as paganism and did not identify themselves as Pagan.

‘paganism’, with a small 'p', is a term used as a form of derision by Christian Missionaries and Churches with reference to pre-Christian religious belief systems and practices and today the term is commonly used to collectively define divergent pre-Christian cultures and religions, cultures and religions which do not identify themselves as Pagan today.

‘Paganism’, with a capital 'P', refers to the modern revival and reconstruction of ancient religious, spiritual and ritual practices of pre-Christian peoples. Modern Pagans have reclaimed the term 'Paganism' as an over-arching definition for reconstructed pre-Christian European religions (also referred to as Ethnic European Religions) and post-Christian neo-Pagan syncretic religions. Pagan academics refer to Paganism as a modern religious movement containing several distinct and separate religions. Modern Paganism is characterized by a diversity of spirituality, belief and religious practice, and by tolerance of religious and theological diversity.
Part II. Paganism in S.A.

Since 1995 a number of South African Pagans have taken the opportunity to express their pleas for religious tolerance and an end to discrimination against religious minorities in South Africa.

Many new Pagan religious communities have been formed, each of which have and are contributing toward building, through networking, sharing and teaching, the Pagan community of South Africa.

Census

To date (2012) there is no accurate census of the number of Pagans in South Africa.

Official government censuses have never listed Paganism as a census choice. It may be assumed that Pagans who registered for the 2001 Census, were collectively lumped with ‘others’ under either one of these listed figures:

Other beliefs 283815 - No religion 6767165 - Undetermined 610974

No official or definitive South African census on the number of self-defined Pagans exists.

Community structure

Insular Pagan communities around the country are bound by their own religious rules, codes of conduct, religious traditions and theologies.

Conversion

Entry into formal and insular communities sometimes involves an initiatory rite of entry or initiation into the mysteries of that community.

Legal Standing

In accordance with Chapter Two of the South African Constitution, the right to practice and promote Pagan religions is a pre-existing constitutional guarantee for all South African Pagans.

Several Pagan organizations and religious institutions are designated ‘religious organizations’ by the Department of Home Affairs and may nominate Pagans as religious marriage officers in accordance with provisions of the Civil Union Act.
Public Pagan Groups

Many diverse Pagan groups have been formed since 1996, reflecting the independent spirit of diversity so characteristic of the modern Pagan movement in South Africa. No one person or group may be said to speak for all Pagans in South Africa. The most visible of these groups include...

The Grove was founded in 1996 as an eclectic South African Pagan Mystery School dedicated to the exploration of Pagan gnosis and the practice of neo-Paganism. The order is an initiatory tradition founded on the praxis of ancient and modern Pagan traditions.

The Clan of Ysgithyrwyn was founded 1998 in the southern Cape. The Hearth of Ysgithyrwyn was formed as a Pagan circle of fellowship and ceremony and is the foundation stone of an eclectic Pagan Coven.

The Lunaguardia Tradition was founded in December 2000 in Nelspruit. Lunaguardia is an eclectic coven aimed at personal identification with Divinity and the Solitary path.

The Circle of the African Moon (CAM) was founded in 2001 and promotes itself as a proactive Pagan educational network.

The Celestine Circle was founded in 2001 in Kwazulu-Natal.

The Correlian Nativist Church (CNC) was launched in South Africa in 2002. A number of Correllian Temples have been formed in Gauteng and the Western Cape.


The South African Pagan Rights Alliance (SAPRA) was founded in 2004 as a Pagan human rights activist alliance. The Alliance was constituted to promote the guaranteed liberties and freedoms enshrined in the Bill of Rights and to assist South African Pagans, whose constitutionally guaranteed rights and freedoms have been infringed due to unfair discrimination, to obtain appropriate redress.

The Clan of Kheper Temple was formed in Cape Town in 2005. The Clan of Kheper is a Temple of the Correllian Nativist Tradition dedicated to the study of Correllian Philosophy and Training in the Correllian degree's of Clergy.

The South African Pagan Council (SAPC), a non-profit organization, was formed in December 2006 and currently serves as a round table organization for almost every existing public Pagan organization and religious community, and many solitary Pagans who choose not to belong to organized groups, in South Africa. All affiliated members (individuals and groups) to the Council remain independent and autonomous.

