

The Journey...S

Official Newsletter of Church of the Spiral Tree
an Ecumenical, Faerie Faith church

Issue 13
Yule, 2000

NEWS

Upcoming Rituals: In 2001 CST will be having regular sabbat rituals again, starting with Imbolc. The Spring Equinox ritual is up in the air, however, as either weekend it can be held, March 17 or March 24, Craig and I will be out of town. So we're looking for someone to volunteer to write and run this ritual. Also, Walter, who lives near Tallassee, Alabama, is doing full moon rituals, on the actual night of the full moon. If you live in the area, he's got a great place, lots of land, and lots of privacy. We'll be sending out notices of his rituals along with CST rituals.

Disaster Relief: We've had a different kind of disaster relief lately; Jay and Alice's house in Newnan, Georgia, burned down in October. CST has been helping to put the word out about it, and encouraging people to send donations of money, furniture, clothing, etc. So far we've collected quite a bit, and have a storage room in Auburn to keep things in till they can re-build their house. In the meantime, if you'd like to donate anything, please contact us about it.

Address Changes: Please let us know as soon as possible if your address changes, or your email changes, or if you get email after not having it. Most of our notices are sent out by email, and having your current email address is very important.

Volunteer Needed: CST still needs someone to volunteer to help out with our social projects, such as fund raising for the Church, and fund raising for other needy causes, such as Battered Women's Shelters, AIDS groups, Adopt-a-Road, and so forth. There are so many causes we could help out with, and it would also put a pagan church in a nice light if we could do something socially aware in our community.

Forms: In this issue we have forms for starting your own local CST grove, and the general and specific rules for groves.

- Linda Kerr

Who Are We?

The Church of the Spiral Tree (CST) is a non-profit, volunteer-staffed, ecumenical pagan/wiccan church, designed to foster a sense of community and family among pagans, both locally and in other regions of the country/world. It is an ecumenical church in that it encompasses all traditions, and is non-exclusive. It welcomes all who revere the Earth Mother and adhere to the tenets of the Wiccan Rede ("An it harm none, do as you will"), regardless of which tradition one is affiliated with. CST is also a Faerie Faith church, in that it has a goal of spreading the teachings of the Faerie Faith to all who are interested, and giving people better access to this ancient and beautiful Irish belief system. The Faerie Faith itself is a non-exclusive faith; one who is studying the Faerie Faith is always free to study other traditions or join other organizations.

If you would like to help with any of our projects, have any further ideas for the church, or have any resources which would be of benefit, please contact us. CST is also seeking volunteers to help with various parts of the church. Call us with ideas!

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Info About Our Services:

Ministers: CST, being a church, may ordain any member over the age of 18 a minister. The fee for this is \$35.00, and you must also be a paid member. This ordination is for life; you do not have to maintain your membership to continue to be a CST minister, but we would really appreciate it. Each year we have to renew our "Registered" status in various states in order for our ministers to be legal, and your continued membership fees help pay for this. Ministers are entitled to perform legal weddings, baptisms, and funerals. Ordination as a minister does not automatically confer "Elder" or "High Priest/ess" status upon anyone.

Subordinate Organizations: The main form of a local CST group is a Grove. This can be formed by at least three paid church members, who apply to CST for a charter. If you are interested in forming a Grove, simply find two other like-minded friends, and encourage them to send in their membership to CST, then apply to us for a Grove charter. The application and first year's fee is \$35.00. Note that whomever forms a Grove and runs it, including writing and performing rituals and teaching mysteries, does not automatically become a "High Priest/ess."

Note on Ministers and Groups: For those of you who wish to form a local group or become ordained as a minister, if you're somewhere besides Alabama or Georgia, you just need to let us know a bit ahead of time.

For the group and the ministership to be legal, we need to be registered in your state. This takes a little time to get the paperwork done and sent in. We will register in other states as needed, as there's a bit of expense involved. Your membership fees and the fees for ordination (\$35) and forming a group (\$35) help pay for these costs. CST is already registered in Georgia, so anyone wishing to put together a local CST group there can do so. Full info on starting a CST grove and becoming a minister is now on the web site, < <http://www.spiraltree.org>> .

Ritual Link: You have the option of participating long-distance in our rituals. All you have to do is let us know that you want to do this, and before each of our planned rituals, we will mail, email, or FAX a copy of the ritual to you, along with the "kick-off" time and date of the ritual. This way, members who wish can do the same ritual the rest of the group is doing, at the same time, on the same day.

