

Working with the Media:

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Questions to Consider

- What do you do when the local media calls you or your group about witchcraft, Wicca or the various arrays of topics related to our faith paths?
- What do you do if they want to film your event?
- How do you keep things from being blown out of proportion or sensationalized?
- Do you have structures in place for spokespeople from your group to the press?
- Does your organizations, covens, family, workplace, and life support your work with the media?
- If you are not public already how will this impact your life? Your partners? Your children?
- Do not set yourself up for being edited inappropriately, misquoted, or Even the most savvy of speakers can get tripped up in an interview.

A First Rule of Thumb

Have policies or boundaries in place for speaking to the media whether it is for yourself personally or the organization you represent. Some examples would be:

- Creating a list of questions that are off limits or too invasive for you.
- What subjects are your strengths to speak about?
- What are your weaker subject areas that you may not want to respond?
- What resources you can give that are open to being contacted?
- How will you not be treated in an interview? How will you handle it when the line is crossed?
- If you can think of what is important to you in how you are treated and how you will project yourself you will have created your boundaries.

For organizations,

- Have boundaries and policies in written form available for the media when they contact you and as a part of your normal organizational press packet.
- Ask for a list of questions
- Go to their web site and investigate the interviewer. Listen to clips of their shows to have a sense of how they interview others.
- Network with the larger community. Ask on e-lists about the station, reporter or publication. Gather as much information as you can.

Staying on Target, the Facts and Communication

Present things factually and to the point.

- Using Pagan jargon and lingo may not support the image you are looking to project nor really get your message across to those not familiar with earth religious thinking.
- Use comparative religious structures or contemporary faith equals to illustrate your point. An example: I rarely use the word ritual too much. I use the phrase "the liturgical format of the service" or refer to it simply as "our services." When talking about spellcasting, I won't over use the term. I may introduce it by definition and then say that "when praying the tools I use help me focus like a rosary or other religious symbol." Be familiar with the language used in interfaith settings.
- Don't feel it is a cop out to use words that will at least gain understanding in the moment for you. People are learning about us.
- Giving them the safety of language they are familiar with lays the groundwork for you to get them use to our jargon.

Keep your answers plain and straight.

- Don't sound too fluffy or weird.
- Answer questions with short brief statements. These are more difficult to edit for radio and television.
- Short answers can be written faster and easier too. They are harder to embellish.
- Stay on topic also. Don't let yourself be led off of the topic you were invited to speak about.
- Bring the reporter back to their original question if they lead you from it.

Physical Presentations

- When you are in an interview everything about you communicates who you are.
- Clothing, hair, facial expressions, etc. will aid others to judge not only you but your path too. Assess how you wish to be seen or interpreted.
- Don't go in sloppy clothes. Dress professionally with clean, pressed clothes. Ritual garb is not necessary and can actually detract from the educational information you are trying to offer.
- Don't over do your makeup or hair style.
- Be yourself and find a way to do so that will enroll people in your message and information not take away from it.
- Remember that you are representing more than just yourself. You are representing your community too.

Lights, Cameras Action...or Not!

Lots of television and print publications want to shoot photos.

- This works at times and others doesn't.
- Athames, swords, and such almost never seem to communicate well.
- If you choose to do a ritual on film and have time, practice it ahead of time with a friend shooting it to see what may not work or be misinterpreted.
- Remember that the way you see it will be different from the average person seeing it for the first time.
- Ask someone you who is not close to the subject what he or she see. Be open to what they see and look at whether it is appropriate.

Look to see if you want to have your ritual shot while it is in progress.

- Question whether it might be better to let the photographers experience it first and then go back to restage the shots.
- Give an outline of the ritual to the reporter with recommended places to shoot photos if you decide to do them during the ritual.
- The use of flash during a ritual in the evening can be distracting and dangerous. A flash caught in the eye can blind someone momentarily. With candles, fires in cauldrons, dramatic storytelling, and a variety of ritual presentations this can cause injuries. Most video shoots use extra lighting. Are you willing to sacrifice mood and ambiance?
- While looking at imaging and images for interviews and articles one needs to also consider the group and individual needs for privacy. Are there people in the circle who are not public or out? How can you make sure they are not photographed?
- Ribbons tied to clothing, stickers, and other tools like these can be used. They should be brightly colored and very visible to the camera lenses. Another way to care for these folks is to stand them in a specific portion of the circle and let the photographer know they cannot photograph this area.
- Ask parents to be clear they want their children to be photographed. As photographs become public, you open your child's life up to the experience of being outed to the community they play in and to the ridicule that can accompany that.
- Photographers need to ask for participants to sign photo release forms in order to publish their photos. Make sure these forms are for only the article they are writing. Parents need to sign these for their underage children.
- Often, photographers will use the photos for one article and sell the rights for use to other publications or stock photo houses. A photo could show up in another publication symbolizing something totally different than originally intended.
- Don't sign anything without someone from your group getting it reviewed.

- Remember too with the wonder of today's technical advances in imaging and photography, photos can be altered and changed. This too can take away from the intended presentation.
- Make sure there is a written agreement about this. Be sure to have the name and address of the photographer for your records. Get copies of anything signed.

Preparing for the Interview

Know your audience. Know your interviewer

- Research the organization publishing the piece and the market they advertise in. If it takes telling the reporter to call back later then fine. That will give you time to do your research. This will enable you to speak wisely to those in that particular media setting.
- If opposing views are to be part of the process, ask how this will be handled, who the person speaking will be and learn about that person. Offer possible candidates who may offer and opposing view in an academic or intellectual way. If on the radio or television remember, you do not need to justify who you are or your faith.
- You do not need to be treated rudely. In return do not treat opposition disrespectfully. Bring graciousness and dignity to situations like these.
- Practice being interviewed if you are looking at doing this. Sit or stand in front of a mirror if visual media is being used. Tape your voice. Listen to how you sound. Have someone video tape you. Ask an objective person to listen and watch you. Be open to their input and don't set yourself up with someone who will just agree that you are doing fine. Look for the critique. It is good training for you.
- Tape your actual interview. This way you can be clear of what you did say if misprints or misquotes happen. Remember though that good editors will paraphrase what you have to say. Just be clear the spirit of what you said is what you are listening or watching for.
- Remember you can really and ultimately only speak for yourself on what Paganism is or isn't. We are a diverse faith community. Do not try to speak on traditions you know nothing about.
- If questions come up that you do not know the answers to, offer contacts to the reporter who they might call for more specific answers. Network.

Further Resources and Tools to Offer

The Internet for dealing with the media.

- The Witches Voice at <http://www.witchvox.com>.
- Organizations such as Circle, the Pagan Education Network, EarthSpirit Community, the Covenant of UU Pagans and a host of other long standing national and international organizations have information on their sites. Offer the reporter reference materials, books, web sites, and other related information to do research with. Have a paper with a list of these

to fax them or sent to them. A good reporter will do more research than just talking to you and will welcome the resource list. It saves them time too.

When All Is Said and Done

- Ask the organization interviewing you for at least two copies of the media you are being published on. Keep these in your personal or organizational archives. Notify Circle Magazine about the event so they can add it to their list of media activities in the communities across the country.
- After the interview take some time to breathe. Interviews can be stressful.
- Research, practice, speak, and care for one's group take lots of work. Give yourself some time to feel the range of your experiences.
- A successful interview process depends on you and your willingness to take it seriously. What you put in you will get out.
- Standing in the dignity, grace and honor of Spirit, however that exists for you, will serve you in your journey. Listen to it. Let it guide you. Serve it wisely.