Many new South African Pagan newsletters (including an online Pagan magazine) have also appeared to network a growing and diverse national community of Pagans seeking to identify with and to shape the emerging identity of South African Paganism as a minority religion.
Part III. Pagan Religions

Common Beliefs and Practices

Religious authority

Paganism nationally and internationally has no central religious authority. Communities are governed by initiatory hierarchy or by democratic consensus.

Theologies

Paganism has no central theology and embraces a number of theologies and belief systems including but not restricted to polytheism, monotheism, pantheism and animism.

Paganism draws spiritual and religious inspiration from many credible and authentic ancient and modern sources of religious doctrine, theology and philosophy. Modern Pagan theology is composed of beliefs and practices originating in many distinct pre- and post-Christian religious traditions. Modern Pagans may embrace all or part of this tapestry of belief systems.

Pagans may explore their family and ethnic heritage to discover the indigenous practices of their distant ancestors. Others do respectfully incorporate indigenous practices that belong to a wide variety of cultures. Many Pagans create new practices that in turn may form part of a new Pagan tradition.

Nature and Divinity

Modern Paganism encourages a strong environmental ethic. This is expressed in the veneration for the Divine Feminine (God as Goddess), most often portrayed as 'Earth Mother' or as the 'Goddess of the Earth'.

Paganism encourages a personal inner relationship with the Divine, in and through Nature, whether through the worship of a Goddess, or through worship of a God and Goddess, or through the worship of many Gods and Goddesses.

Pagans also venerate Nature by observing seasonal changes through religious ritual and ceremony. Paganism encourages reverence for the Divine within Nature, and the pursuit of the development of sacred relationships with Nature in many forms. Many neo-Pagans celebrate eight religious holy-days which occur on the solstices, equinoxes and four seasonal mid-points between them. These are the festivals that celebrate the seasons and the turning of the Wheel of the Year in the southern hemisphere.
The 8 Seasonal neo-Pagan Festivals:

1. Samhain
   Also known as Halloween.
   This sabbat celebrates the start of the new spiritual year with the veneration of the ancestors.
   Date: 30 April / 1 May

2. Winter Solstice
   Also known as Yule.
   This sabbat celebrates the Winter Solstice Sun.
   Date: 21 June (or on the date of the winter solstice)

3. Imbolc
   Also known as Imbolg.
   This sabbat celebrates the end of Winter and the quickening of stem and field to new life.
   Date: 1 August

4. Spring Equinox
   Also known as Ostara.
   This sabbat celebrates the Spring Equinox and new life.
   Date: 21 September (or on the date of the spring equinox)

5. Beltane
   Also known as Beltain.
   This is a fertility sabbat in honour of Sun and Earth.
   Date: 31 October / 1 November

6. Summer Solstice
   Also known as Litha.
   This sabbat celebrates the Summer Solstice Sun.
   Date: 21 December (or on the date of the summer solstice)

7. Lughnasadh
   Also known as the Festival of First Fruits
   This sabbat celebrates the First Fruits Harvest.
   Date: 2 February

8. Autumn Equinox
   Also known as Mabon.
   This sabbat celebrates the Autumn Equinox and the second harvest of fruit and vegetable.
   Date: 21 March (or on the date of the autumn equinox)

Reconstructionist Pagans do not observe the above holy-days, a fairly modern construct, choosing instead to adopt religious celebrations, rites and rituals of their pre-Christian ancestors. Modern Pagans encourage respect for ancestral traditions and respect for the living memory of their Ancestors.

Pagans are encouraged to live ethically and to obey the just laws of the Land.
Part IV. Suggested Further Reading

Paganism Today: Wiccans, Druids, the Goddess and Ancient Earth Traditions for the Twenty-First Century
Graham Harvey and Charlotte Hardman

Being a Pagan: Druids, Wiccans, and Witches Today
Ellen Evert Hopman and Lawrence Bond

The Paganism Reader
Edited by Chas Clifton and Graham Harvey

Contemporary Paganism: Listening People, Speaking Earth
by Graham Harvey

Paganism: An Introduction to Earth-Centered Religions
by River Higginbotham and Joyce Higginbotham

The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft
by Ronald Hutton

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