



**the
aquarian
tabernacle
church of
wicca**

seeker packet

The Aquarian Tabernacle Church of Wicca
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Welcome to the Aquarian Tabernacle Church of Wicca

We are a diverse community, and we welcome you wherever you may be on your spiritual path. The Aquarian Tabernacle is a Wiccan church that was founded in the Seattle area in 1979, and has now blossomed out beyond the U.S.A. into Canada, Australia, Ireland, and other nations with over 30 legally recognized congregations worldwide. We are a positive, life-affirming Wiccan path, offering many opportunities for spiritual growth for the larger Pagan community through honoring the Lady, the Lord and the Old Gods of antiquity.

Our goal is to practice a modern Pagan life in the knowledge that every spiritual tradition, old and new, has lessons to offer us. We teach the great principals of successful living that have been discovered and rediscovered by every religion down through the ages, and we seek to assimilate those truths into our daily lives.

As a community, we support one another in learning to live our Pagan spirituality so that we can experience and share the blessings of our loving Goddess, the God and all of the Old Gods. We gather as of old according to the lunar cycles and solar holidays to remind ourselves of these deep spiritual truths, to celebrate the growing Earthly presence of the Goddess and God and integrate them into our living, and to support each other as friends and neighbors.

As Pagans from many diverse paths, we focus on and share the commonalities of our beliefs and overlook our differences. We believe that the Goddess and the Gods are good, and that we ourselves are also fundamentally good. We believe that the spark of the divine dwells deep within each of us. Our lives are blessed and transformed to the degree that we honor the Old Gods. As we become aware of this in our daily living and open ourselves to this Divine Presence within us, our lives become richer, happier and more rewarding.

We do not seek the Lady and Lord out of a sense of guilt or obligation, but rather out of a love and respect for them and all of their creation. We learn to live our Paganism every minute of every day, because when we do, life becomes so much better than before.



The Aquarian Tabernacle Church of Wicca AN OVERVIEW

The ATC is a Wiccan church following the Old Religion based on the beliefs and practices of indigenous peoples of Northern Europe. The ATC Mother Church is located in Index, Washington.

Begun in 1979 by Pete “Pathfinder” Davis as a coven dedicated to providing religious services and support to the larger Wiccan community, ATC was “the right idea at the right time,” and in a few years grew into the first Wiccan church with full legal status and recognition by the governments of four nations. ATC now has over 30 affiliated groups sharing the benefits and protections of the ATC recognition “umbrella” through its 501 c3 IRS Group Exemption.

The Aquarian Tabernacle Church of Wicca is a positive, life-affirming spirituality, a non-dualist, non-racist, non-sexist, non-exclusivist, bi-polar, ecologically-oriented faith dedicated to the preservation of Holy Mother Earth, the revival of the worship of the Old Gods in a modern context, the achievement of the fullest of human potentials and the creation of a peaceful world of love, freedom, health and prosperity for all sentient beings. We claim to speak only for ourselves, and for no others.

The Tabernacle did not begin as “an initiatory order,” although the founders were degreed in other Traditions. The ATC was given its first formalized structure on the Summer Solstice, Friday, June 21, 1985. Five Priestesses and Priests joined together at the ATC MoonStone Circle of standing stones in a group ceremony to dedicate the newly installed altar stone, and in recognition of the Tabernacle goals of service to the community. Some of that original group has dispersed over the intervening years, but the spirit and dedication to the Tabernacle’s original goals continues, perpetuated through the inner circles of the Tradition in the U.S. and other nations.

We believe, above all else, that everyone has the right to identify and follow their own unique spiritual path, and in that belief we do not actively seek to make converts to our religion. We will help those seekers who come to us asking to learn of our ways so that they may make their own conscious choices on the path that is right for them.

