



# By-Laws of Sylvan Circle, Coven of the Old Religion

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## **MISSION STATEMENT**

1.1 Sylvan Circle [The Coven] is a Wiccan coven which derives its power from the diversity and strength of each individual member, and exists to provide for its members a safe space in which to express their spirituality.

1.2 The Coven exists as an open forum for the members to share knowledge, wisdom, and ideas.

1.3 In all administrative matters, The Coven is egalitarian and reaches decisions by consensus of the members.

1.3.1 The founding High Priestess will facilitate decision making sessions/meetings. Everyone who is a member of the coven shall act as an advisor. If consensus can not be quickly achieved, the High Priestess will make the final decision.

1.3.2 In an emergency situation, the High Priestess may make a decision without council, or with council as she chooses. Emergency decisions made by the High Priestess without council will be brought to the coven at a later date with the option for approval or adjustment.

1.4 In all matters of spiritual training, a three degree system is honored and employed.

1.5 The Coven agrees to follow a common body of laws which protect the rights and well being of the coven as a whole and the individuals that compose it. The Laws apply equally to all, and is applied equally to all, regardless of position or degree.

# **BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

## **2.1 FORMATION**

2.1.1 The core group will be 4 individuals who hold offices within the corporate structure.

2.1.2 Corporate titles for these individuals are "TRUSTEE".

2.1.3 The Trustees are responsible for the execution of all corporate needs and management of fiscal responsibilities of The Coven.

2.1.4 The Trustees, as a group, bestow legal clergy rights and privileges on members of sufficient rank and merit.

2.1.5 The Trustees, as a group, may bestow these same clergy rights on a limited basis to those of merit but who have not yet gained the rank necessary to carry them indefinitely.

## **2.2 TERM OF OFFICE**

2.2.1 The Trustees are set at the formation of this body and there is no set term of office.

2.2.2 The position of Trustee conveys a great deal of responsibility and may require more time than can be given by an individual. For this reason, a Trustee who finds her/himself without sufficient time and/or energy to fulfill his/her position may take a hiatus of up to six months and still retain his/her position as Trustee.

2.2.2.1 If a trustee takes a hiatus, the membership may choose from among the volunteers from the membership one of merit to fill the role and responsibilities of the missing Trustee, on the understanding that it is only a temporary position. If the remaining Trustees can effectively handle the work of the missing Trustee, they do not need to seek a replacement for the one on hiatus.

2.2.2.2 If after six months, the missing Trustee still feels unable to fulfill his/her responsibility as Trustee, s/he will no longer be considered a Trustee and may be replaced.

2.2.2.3 Elections will then be held to elect a new Trustee from among the membership. This new Trustee will have the same rights and responsibilities as the other Trustees, including no set term of office.

## **2.3 REMOVAL OF A TRUSTEE**

2.3.1 If the Trustee has so violated the trust of the membership as to make some or all uncomfortable with the Trustee retaining their position, any of the membership may make a Motion to Recall. Motion to recall can not be made until dispute resolution has been attempted.

2.3.2 If such a motion is made, a meeting date must be set and communicated to all members at least 1 week prior to the meeting date. This is necessary as all members are encouraged to participate.

2.3.3 At least 67% of the membership must be present (in person or by written proxy) at the time of the vote.

2.3.4 To recall a Trustee at least 60% of those present must agree by means of their vote to remove the Trustee. If less than 60% vote for the recall, the Trustee maintains his/her position, but is urged to look at the concerns of the membership and do her/his utmost to address the concerns and regain good faith.

2.3.5 Removal or resignation from the Board of Trustees in no way affects their status as members of The Coven.

## **2.4 ADDITIONAL TRUSTEES**

2.4.1 If at some point the Trustees determine that there is a need for additional Trustees to meet the functional needs of the Board of Trustees, they may call for volunteers from within the membership to fill the new vacancy(ies).

2.4.2 The consensually accepted Trustee(s) have the same rights and responsibilities as the standing Trustees, including no set term of office.

## **2.5 REMOVAL OF ADDITIONAL TRUSTEE POSITION(S)**

2.5.1 If it comes to pass that an established Trustee position goes vacant, either due to lack of membership or lack of interest, for a period of nine months or more, that position is removed from the structure and can only be reinstated by means outlined previously.

