



Paganism

Disclaimer

This resource has been prepared to help staff and students in raising awareness, increasing knowledge and to assist their work at MMU.

The resource has been prepared according to the Faith Communities Navigator' published in 2007 by the Faith Regen Foundation and guidance from

MMU Chaplains. The interpretation of the faith, observances and representation of standards etc. are part of this professional judgement and should not be construed as an authorised or official interpretation. MMU has sought to acknowledge the use of any published material in the text of this resource. Any inadvertent omissions deemed necessary will be corrected upon notification of this error.

Key beliefs

Paganism describes those contemporary religions which are said to revere nature and have a strong environmental philosophy; beliefs are typically, but not exclusively, oriented around the cycle of the seasons. Paganism covers a diverse community: Wiccans, Druids, Shamans, Sacred Ecologists, Odinist, Heathens and Asatru. Environmentally aware, they try and cause as little damage as possible to the natural environment.

Worship elements

Generally worship consists of informal prayer or meditation, or of formal, structured rituals through which the participants affirm their deep spiritual connection with nature, honour their Gods and Goddesses, and celebrate the seasonal festivals of the turning year and the rites of passage of human life.

Places of worship

Pagans have no public buildings specifically set aside for worship, and most believe that religious ceremonies are best conducted out-of-doors.

Festivals and days of worship

The Pagan year - the Pagan seasonal cycle is often called the Wheel of the Year. Some Pagan communities will celebrate in a cycle of eight festivals spaced throughout the year:

Imbolc - marks the start of the farming season and celebrations are centred around fire. As winter stores of food were getting low Imbolc rituals were performed to harness divine energy that would ensure a steady supply of food until the harvest six months later.

Spring Equinox - celebrates the renewal of the earth's life after the arrival of spring.

Beltane - occurs between spring and summer and celebrates the fertility of the coming year.

Summer Solstice - at midsummer, Pagans honour the strength of the sun and the powers of the divine to create life.

Lughnasadh - takes place at the beginning of August, traditionally a harvest festival dominated by symbols and is connected with the reaping of corn.

Autumn Equinox - celebrated when day and night are of equal duration before the descent into increasing darkness and is the final festival of the season of harvest. In nature, the activity of the summer months slows down to the hibernation for the winter. For many Pagans, now is time to reflect on the past season.

Samhain - a very important date in the Pagan calendar marking the Feast of the Dead. Many Pagans also celebrate it as the old Celtic New Year (although some mark this at Imbolc). It is also celebrated by non-Pagans who call this festival Halloween.

Winter Solstice - falls on the shortest day of the year (21st December) and was celebrated in Britain long before the arrival of Christianity. The Druids (Celtic priests) would cut the mistletoe that grew on the oak tree and give it as a blessing. Oaks were seen as sacred and the winter fruit of the mistletoe was a symbol of life in the dark winter months.

The diversity calendar can be found at www.mmu.ac.uk/humanresources/equalities

This fact sheet has been produced using information found in the 'Faith Communities Navigator' published in 2007 by the Faith Regen Foundation and www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/zoroastrian with guidance from MMU Chaplains.