Let us know if you're interested in participating this way. As our rituals sometimes are not completely written till the night before, we need either an email address or FAX number to quickly send you the ritual.

Natural Family Planning: Cathy, a health services professional, is offering counseling on natural methods of family planning, both fertility and contraception. For more info, email her at tabbatcat@yahoo.com.

GENERAL RULES GOVERNING CST GROVES AND BRANCHES

There are two types of subordinate organizations within Church of the Spiral Tree: Groves and Branches. Groves consist of three or more members, while Branches consist of five or more members, and are designed to be formed from one or more existing Groves. All Groves or Branches begin as Incipient Groves or Branches, and after meeting monthly and meeting all other requirements for a minimum of a year and a day, may be granted full status as a Grove or Branch.

Group Exemption: Groups chartered by the BOD shall be legal Subordinate Organizations of CST as incorporated under the laws of the United States, and shall be eligible to be covered under CST's group exemption. Groups do not have the power to incur debt in the name of Church of the Spiral Tree.

Financial Accountability: Groups must submit a quarterly financial statement to CST's Board of Directors (BOD). Failure to do so for two successive quarters shall be grounds for investigation and suspension of the Branch's Charter.

Reports: Each group, whether Incipient or full status, must submit quarterly reports of its activities and financial status to CST's Secretary/Treasurer at least two weeks prior to each meeting of the BOD.

Membership: The governance of groups shall be by Stewards, Directors or Councils. Should the group be authorized to open a bank or checking account, there shall be three approved signatories on the account. Chartering and serving as administrators or officers of groups is open only to Active Members of CST. Membership in CST does not automatically confer membership in any local Grove or Branch.

Innovation: The BOD and Clergy of CST do not wish to impose any doctrinal constraints upon local Groves beyond the requirement that their activities be in accord with the purpose of the Corporation as stated in the Preamble and Article III of the bylaws. We in fact encourage creativity and innovation on the part of all local groups in the lawful pursuit of the goals of CST.

Protecting People's Life Work Within the Church: In order for members to be willing to devote their lives, assets and resources to the church, each individual and group shall have as much autonomy and freedom of action and expression as possible.

Disbanding a Grove or Branch: The BOD may accept and note the disbanding of a group or incipient group upon written notification from that group's administrative body and the return of all group materials issued by the BOD. In such case, all group

assets are to be delivered to CST Central, unless the group has independently incorporated as a non-profit 501(c)(3) entity, in which case assets shall be divided by mutual agreement or by arbitration. The records and materials of the group will go into the BOD's "inactive" group file, where they will remain until or unless the group may be reactivated. If no one reactivates an inactive group within three years, it will be declared "discorporate" and filed accordingly. Incipient group charters will lapse automatically after one year from the date of their last quarterly report.

Suspending Charters: The BOD may suspend the charter of a group pending investigation of problems that may be brought to the BOD's attention, or if the quarterly reports (or lack thereof) from that group fail to indicate its continuing function. A group whose charter has been suspended will be regarded as an inactive group, and its charter may be reinstated if the group can resolve its problems to the satisfaction of the BOD. If this does not happen within a year and a day, the suspended group will be declared "discorporate." This action may be appealed to the BOD, whose decision will be final.

Revoking Charters: The BOD reserves the right to revoke a group charter for reasons including but not limited to:

The conduct of the group at its meetings and public functions or in its public statements is found to be incompatible with the purposes of the Corporation as stated in Article III of the Bylaws, or contrary to the laws of the country or state of residence of the group;

The conduct or statements of the group in its meetings and public functions or in its public statements, in the judgment of the BOD, reflects unacceptable discredit on CST, its purposes, members and Clergy; or

The BOD has reason to believe upon investigation that the chartered group is not truly functioning as a group in that the contact person does not respond to queries, show evidence of membership or the holding of regular meetings or other evidence that the chartered group is, indeed, functioning as a viable organizational unit of CST.

Removing Group From CST: In case of irreconcilable conflict with CST, the directors of a group, subject to contractual agreement, have the option of removing their organization from CST while retaining its name, function, corporate status (if any) and assets. In such a case, that organization would forfeit the coverage of CST's group exemption, insurance, and any other privileges of affiliation with CST.

If there is a dispute between the BOD and a group, or among Directors or other partners in a group, and if any of these parties are not satisfied with a decision of the BOD, they may seek binding arbitration by a mutually-agreed-upon party or parties, pursuant to CST's conflict resolution procedure.