# **THE SECRETARY**

## **3.1 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SECRETARY**

3.1.1 Every group will inevitably receive correspondence and requests for classes. For this reason, there needs to be a person who is charged with answering correspondence and questions about the group, and chairing meetings.

3.1.2 The Secretary represents The Coven to all outsiders and is responsible for responding to all inquiries, written or otherwise. The secretary chairs all meetings, and takes notes at meetings.

3.1.3 Though not required, it is strongly urged that the Secretary periodically check in with the membership to ensure that they are adequately representing The Coven and not just their own opinions.

3.1.4 The term of office shall be a period of twelve months beginning at or around the Sabbat of Spring Equinox (March 21st). One person can not hold the position for more than two consecutive terms.

3.1.5 The Secretary is a volunteer position answering to the membership and the Secretary can also hold the position of Trustee concurrently, but the Secretary does not need to be a Trustee.

3.1.6 Volunteers should be sought by the Trustees at the annual meeting at or around Imbolc (Feb 2nd).

3.1.7 If more than one member volunteers for a given term, the volunteers will work out between themselves who will serve the next term with the remaining volunteers being pre-assigned for subsequent terms.

3.1.8 If the volunteers are unable to work out an amenable solution, the membership will vote for their choice of Secretary with a simple majority determining the appointee.

3.1.9 Once the Secretary for the coming term has been determined, the new Secretary must confer with the current Secretary in order to be briefed on current practices and pending needs of the position. Any significant changes desired by the new Secretary must be brought for approval to the Trustees.

3.1.10 The Secretary will keep on file copies of all incoming or outgoing correspondence, and will report significant correspondence at business meetings.

3.1.11 The business files, and all correspondence are property of the Coven.

### **3.2 REMOVAL OF THE SECRETARY**

3.2.1 If the Secretary has so violated the trust of the membership as to make some or all uncomfortable with the Secretary retaining his/her position, any of the membership may make a Motion to Recall. Motion to recall can only be made until disputes resolution has been attempted.

3.2.2 If such a motion is made, a time and date for the meeting to vote on the motion is set. All members must be notified at least 1 week in advance of the meeting.

3.2.3 At the time of the meeting, at least 67% of the membership must be present, either in person or by written proxy.

3.2.4 To recall the Secretary, a simple majority of those present must agree by means of their vote to remove the Secretary. If the majority does not vote to recall the Secretary, the Secretary retains his/her position, but is urged to look at the concerns of the membership and do her/his utmost to address their concerns and regain their faith.

3.2.5 Removal or resignation of the Secretary in no way affects their status as members of The Coven.

# **THE MEMBERSHIP**

## **4.1 FORMATION**

4.1.1 Membership is voluntary and any may choose to terminate their association at any time.

4.1.2 The membership is composed of traditionally initiated Wiccans, initiated or aligned into the Reformed Celtic Tradition.

4.1.3 Membership is by invitation or initiation into The Coven.

4.1.4 When a member wishes for an invitation to be offered to a Wiccan, he/she presents to the membership at a meeting whom he/she wishes to join The Coven and why.

4.1.4 A Traditionally Initiated Wiccan who seeks membership into the coven may make a formal petition for membership after attending no less than two coven events, though more time is recommended so we may get to know each other better.

4.1.5 If agreed upon by all members of the coven, an interview will be scheduled to ensure that training, theology, beliefs, etc, are in alignment with that of the Coven.

4.1.6 If after the interview, Petitioner and Coven are in agreement to move forward, the Petitioner shall be invited to an Esbat.

4.1.7 After the Esbat, a vote will be taken by the coven as to whether an invitation should be extended, with consensus determining the outcome.

4.1.8 If the perspective member accepts the invitation to join, a Joining Ceremony will be scheduled. All members are strongly urged to make every attempt to attend this ceremony.

4.1.9 A Candidate who is not of at least the First Degree or higher requesting initiation into The Coven must ask a member for initiation.

4.1.10 Members receiving petitions for initiation will bring them immediately to the membership body, which will decide by consensus whether to accept the candidate. The Coven will not initiate anyone under 18 years of age.

4.1.11 Petitioners accepted for initiation must complete all initiatory tasks including the initiation ceremony before membership is conveyed.

4.1.12 Please note that initiations performed by The Coven or by its membership do not automatically convey membership to the new initiate, unless previously discussed with the membership and agreed upon.