In our tradition, one based on serving the many solitary believers as well as organized groups, we focus our attentions on providing group worship and celebration and a place where seekers may come to learn and grow in their Paganism as a way of life. While our objective is to serve the larger Pagan community, we remain a separate and distinct tradition following our own customs and laws, and we are a self-regulating, closed membership organization rather than a composite community group with open membership from other traditions. The Aquarian Tabernacle Church is governed and perpetuated from within, but we do accept into our tradition individuals and groups from other traditions who wish to associate themselves with our work and goals of serving

the larger Pagan community, and agree to follow our tradition's customs and ordains. We are a public, incorporated, non-profit church, and are recognized as tax-exempt by the government at all levels.

The Aquarian Tabernacle Church Tradition is under the stewardship of two distinct structures, one principally secular and one principally spiritual, although there is, of necessity, a requisite overlap in the responsibilities of several of the offices between these structures. The secular matters rest with the Board of Directors and Corporate Officers who administer the worldly affairs of the church corporation and deal with legal matters. The Archpriesthood, the innermost circle of this tradition, together with the Council of Elders (the Tradition's Judicatory body), administer the spiritual affairs of the larger church body according to the Ordains.



Aquarian Tabernacle Church of Wicca TRADITION OF WICCA

The ATC Tradition is based on English Traditional Wicca, but has been modified both for contemporary needs and to be in accordance with our stated purpose. Training begins with exposure to the work of the ATC. If someone is interested in the mission of the ATC and wishes to learn the Tradition, that person makes his or her wishes known and, after an orientation, requests Seeker status. The Eldership will assess each applicant and will accept as Seekers those who show a true understanding of the path and a willingness to learn. Formal training consists of individual work and study and group lessons, as well as active membership in the Church. Postulancy is offered to those Seekers who, after becoming familiar with the ATC and having shown a serious commitment, choose to follow this path.

THE SPIRITUAL TRADITION OF THE ATC IS A DEGREED ONE.

Tradition Degrees—these are awarded as one learns the basics of the ATC Spiritual Tradition. Cords are awarded for each degree: blue for Postulant, white for First, red for Second, and black for Third. Elevation is contingent upon proof of ability specific to the degree, including a written test as well as recommendations by teachers and the Elders. There is no specific time line. Work can be accomplished in a class setting, by individual work and by working one on one.

POSTULANCY

Postulancy is a formal spiritual commitment to study and learn the ATC Tradition. Postulancy is vested in a special ritual where the teachers and Elders of the Church commit to teaching the Seeker and the Seeker commits to being the best student he or she can be. The Postulant enters a course of study learning not only the basics of Wicca, but specifically the purpose and mission of the ATC.

FIRST DEGREE

After showing a proficiency in the basics of Wicca, with an understanding of and commitment to the mission of the ATC, a postulant is initiated into the ATC Tradition. This confers First Degree. In the ATC Tradition, First Degree Initiates are awarded a white cord, wear the ATC white robe and may choose to study for Second Degree.

SECOND DEGREE

To attain Second Degree one must not only show a continuing knowledge of Wicca and commitment to the path, but must also show the character necessary to uphold the mission and goals of the church. Seconds also teach as well as design and hold ritual without supervision. Seconds wear white and red cords and wear the black ATC tabard with the Hekate Wheel emblem over their white robes.

On rare occasions the Degree of DISTINGUISHED SECOND may be granted to those

Second Degree priests or priestesses who have shown great ability, dedication and commitment to the ATC Tradition Path, but cannot, for one reason or another, commit to a Great Work.

THIRD DEGREE

Third Degree bestows legal *licensed* ordination and is reserved for those who have not only achieved a mastery of the Tradition, but also possess the skills, heightened capacity and maturity to minister on a high level to their community as well as commit to an on-going Great Work. The Great Work is re-confirmed and signed each year. If a Third Degree Priest/ess cannot fulfill the terms of the Great Work, a sabbatical may be granted for one year, with the approval of the Elders of the Tradition. The Third Degree will revert to Second Degree if the Great Work does not continue. Third Degree is not studied for, but is awarded if the priest/ess demonstrates the necessary skills. Thirds wear white, red and black cords braided together.

FOURTH DEGREE

The ATC is unique in that it confers two degrees beyond third. Fourth Degree is awarded when one has achieved true Elder status after working actively as a Third. Fourth Degree is honored retirement.