Assets: All Assets of a chartered group revert to CST Central upon dissolution of that group, whether by disbanding or by revocation of their charter, unless said Branch has separately incorporated as a non-profit organization, in which case assets shall be divided by mutual agreement or by arbitration.

Should a group which has removed itself from CST be disbanded at any time up to a year after leaving CST, any remaining assets will revert to CST Central.

Reactivating a Grove: If within three years, at least two members of the original group and at least one other active member of CST are willing to resume group activities and regular meetings, an inactive group or incipient group may be reactivated under its original name and charter. If there is a dispute among the members of the original group over the group's reactivation, the BOD may request that the name of the group be changed, and a new charter issued under the new name, while still recognizing the legal continuity of that group or incipient group insofar as dating its inception from the original application.

If a group's charter is suspended, the group will have three months to address and resolve the issues that resulted in that action to the satisfaction of the BOD. If this can be accomplished, their charter will be reinstated and returned after their current quarterly report is approved.

If a group's charter has been revoked by the BOD, there is no further appeal. The re-establishment of a CST Grove or Branch in that area will require starting all over, with a new application, under a different name and with a new administrative body.

SPECIFIC RULES FOR GROVES

The Grove is the basic local organizational congregational unit of Church of the Spiral Tree. A Grove is a small intimate group of at least three, and we recommend not more than 13, CST members, organized in a local area to learn about, discuss, and creatively practice the purposes of the Church. Groves are largely autonomous units which agree to adopt and practice the values and purposes of CST and are, after applying to the Board of Directors (BOD), granted a charter by the BOD.

Groves are not required to have open meetings and may determine their own internal structure and method of participation. Any new person joining a Grove must be approved by all existing members. Membership in the Grove does not automatically confer membership in CST.

Charters: In order to form a Grove, a group of at least three active CST members must apply to the BOD for a charter as an Incipient Grove. Upon receipt of a qualifying Incipient Grove application, along with application fees, the BOD will issue an Incipient Grove Charter. In order to be granted a full Grove Charter, a group must have been meeting at least monthly for at least one year. Granting of a Grove Charter is by approval of the BOD.

Administration: Each Grove shall choose a person who takes on the major responsibilities of administration, contact and organization of either a Grove or an Incipient Grove. Such person shall be known as the Grove Steward, and they shall serve as contact and liaison to CST's central headquarters and the BOD in all matters of administration and/or corporate needs and concerns relative to their particular Grove or Incipient Grove.

Membership: A Grove must maintain a minimum of three paid CST members. It may have other members who may or may not be paid CST members, but any officers in the Grove, including the Grove Steward, must be paid CST members.

Church of the Spiral Tree Incipient Grove Application

Responsibilities and advantages of the local Grove are listed in the Bylaws and in the General and Specific Rules for Groves and Branches. It is the responsibility of the governing body of the local group to know and understand these responsibilities. The Incipient Grove will become active once this application is received and properly recorded at CST's headquarters. It will remain active only as long as the points of the agreement are kept. CST's Board of Directors reserve the right to suspend or revoke the charter if any of the specific or general rules governing Groves are not met.

WE, THE PROPOSED INCIPIENT GROVE, AGREE:

1. To abide by the General and Specific Rules for Groves and Branches.
2. To abide by all the laws of the local, state, and federal governments.
3. To meet monthly and report quarterly to CST. This quarterly report will include services held, special meetings, attendance, and a treasury report.
4. To pay a yearly fee of \$20.00 by December 31. The application fee includes the first year's fee.
5. To maintain a governing body of at least three active members, including a Grove Steward, of legal age whose signatures appear below. CST is to be notified immediately of any change in the governing body or of any change in address.
6. That any charter granted is subject to be suspended or revoked if the specific or general rules governing Groves are not met, in which case all assets will revert to CST Central.
7. That each Grove is a largely autonomous body which is responsible for its own financial affairs. The signatories promise that they will indemnify, save harmless, and defend CST from all liability from damages to persons or property in any suit at law arising out of any charter granted. The signatories acknowledge that CST is not responsible for any debts incurred by the local Incipient Grove.

NOTE: The above agreement does not preclude the general and specific rules governing Groves.

We, the undersigned, having read the general rules governing CST Groves and Branches and the specific rules for Groves, do hereby apply for status as an Incipient Grove. We understand that after a period of at least a year and a day, we may apply to CST for full Grove status. We further understand that granting of any charter is upon approval by the Board of Directors.