4.1.13 If there is a termination of membership for any reason, the former member must immediately return their coven cords intact, braided or unbraided

## ***4.2 RIGHTS OF THE WHOLE MEMBERSHIP***

4.2.1 All members are implicitly invited to coven meetings and are encouraged to voice their opinions in decision making.

4.2.2 All members are eligible to serve as Trustees and as Secretary.

4.2.3 Any member may call a meeting of the membership when they have issues that they need to discuss, including the desire to amend these bylaws.

4.2.4 Though the Coven is a family, all members are free to pursue their studies either within or outside of The Coven membership, insofar as such choices do not conflict with the Code of Honor and vows taken.

4.2.5 All members are free to associate with whomever they find worthy of their time, regardless of any tension that may exist between the persons they choose to associate with and members of The Coven, insofar as such choices do not conflict with the Code of Honor and vows taken.

4.2.6 All members are at all times bound by the Code of Honor and the vows they have freely taken.

## ***4.3 RIGHTS OF THE 1ST DEGREE***

4.3.1 May cast circle for themselves.

4.3.2 May teach classes within and for The Coven if approved by the Clergy.

4.3.3 May lead rituals for themselves.

4.3.4 May consecrate their own magickal tools.

4.3.5 May attend 1st degree initiation ceremonies and other circles to which they are invited.

4.3.6 May refer to self as "A Wiccan".

## ***4.4 RIGHTS OF THE 2ND DEGREE***



4.4.1 May cast circle without restriction.

4.4.2 May teach classes within and for The Coven and workshops and classes outside of The Coven.

4.4.3 May train students in the Craft.

4.4.4 May form study groups/protocovens. They are strongly urged to work with a partner of the 2nd or 3rd degree in such endeavors, as the temptation/opportunity to misuse authority is thus greatly diminished.

4.4.5 May lead rituals for themselves, their students, and for members of The Coven.

4.4.5.1 Is expected to lead at least one Sabbat each turn of the Wheel if possible.

4.4.6 May perform initiations with a partner of 2nd degree, or with a partner of 1st degree who has had clergy rights bestowed by the Trustees for the purpose of initiating, if a 3rd degree is present and in accord with the ceremony.

4.4.7 May attend 2nd degree elevation ceremonies and circles to which they are invited.

4.4.8 May refer to self as "A Priest/ess".

## ***4.5 RIGHTS OF THE 3RD DEGREE***

4.5.1 May cast circle without restriction.

4.5.2 May teach classes within and for The Coven and workshops and classes outside of The Coven.

4.5.3 May train students in the Craft.

4.5.4 May form their own covens. They are strongly urged to work with a partner of the 2nd or 3rd degree in such endeavors, as the temptation/opportunity to misuse authority is thus greatly diminished.

4.5.5 May lead rituals for themselves, their students, in the community (Wiccan and Mundane), and for members of The Coven.

4.5.5.1 Is expected to lead at least one Sabbat each turn of the Wheel if possible.

4.5.6 May perform initiations with a partner of at least 2nd degree, or with a partner of 1st degree who has had clergy rights bestowed by the Trustees for the purpose of initiating.

4.5.7 May attend 3rd Degree elevation ceremonies and circles to which they are invited.

4.5.8 May refer to self as "a High Priest/ess".

## **4.6 MEMBERSHIP STANDARDS OF CONDUCT**

4.6.1 All members shall abide by the Code of Honor, these bylaws, and the vows freely taken by themselves.

4.6.2 No member, student, or candidate shall ever be required to perform or submit to sexual acts as a condition of receiving teachings, initiations, elevations, or any other benefit, nor shall one be required to witness sexual acts, nor to broker sexual services, nor to acquiesce to the sharing of a spouse or sexual partner.

4.6.3 No member shall infringe upon the Constitutional rights of any member, student or candidate.

4.6.4 In all matters, members shall ever strive to conduct themselves in an exemplary manner and in keeping with that which they were taught and that which they teach.

4.6.5 No member shall ever intentionally lie or distort information to another member, student, or candidate with the object of harming, exploiting, or otherwise taking advantage of that person. A Witch's word is his or her bond. If a promise cannot be kept, members shall not make such a promise.

## **4.7 ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP**

4.7.1 An associate is reserved for those close to the heart of Sylvan Circle who live at such a distance that they cannot attend required coven functions.