FIFTH DEGREE

Fifth Degree is awarded when the Lord and Lady call the priest/ess home at the end of this life.



Aquarian Tabernacle Church of Wicca STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

We recognize that the traditionally small circle or group structure is not always appropriate or useful for all who wish to follow our religion. We hold that the Wiccan Inner circle should act as a place where clergy are trained to serve the larger community. There are many Pagans who want to worship and celebrate the high holidays and the lunar cycle together, yet do not desire to make the teaching and practice of Wicca the central focus of their lives. They are the many scattered believers who have suffered the lack of contact with others—the neglected folks who will insure the future and the return of Paganism as a major influence in Western religion. It is to these people that we of the Tabernacle Tradition dedicate and focus our energies. In addition, the Tabernacle provides a home for those who wish to learn our Tradition and dedicate to our purpose.

There remain some who believe our path must remain dark and secret, available only to the “chosen few,” and they are entitled to their privacy. But history supports our belief that the ancients never intended that anyone who honestly seeks after the knowledge and love of the Goddess and the God should be deprived of it.



Aquarian Tabernacle Church of Wicca CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

The ATC Tradition is based on English Traditional Wicca and focuses on providing service to the larger Wiccan and Pagan community by offering the facilities, programs and services customarily available to the followers of more traditional or main line religions. Pagans and Wiccans have not always had the most basic religious services easily available to them.

If you want to marry and have a reception afterward and your are, let us say, a Protestant, you have merely to ask your minister to consecrate your union in the church chapel and let you use the parish hall for the reception afterwards. It's that simple. But what if you are Wiccan or Pagan? One could almost always find a Wiccan priestess or priest, but did they have the authority from the state to legally sanctify a marriage? Probably not, for in all likelihood our priestesses and priests did all in their power to avoid the notice of the state.

The ATC has changed all of that. The Church is a recognized, tax-exempt, non-profit religious church corporation that exists legally with the knowledge and blessing of the state and federal governments. They have also given the ATC the power to charter other congregations and grant recognition to them as well. Our clergy are recognized and have the power to sanctify marriages in all 50 states, as well as Canada and Australia.

We celebrate eight major Sabbats of Wicca as well as the lunar Esbats each year in the traditional way: by Circling with each other in our MoonStone Circle, a ring of standing menhirs (stones) set in a grove of stately old cedar trees to the rear of our church building, which houses our meeting and eating facilities, our extensive library and our offices and religious printing facilities.

The ATC is open to all sincere seekers, and we encourage newcomers to come and join us in celebration on the occasions when we hold services, both at the church property and elsewhere, according to our schedule.

The ATC offers several programs to the greater Pagan and Wiccan communities in addition to our open circle services. We host two major festivals each year: our Ostara celebration, Spring Mysteries Festival, over Easter weekend and our Samhain celebration, Hekate's Sickle, the first weekend in November. We teach public education classes, both at our church facilities and at Pagan/Wiccan bookstores in the greater Seattle area. Our Woolston-Steen Theological Seminary of Wicca is the first Wiccan seminary to be recognized by the state in the U.S. Our scouting program, SpiralScouts, has over 60 chapters throughout the U.S. We offer opportunities to learn, to work, to get involved, to spiritually grow. We exist because of and for you.



The ATC Vision . . .

In the belief that the quality of life and our vision is crucial to both our temporal and spiritual success in this incarnation, the people of the Aquarian Tabernacle Church seek to create an environment and community which:

RESPECTS THE INDIVIDUAL

- * by respecting the right of each to formulate their own belief system and structure free from imposed dogma or doctrine handed down from others;
- * by empowering every individual member through the encouragement of individual enquiry and investigation of matters of personal belief and the reaffirmation of the validity of responsible individual choice; by encouraging each individual according to their potential through religious study, training, mutual growth and respect;
- * by creating an environment where the quality of each individual's relationships with every other member are open and accepting of each other as we are now;
- * by nurturing and supporting a culture in which all can grow and mature in perfect love and perfect trust while learning to live in harmony with each other;