Member #1

Name (Print): _____
Address: _____
City, State, ZIP _____
Phone #: _____
Email: _____
Legal Signature: _____
Date: _____

Member #2

Name (Print): _____
Address: _____
City, State, ZIP _____
Phone #: _____
Email: _____
Legal Signature: _____
Date: _____

Member #3

Name (Print): _____
Address: _____
City, State, ZIP _____
Phone #: _____
Email: _____
Legal Signature: _____
Date: _____

Proposed Name for Incipient Grove:

Application & 1st Year's Fee: \$35.00

**Please include a check made out to
Church of the Spiral Tree, Inc.**

The charter activating the Incipient Grove will be returned to you along with a file number. Use your file number on all correspondence to us. If you should move please send your old and new addresses immediately so your file can be changed quickly and correctly. Please advise us immediately of any change in officers.

Return this application with original signatures to CST, P.O. Box 186, Auburn, AL 36831-0186. Please keep a copy for your records. Also keep a copy of the quarterly reports submitted to us.

Member's Corner

God is in the Desert (Dedicated to the Goddess Shekhina)

God is in the desert—I saw her there beside me.
She raised the sand above my head and circled there around me.
God is in the desert— like a mighty scouring wind.
She bore me high above the dunes carrying gypsy song within.
God is in the desert—shifting with the sands;
As timeless as the Sahara, the crystal sea that never ends.

God is in the desert—she moved through me without a sound,
She rode the waves of the sandy ocean casting her light around.
God is in the desert—like a lone oasis bloom;
Follow the wind, seek not the mirage, she will guide you through.
God is in the desert—the vastness of the skies;
Within your heart, within your mind and watching through your eyes.

-- by Norna



“Warrior Woman”
by Norna

Dreamers Whims by Norna

Opening doors at twilight standing alone at the foot of reality and visions of imagination at the end of a red carpeted hall and just above circling the moon in her opaque splendor reaching out with her dimpled hands to carry dreamers to some sleepers paradise and sitting on this verge of wonder I ask myself, “What roads in life have brought me to this place?” and looking up seeing the stars spinning in their celestial dance and rising to greet them lifting feet and leaving behind this earthly imprisonment with arms uplifted to capture the dusts of creation and circling an orbit around these lives and musing over secret dreams “Have they ever been like this before?” and silently slipping into the cosmic waltz gliding to the center and to see all of us here all waiting to join in step so as not to upset the balance of the picture and those names of the dancers all spoken in trancing harmonies blending together in a low frequency hum that shakes the foundation of this world we have created and leaves us breathless and our spirits rising higher and higher greeting the rays of the sun as they stretch across the vast blanket of night and over the Earth beneath us soaring through the slivers and toward this fire in the endless sky pushing the boundaries of forever and clasping each other like lovers and speeding through the twinkling into enlightenment bound by hopes and shared dreams and blending together in layer upon layer of ghostly translucence breaking the barriers of love and forgiveness and sweeping this promise on the souls beneath and opening them to possibilities and new designs and feeling the creative forces interlace like a chain raised by visionaries and casting ourselves into the realms of desires like martyrs to dreamers whims.

Winter's End

Magic at winters end, fills hearts with hope, renews life again.
Birds sing of days to come when the sun wakes the blooms, kissing our senses with abounding life.
Hearts and minds awaken from the silence gone with the winters chill, to the warmth of the life springing forward around us.

It's almost more than our feeble minds can take and so we fever with spring and store the magic in the air.
Blessed are we with our beautiful land, take heed and take care.
Magic is in the air.

-- by Linda (Pelayah) Moore

Festivals of February

by Linda Kerr

February is named after the Roman goddess Februa, mother of Mars. Also known as Juno Februa and St. Febronia, she was the goddess of the passion or fever (*febris*) of love. (Pennick, 37) While her festivals were orgiastic rites of fertility, February was also a time for purification. This was as true in the Celtic world as it was in ancient Rome. We see remnants of the purification festivals in Candlemas, and the fertility and love rites in Valentine's Day. February was also a very important month agriculturally to country folk; thus the Imbolc lambing festivals and the weather divinations of Groundhog Day.