4.7.2 Associate member status is granted by unanimous decision of the coven.

4.7.3 An associate is free to attend all coven functions.

4.7.4 An associate retains all the rights of a member, with the following exceptions:

4.7.3.1 Holding office within the coven, or

4.7.3.2 Decision making within the coven.

4.7.3.3 The immediately preceding exclusions do not prohibit solicitation and consideration of the input and opinion of associates on any matter before SC.

4.7.5 Associate members must remain in contact with the coven by attending at least one meeting, ritual or workshop within a three year period, or by providing a workshop for the coven within a three year period.

4.7.5.1 Attendance may include in-person, or via live streaming communication such as Zoom when and where appropriate.

4.7.6 If the attendance requirements listed in this section can not be, or are not met, then the associate membership is forfeited, and the coven cords in the possession of the former member must be returned immediately, either intact or unbraided.

4.7.7 If a change of residence allows an associate member in good standing to fulfill regular membership obligations, the associate membership will commute to full membership within the coven, and the member will have all rights of full membership restored.

4.7.8 If an associate member who has let their membership status lapse wishes to petition to re-join the coven, then all processes and procedures of section 4.1 for a traditional initiated witch must be followed.

4.7.9 Any associate member of the coven who became an associate before Jan 30, 2021, shall be exempt from the attendance rules in this section (4.7.5, 4.7.5.1, and 4.7.6).

## ***4.8 RIGHTS OF THE ELDER***

4.8.1 An Eldership is reserved for someone who has served as a third degree within the coven, but is at a stage in life where s/he wishes to retire from the full time responsibilities of coven life.

4.8.2 To become an Elder, a person must have been a full member of the coven for 10 consecutive years prior to moving to the role of Elder.

4.8.3 An Elder is free to attend all coven functions.

4.8.4 An Elder retains all the rights of a member, with the following exceptions:

4.8.4.1 Holding office within the coven, or

4.8.4.2 Decision making within the coven.

4.8.4.3 The immediately preceding exclusions do not prohibit solicitation and consideration of the input and opinion of an Elder on any matter before the coven.

4.8.5 An Elder member must remain in contact with the coven by attending at least one meeting, ritual or workshop within a three-year period, or by providing a workshop for the coven within a three-year period.

4.8.5.1 Attendance may include in-person, or via live streaming communication such as Zoom when and where appropriate.

4.8.5.2 If the attendance requirements listed in this section cannot be, or are not met, then the Elder membership is forfeited, and the coven cords in the possession of the former member must be returned immediately, either intact or unbraided.

4.8.6 If an Elder wishes to return to full time coven membership, they may do so for a provisional period of a year and a day.

4.8.6.1 During the provisional period, the returning Elder's membership will mirror those of the First Degree with regards to voting, attendance and mandatory leading of events. (see sec 4.3 for the Rights of the First Degree)

4.8.6.2 During the provisional period, if the Elder decides that, again, full time coven membership is difficult to maintain, they may revert to Elder status at any time.

## **4.9 REMOVAL OF A MEMBER**

4.9.1 If the member has so violated the trust of the membership as to make some or all uncomfortable with the member remaining within The Coven, any of the membership may make a Motion to Dismiss. A motion to dismiss can not be made until dispute resolution has been attempted.

4.9.1.1 The seriousness of this potential action should limit this option as the very last resort considered. The following offenses shall constitute the whole for which this option may be invoked: VIOLATION OF THE CODE OF HONOR, VIOLATION OF THE CONTRACT WITH THE STUDENT, OR THE VIOLATION OF THE MEMBERSHIP STANDARDS OF CONDUCT.

4.9.2 If such a motion is made, a meeting date must be set and communicated to all members at least 1 week prior to the vote. This is necessary as all members are encouraged to participate (and at least 67% of the membership must take part if the vote is to be valid).

4.9.3 At least 67% of the membership must be present in person (or by written proxy) at the time of the vote.

4.9.4 To dismiss a member, at least 75% of those present must agree by means of their vote to break ties with the member. If less than 75% vote for the Dismissal, the member

maintains his/her membership, but is urged to look at the concerns of the membership and do her/his utmost to address the concerns and regain their faith.