UNDERSTANDING THE ONLY LIMITS ARE THOSE WHICH ARE SELF-IMPOSED

- * by encouraging those who choose not to be limited to reach out and grow; encouraging each and every member through active support, both within and without the Church, to take the initiative to improve the quality of their lives and their daily working relationships through active growth in order to:

FOSTER UNITY, TEAMWORK, AND TOLERANCE FOR OTHERS

- * by recognizing that everyone, the exalted and the insignificant, has something for us to hear and comprehend;
- * by instilling and valuing the active listening and understanding of other points of view;
- * by recognizing that each member's role in improving relationships within our families, our church, our jobs and our lives is truly important in order that we may:

CREATE TRUE AND MEANINGFUL LIVES

- * by filling our every minutes with a sense of responsible joy, love, pleasure and humor, harming no one in the process;
- * by challenging each of us to reward ourselves in this life by being *more* through conscious effort;
- * by honoring the natural order of the universe and our Goddess and God through the regular acknowledgement and celebration of the solar, lunar and other cycles of our life;

THEREBY ENCOURAGING

- * a faith in the ability to accept and solve one's own problems on all levels, public and private;
- * a lifelong commitment to personal and universal growth and balance;
- * an understanding that human interdependence implies community cooperation, requiring us to practice every day what we preach. We must use our talents and skills to actively help each other as well as the community at large;
- * a concern with making one's lifestyle consistent with one's proclaimed beliefs.

THIS, THEN, IS THE VISION WE ASK ALL MEMBERS OF THE AQUARIAN TABERNACLE CHURCH OF WICCA FAMILY TO SHARE WITH US AS WE JOURNEY THROUGH THIS LIFETIME TOGETHER.



Aquarian Tabernacle Church CELEBRATING THE WHEEL OF THE YEAR

Wicca is a nature religion. The heart of its spirituality is its recognition of the spiritual nature of all things, its understanding of the connection among all aspects of life and its honoring of deity in both female and male aspects. In a world that seems to get farther away from nature every day, it is a challenge to make this part of Wiccan spirituality a part of daily life and worship. We honor the *Wheel of the Year*, the Sabbat cycle and the esbat cycle, as one way to do this.

The ancients observed that life existed as a cycle. Flowers and plants grew, bloomed, bore fruit and died only to rise again. Summer followed spring, spring followed winter, winter followed fall and fall followed summer. The moon waxed, became full, waned, was dark and waxed again. The logic of this cycle did not escape them. It only made sense that human life followed the same pattern. They honored this pattern by celebrating the cycles of nature, honoring nature and, in honoring nature, honoring deity and themselves. Our Tradition is based on the Celtic/British celebration cycle. The first festivals observed by the Celts of the British Isles were **BELTAINE** in the spring and **SAMHAIN** in the fall. The Celts held sacred the *between* times, the times between the day and night (dawn and dusk), between one cycle of the year and another. Spring was when life returned, exploded and flourished—between winter and summer. Fall was when the harvest came in, life retreating, preparing to rest and renew—between summer and winter. These were the two greatest and most obvious *betweens* of the year and were honored and celebrated as such. The Norse brought with them the idea of the solar celebrations, the solstices and equinoxes. This brought the total of yearly celebrations to six. Two more were added later to bring the total to eight, and this is what we celebrate today: the eight Sabbats—the eight holy days. The *quarter days* are the solstices and equinoxes—they divide the year into quarters: **LITHA** (summer solstice), June 21st; **MABON** (the fall equinox), Sept. 20th; **YULE** (the winter solstice), December 21st; and **OSTARA** (the spring equinox), March 20th. The *cross-quarter days* are the Sabbats that fall between the quarter days: **SAMHAIN**, Oct. 31st; **IMBOLC**, Feb. 2nd; **BELTAINE**, May 1st; **LAMMAS** or **LUGHNASADH**, Aug. 1st. These Sabbats are sometimes called the Major Sabbats.