CANDLEMAS

Candlemas is also called the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin, and is observed on February 2 by the Roman, Greek, and Anglican churches. It is in celebration of Mary's visit to the Temple in Jerusalem for a ritualistic purification after the birth of Jesus. (Douglas, 77) According to the Judeo-Christian rule of that time, women were required to "purify" themselves forty days after the birth of a son, or eighty days after the birth of a daughter, since females were supposed to be twice as unclean as males. (Walker, 135; Leviticus 12:2-5)

A story tells of Simeon, a holy man living in Jerusalem, who, when Mary entered the Temple, greeted her and the child Jesus, and blessed the child as "a light to lighten the gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." (Hole, 42) The festival is called Candlemas because in symbolic reference to Simeon's words, candles are blessed in the churches on that day. (Douglas, 77)

Church historians believe that Candlemas was celebrated from very early times, since at least the fifth century, by the Christians in Jerusalem. For many years the festival was on February 14, as Jesus was supposed to have been born on the day of the Epiphany. But when it was later decided that his day of birth fell on December 25, the Feast of Purification was moved to February 2. (Douglas, 77). The Council of Trullus once tried to abolish the festival of Candlemas, claiming that Mary "suffered no pollution, and therefore needed no purification," after giving birth to Jesus. (Walker, 135)

There is a theory that Candlemas is a Christianized form of the ancient Roman festival Lupercalia which was celebrated in mid-February. (Douglas, 77)

Lupa was the sacred She-Wolf of Roman legend, who nursed the foundling twins Romulus and Remus. Her temple harlots were *lupae*, sometimes called queens or high priestesses in the outlying Roman towns. The Lupercalia featured orgiastic rites to insure the year's fertility. (Walker, 556) Christina Hole tells us that after sacrifices of a dog and a goat were made "for the protection of flocks and herds, two young men of high rank ran about with thongs of goat-skin, striking all the women they met to make them fruitful." (Hole, 203) After participating in the ceremony, naked youths traveled from town to town to 'purify' them. Walker says perhaps this is why, after Lupa's festival was adopted by the Christian church, it was renamed the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin." (Walker, 556-557)

In another Roman festival, very similar to the Lupercalia, Roman pagans honored Juno Februata on February 2 as the virgin mother of Mars. She was the Goddess who engendered the 'fever' of love; the patroness of love. Christian authorities say that the pagan people went about Rome with "candles burning in worship of this woman Februa." Pope Sergius renamed the holy day as Candlemas "to undo this foul use and custom, and turn it onto God's worship and our Lady's...so that now this feast is solemnly hallowed through all Christendom." (Walker, 135)

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* says that Candlemas was certainly not introduced by Pope Gelasius (Pope from 492 to 496) to suppress the excess of the Lupercalia. However, a sermon exists that is supposedly by "Pope Innocent XII (1691-1700) in which he says: 'Why do we in this feast carry candles? Because the Gentiles dedicated the month of February to the infernal gods, and as at the beginning of it Pluto stole Proserpine, and her mother Ceres sought her in the night with lighted candles, so they, at the beginning of the month, walked about the city with lighted candles. Because the holy fathers could not extirpate the custom, they ordained that Christians should carry about candles in honor of the Blessed Virgin; and thus what was done before in the honor of Ceres is now done in honor of the Blessed Virgin.' " (Douglas, 77-78)

VALENTINE'S DAY

While some of the traditions of the Lupercalia became associated with the Christian Candlemas, others attached themselves to St. Valentine's Day, on February 14; most notably the custom of choosing lovers on that day and presenting gifts to each other.

There are different theories about how the name of Valentine came to be connected with the day on which lovers send tokens to one another. One is based on the belief throughout Europe in medieval times that birds began to mate on February 14. English literature, including Chaucer, contains frequent references to the day as sacred to lovers. Another explanation is that the association grew out of the similarity between the Norman word 'galantin,' meaning a lover of women, and the name of the saint. Some think that Galantin's Day, with the 'g' often pronounced as 'v,' led to confusion in the popular mind. (Douglas, 120-121)

However, the most popular theory says that Valentine's Day actually grew out of the Roman festival Lupercalia, a festival of sexual license. The names of young men and women were written on 'billets' -- small papers -- and put into a box, from which they were drawn by chance. In this way the people chose partners for erotic games. Churchmen denounced these early valentines as "heathens' lewd customs," and tried to substitute the names of saints for the names of the young people and put short sermons on the billets, but people soon reverted to the old love-notes. (Walker, 1037)

