

Pagan Festival Venues

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One of the vendors who was at Fall Fest 2011 recently advised us that she will not be returning to vend at this year's festivals. She told TAWN in her email that one of the main reasons she's not coming back was that one of the Wiccans at the last event "chewed [her] a new one" (direct quote) because the festival was held in a church. I was flabbergasted to read this! After all, (1) the vendor didn't choose the venue, (2) people who have ANY complaint about the festivals, including the venue, should harass a TAWN Board member rather than an outsider, and (3) whoever blasted this poor vendor also blasted the reputation of TAWN. The vendor did not state that attacker was a member of TAWN, and probably did not even know whether that was true, but this reminds us that we all need to behave ourselves when we are in the public and perceived as the face of TAWN. No one, TAWN member or not, should be attacking a vendor over things the vendor cannot control.

In addition to the desired behavior from TAWN members at TAWN events, two items occurred to me when I read this. One was that it has been a while since we have held Fall Fest or Spring Fest in any location other than the UU church, and with the constant turnover in TAWN membership, it may be that some don't know the history of the festivals or the reasons why we have been at the church lately. The other is that it takes a Pagan with a problem to feel that a church is a bad place for Pagans to gather and celebrate. Many Pagans are fond of quoting that "All true paths lead in the same direction," and I can't see how that excludes Christians.

TAWN originally celebrated Fall Fest in public parks. We began at Himmel Park, and moved to Reid Park when we outgrew the facilities available at Himmel. TAWN believed that a park was next best thing to being able to hold Fall Fest in "the wilderness," as those who celebrate a nature religion want to be in Nature for their celebrations. A park did, however, have some advantages over being in the unspoiled outdoors, such as bathrooms and transportation options. While some members of TAWN would probably prefer to have Fall Fest in a less civilized venue, once you start to make such a distinction it is hard to know how much civilization is "too much." Is it restrooms, or even running water at all? How about electricity? Should we have roads, or vehicles, or parking lots? If we continue down that path, we would soon have to forbid glasses, contact lenses, cell phones, laptops, sunscreen, bottled water, all vehicles, any clothing if not made by hand from natural materials, and money! In my opinion, if my ancestors of a thousand years ago had air conditioning, indoor plumbing, and medication available to them, they would have wept with joy and used them all!

The last time we were at a park it was in Reid Park, in the area now being bulldozed into a new elephant compound. We rented two ramadas and a soccer field, and used the area between them as well. However, when we next went to rent the space, the City of Tucson told us we needed insurance first. The City required festivals at any City park to obtain insurance that would protect the City from any claims arising out of the public event! Although we purchased that insurance for the next few events, the rising cost of doing so soon had us looking for alternate venues. When we last priced that insurance, we couldn't find any for under \$800.00 – and that was years ago. We were also required to pay a fee to the City for each booth we had at the festival. As a result, merchant booths used to cost \$85.00 when we were at the park, and that was without buying the insurance. Because of the lower cost at the UU Church, and because we don't pay the church any fee for our vendors, booths for the upcoming Spring Fest are between

\$25.00 and \$65.00 – and available discounts will even lower those prices. The UU Church, incidentally, already has liability insurance that covers any event held on their property.

There was some discussion about using a church for Fall Fest when we first moved the event there. But in addition to TAWN saving hundreds of dollars, and being able to offer lower fees to our merchants, several other points helped us agree on this church as a venue. Since Pagans follow a nature-based religion, all of creation is seen as sacred. That even includes churches which are being used by other religions! While there are Pagans who feel animosity towards Christians, TAWN members have shown again and again that we can work together with Christians and achieve common goals. As a Wiccan myself, I try to follow the rule, “Harm None” – and have never found the version that reads, “Harm None Except Christians.” TAWN members who are attending TAWN festivals should be on their good behavior, as others will watch and judge TAWN on what they see and hear. Guests at TAWN festivals, or any festivals, should show the respect due to a host from their guests. Either way, people should mind their manners.

In case you didn't know, the UU Church is not a Christian church! While the UU faith has its theological roots in European Christian traditions, the modern UU Church promotes a non-creedal faith which permits their individual members to search for truth on many different paths. They agree on seven principles, none of which are at odds with Paganism, and none of which include the Christian God. In fact, on their FAQ page, the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations (<http://www.uua.org>) specifically mentions Paganism as one of the religious traditions that an individual Unitarian Universalist might identify with. Despite the American right to freedom of religion, few mainstream churches would be pleased to have Witches, Pagans, Heathen, and assorted polytheists on their turf. It is pretty cool that they not only allow us, but welcome us. A Pagan-friendly church is something to be glad of, not something to complain about! This is one small part of a larger truth we should be very grateful for, that Tucson is as accepting of Pagans as anywhere I've been able to find.

As a last thought, Pagans generally believe in magic – the power to change the physical world with will and desire. Most successful practitioners of magic agree that intent is a major ingredient for success, and that a bad attitude will manifest itself in the magical results. That means that those who just complain, without any intention of working for a change for the better, are not only being disrespectful to those who worked to put on the festival, but are using their magical might to disrespect and disrupt the Pagan community. If they are TAWN members, they are also in violation of TAWN's Code of Ethics, and should expect to reap the consequences of their actions. If anyone has a serious complaint about the venue for Spring Fest and Fall Fest, please contact a TAWN Board member to express it – and offer a solution that will work better. If not, rejoice as we celebrate TAWN's twenty-fifth annual Fall Festival this year. It is my hope that, as Pagans, we can think about what we do and how we do it, so we can attend a festival where we are proud to be Pagan and grateful that we live in a time and place that allows us the freedom to do so. Blessed Be!