All Sabbats are honored not only for what they represent in the cycle of nature, but also for their meanings on all levels. There is symbolism upon symbolism. The energy of these feast days is practical, spiritual, mental—all levels of life and understanding.

SAMHAIN

Samhain (pronounced *sow wen*) is the Celtic New Year and the most powerful of all the Sabbats. As the new day begins with twilight, so the new year begins with the twilight going into the dark of the year. This is the most *between* of all times, not only between the growing and the dying, but also between the old and the new, the live and the dead, the light and the dark. It is a time when the earth prepares to rest. The harvest is over,

it is now time for the earth to lie fallow and prepare for the next growing season. As the earth lies fallow, so it is time for us to pull away and into ourselves. It is the time for introspection, for inner work, for story- and self-evaluation. It is a good time for divination work. Samhain is also the time we honor those who have died. As the plants have died, as the animals who feed us have died, so have we died. This is the time when we recognize and honor those who have entered their period of rest and renewal from this life in preparation for their next life. We honor our ancestors at this time—those from whom we have come, those who have gone before. Most of the traditions of Halloween can be traced to the customs and beliefs of Samhain. Keridwen, the Hag, stirs her cauldron and change occurs. This is the time of transformation. The Horned God of the wild things walks the earth and the Green Man rests.

YULE

Yule is the celebration of the Light, of the sun and of the son. It is the longest night of the year, but in the very moment of the triumph of the Dark, the Light returns. It is the essential truth and contradiction—in the moment of greatest triumph lie the seeds of defeat. The sun returns. In mythology, this is also the time when the Mother gives birth to the son of light—no subtlety here with regard to the Christian mythos. In some traditions, this is where the Holly King and the Oak King battle and the Holly King (the winter tree) is doomed to be defeated. Yule is a time of great celebration—the sun and light/life will return once again! Almost all symbols and actions associated with Yule and the Christian Christmas come from the Norse and are related to light, evergreen and life.

IMBOLC

Imbolc means “ewe’s milk,” and refers to the lactation of ewes, the impending birth of lambs i.e. the renewal of life. Imbolc is also the Feast of Brigid, the Lady of creativity. Imbolc is the time of beginnings, the first stirrings of life. Snowdrops and crocuses appear. The groundhog arouses from slumber. It is a time to plant seeds. It is a time to plant our seeds, make plans and commitments to the new growing time. Imbolc is also when we make dedications. It is the traditional time for initiation—certainly a powerful new beginning! House cleansings and blessings are done at Imbolc. This is a good time to do spring cleaning. Imbolc is still deepest winter, but the promise of spring and new life is strong and the days are noticeably longer.

OSTARA

Ostara is the spring equinox, a time of balance. The days and nights are equal. It is a time that reminds us to bring our lives into balance. It is also truly spring. Winter is over. Hyacinth, daffodils and primroses are blooming. Trees are greening up. Fertility is rampant (it is no coincidence that bunnies and eggs are associated with Ostara and Easter!). Ostara is a time when we thank the dark time for the rest and the lessons learned, but it is now time to energize, to gear up for action, growth, fullness. It is all potential, both in the world around us and in our daily lives.

BELTAINE

Beltaine sits opposite the Wheel from Samhain. It is the opposite side of the coin. It is a time of great energy, life bursting into bloom, everything exploding. Everything about this festival is associated with energy increasing. Action instead of rest, outer work

instead of inner work, fertility instead of fallowness, mating and creation instead of death. The two strongest Beltaine images are the *Balefire* and the *Maypole*. The Balefire is the new fire, the new fire of life. Fire transforms and is a symbol for passion and the creativity of life. People jump the Balefire for luck, for love, for change, for creativity. In the old days, cows were driven between two Balefires (bonfires) for fertility and productivity. People would dance around the fire and then partner off and disappear for a night of unabashed coupling. Children born from these matings were considered children of the gods. The Maypole is a strong symbol of life and love. A deep hole is dug into the earth and the pole is set into it (a rather obvious symbol, this). The pole is draped with ribbons. People grasp the ends of the ribbons, women facing one way and men facing the other, and they dance around the pole, bobbing up and down, weaving the ribbons together and around the pole until the pole is covered. It is fun, exhilarating, and energizing. The Lady is represented by the Queen of the May, the Maiden, and her consort is the Green Man, Jack of the Green, the Hooded Man, Robin Hood. The Horned God retreats into the forest until the twilight of the year, for this is the time of new, fresh, green and growing things.