## **CODE OF HONOR**

5.1 To consider your word sacred.

5.2 To love all things in nature.

5.3 To respect all paths to the center.

5.4 To honor Deity in it's many manifestations.

5.5 To abstain from harm when possible, pursuing resolution over conflict.

5.6 To share the Truths of the Wicca only when authorized by Wiccan clergy.

5.7 To have the courage to stand firm in your convictions, ever taking counsel of your Highest Self.

5.8 At all times, to do the very best you can.

## ***6.0 DISPUTE RESOLUTION***

6.1 There will inevitably be disputes among the membership, and possibly there will be concern about the performance of Trustee or Secretary duties. As spiritual beings, we understand that frequently a dispute and its resolution reside within our own selves. Members are encouraged to look within for a resolution before pursuing any further conflict resolution.

6.2 All such disputes which one cannot resolve through inner exploration should be discussed with those directly involved.

6.2 If resolution is not found personally, nor through discussion with the party(s) in the dispute, then the dispute or issue should be brought to The Clergy for resolution.

## **COVEN MEETINGS**

**Please note that these by-laws were revised extensively in 2021.**

### ***7.0 BUSINESS MEETINGS***

7.1 All members who have attained the degree of Priest/ess will meet when necessary to discuss matters of spiritual training and other matters of the clergy.

7.2 All members of the Coven are required to attend an annual business/planning meeting, which is to be held at or about Imbolc, to plan events and issues for the upcoming year.

7.3 Ad-hoc meetings may be called at any time by any member, as the need arises.

7.4 The Secretary will chair and will take notes of all business meetings. If the Secretary is unable to chair a meeting, a Trustee will act as the chair.

7.5 As all members are expected to attend coven meetings, only in person voting on a subject will be allowed. This will allow all members a chance to hear and engage in dialogue. Proxy voting will not be allowed, as a vote that has been logged prior to discussion is fixed and unmovable; unable to be swayed, or to generate alternative solutions through group brainstorming.

### ***8.0 SABBATS AND ESBATS***

8.1 When possible, the Coven will gather to celebrate the eight Sabbats of the Wheel.

8.2 When possible, the Coven will gather to celebrate the thirteen Esbats of the Wheel.

8.2.1. Esbats may be held as circle, or as coven building/social time.

### ***9.0 INITIATIONS AND ELEVATIONS***

9.1 All members of the coven are required to attend coven initiations.

9.2 Every clergy member of the appropriate degree is required to attend coven elevations.

### ***10.0 ATTENDANCE AND EXPECTATIONS***

10.1 Members are expected to attend every event.

10.1.1 While it is understood that emergencies occur, a total of three non-emergency absences are permitted per year.

10.2 It is expected that all members will attend Imbolc unless there is an emergency.

10.3 As the Coven's anniversary is celebrated at Lammas, it is expected that all members will attend unless there is an emergency.

10.4 Refer to the separate [Expectations of Members](#) page for further details and guidance regarding priority of attendance.

10.5 If a member is unable to fulfill the attendance expectations, counseling will be required.

10.5.1 Attendance counseling will be held privately with the High Priest of the coven, and/or a designee of the High Priestess.

## **11.0 EMAILS**

11.1 Sylvan Circle email is considered the official method of communication within the coven.

11.2 Responses to coven emails should be done as soon as able. Refer to the separate [Expectations of Members](#) page.

11.2.1 If the topic of an email is urgent, it shall be noted in the subject line along with a needed reply by date.

## **12.0 USE OF ZOOM OR OTHER ONLINE MEETING SPACES**

12.1 The use of online meeting spaces is not permitted in the Temple Space, nor any ritual where a circle is cast.

12.2 Online meeting spaces may be allowed at dinner esbats at the discretion of the event's priest or priestess.

12.3 Online meeting spaces may be used for portions of sabbats that are not in circle, such as the joke telling at Beltaine.

12.3.1 The use of online meeting spaces during these times are at the discretion of the event's priest or priestess.



12.4 As attendance is required for the annual business meeting, online meeting spaces will not be used.

12.4.1 In the case of an extreme emergency which prevents a member from attending, an online meeting room may be considered.

12.4.2 If any consensus requiring decision needs to be made, and there is a member unable to attend the business meeting due to a condition as in 12.4.1, and said member is unable to join the meeting by an online meeting room, then the subject(s) will be tabled until a later date in which all members are able to have a voice.

### ***13.0 COMBINING EVENTS***

13.1 When the annual schedule is created, events that are closely adjacent in date will be combined whenever feasible.

13.1.2 Due to the extra time and effort involved, workshops will not be scheduled as a separate event on the same day as an esbat.