LITHA

Litha is midsummer (the summer solstice) , the fullness of the year. This is the triumph of the light, the longest day of the year, but as with Yule, its opposite on the Wheel of the Year, this is also the night of its defeat, the night the light begins to fade. The dark begins to rise. The Oak King (the summer tree) battles the Holly King again and the Holly King wins. Litha is the festival of fullness and completion. The fields have been sown, the crops are growing well. It is not yet time for harvest, but all is ready for it. The Mother is pregnant with life. The celebration of Beltaine has borne fruit. This is also one of the nights when the faeries are about. Traditionally the faerie, the sidhe, leave their mounds and walk their paths. It is not good to encounter the fay, for they are not kind to mortals. A Midsummer's Night Dream, Tam Lin, changeling stories all attest to the power of Midsummer and the power of the fay.

LAMMAS OR LUGHNASADH

Lammas means "loaf mass," and Lughnasadh means "the feast of Lugh." This is the first of the harvest festivals—the first harvest, the wheat harvest. The wheat is harvested and bread, the stuff of life, will once again be available during the dark time of the year. The word "Lammas" honors this. The first loaf is the loaf of life. Lugh was the Celtic sun god, the God of all crafts. Lugh's greatest gift to humankind was the gift of himself. He is the God of the grain who gives his life so that life may continue. As the wheat is cut and dies, so Lugh dies. As the seed of the wheat allows it to rise again, so does Lugh. Lammas is not just the celebration of the harvest, it is also the celebration of life, the continuation of life. Because of the gift of the grain, we may continue to live. Corn dollies were woven of the last of the wheat to be cut. This wheat contained the Spirit of the wheat. These dollies were set in a place of honor and then either buried or burned at Imbolc to allow the Spirit back into the earth to grow and rise again. This is the time when we harvest what we sowed at Imbolc. We planted our seeds. What have we harvested? When we make our corn dollies, we think of what we have harvested and remember the blessings of the earth.

MABON

Mabon is the fall equinox, once again a time of balance. The days and nights are equal in length, but the dark continues to rise, soon balance is lost again. This is also the second harvest, the apple, berry, vine and nut harvest, the fruit of the trees and bushes. The bounty of the earth continues, but this harvest is of things that are closer to the wild. The days of tamed cultivation, tamed green land, are drawing to a close. Soon it will be the time of the dark, the time of the wild and untamed. We are drawing away, waning, going toward the inner. This is a time of thanksgiving, of Thanksgiving. We honor the fruits of the field, the fruits of the vine, the fruits of the wild. We thank the Goddess and God. We are preparing, preparing for the dark. Mabon means "son." In Welsh mythology, Mabon was the son of Modron. Modron means "Mother." Mabon ap Modron was Son, son of Mother. In Celtic tradition Mabon is similar to the Greek Persephone. He disappears from earth and his mother only to return mature. This is cyclic, and like the Persephone Demeter myth, is seasonal as well with spring and fertility returning when Mabon does. Fall is when he disappears again as do the things of the growing earth.

The Wheel of the Year is a means for the Pagan/Wiccan to honor the ancients, honor the earth, honor themselves and honor the Gods. This, with the Esbat cycle, forms the basis for Wiccan liturgy and worship.

ASSIGNMENT

Choose one of the following assignments to complete. Turn it in with your completed Request for Seeker Status.

1. Choose one of the Sabbats, research it and discuss the history, tradition, crafts and rituals associated with it. 3 to 5 pages.
2. Research the deities and myths associated with each Sabbat. 3 to 5 pages.
3. Describe how you would set up an altar for each Sabbat, including what you would put on it and why. 3 to 5 pages.