According to Barbara Walker, the church replaced the goddess, Juno Februata, with a mythical martyr, St. Valentine, "who was endowed with several contradictory biographies. One of them made him a handsome Roman youth, executed at the very moment when his sweetheart received his billet of love." (Walker, 1037) In Roman Martyrology there are two martyrs named Valentine. One is a Roman priest who died in 269; the other is an Umbrian bishop who was executed in 273. Hole says it is not clear which of the two is really the lovers' saint, and that there is no historical reason why either of them should be considered such. Hole goes on to say that the death-dates of the two saints, rather than any incident in their lives, may account for the tradition: both are said to have died on February 14, the eve of the Lupercalia. (Hole, 203)

St. Valentine thus became a patron of lovers, since the festival remained dedicated to lovers in spite of all attempts to change it. Many of our modern Valentine's Day customs are directly derived from the Lupercalia festival. Douglas tells us that by drawing billets with names on them, the young men became the 'gallant' of a young woman for the next year. (Douglas, 121) If either party was unwilling to commit to the other for a period of a year, a gift could be given to help make the commitment more enticing. (Whitlock, 31) Thus young people who were paired by this method formed the habit of giving presents to each other. Later only the young man gave a gift to the girl. (Douglas, 121) Then came the custom of sending or giving a 'valentine' to a favorite person. The intent behind the valentine or billet was still clear centuries later: in 1725, H. Bourne, in The Antiquitates Vulgares, wrote of* "a ceremony, never omitted among the Vulgar, to draw lots which they term Valentines. The names of a select number of one sex are by an equal number of the other put into some vessel; and after that, everyone draws a name, which for the present is called their Valentine, and is also look'd upon as a good omen of their being man and wife after wards." (Hole, 204) By Victorian times, the once-sacred customs had become mere party games and frivolous means of match-making, and by the early twentieth century, were observed mainly by children.

But in centuries past, and even in its Christianized form, the Valentine's Day festival "involved secret sex worship, called 'a rite of spiritual marriage with angels in a nuptial chamber.' Ordinary human beings engaged before witnesses in an act of sexual intercourse described as the marriage of Sophia and the Redeemer. A spoken formula said, in part, 'Let the seed of light descend into thy bridal chamber, receive the bridegroom . . .open thine arms to embrace him. Behold, grace has descended upon thee.' " (Walker, 1037-1038)

ST. BRIGID'S DAY

The ancient Romans were certainly not the only ones in the pre-Christian world to have a special festival in February. Christina Hole says that Candlemas took the place of the pre-Christian Feast of Lights, which fell on February 1, when people carried blazing torches about the streets, and also the customs of the Roman

Lupercalia. (Hole, 42) Hole does not tell us, unfortunately, where the Feast of Lights originated, but she does emphasize the fact that the Lupercalia is *Roman*; therefore, we can probably assume that the Feast of Lights was a Celtic festival.

We do know that February 1 was celebrated in the British Isles as St. Brigid's Day, or Imbolc. According to Frazer, the Scottish Highlanders represented the forthcoming revival of vegetation in spring on this day. "The mistress and servants of each family take a sheaf of oats, and dress it up in women's apparel, put it in a large basket and lay a wooden club by it, and this they call Briid's bed; and then the mistress and servants cry three times, 'Briid is come, Briid is welcome.' This they do just before going to bed, and when they rise in the morning they look among the ashes, expecting to see the impression of Briid's club there; which if they do, they reckon it a true presage of a good crop and prosperous year, and the contrary they take as an ill omen." (Frazer, 155) Similar customs were also observed in the Isle of Man. "In these Manx and Highland ceremonies it is obvious that St. Brigid, or St. Bridget, is an old heathen goddess of fertility, disguised in a threadbare Christian cloak. Probably she is no other than Brigit, the Celtic goddess of fire and apparently of the crops." (Frazer, 156)

Although considered a saint today, Brigit was originally the Triple Goddess, revered throughout the Celtic empire of Brigantia: parts of Spain, France, and the British Isles. Barbara Walker tells us Brigit is older than Celtic Ireland, having come with the Gaelic Celts from their original home in Galatia; one of her oldest shrines was Brigeto in Illyricum, the northwestern part of the Balkan peninsula. Brigit is said to be the same as Juno Regina, Queen of Heaven, and Tanit, the Dea Celestis (Heavenly Goddess). (Walker 117)

Dr. MacCulloch says Brigit originated in a period when the Celts worshiped goddesses rather than gods, and when knowledge of medicine, agriculture and inspiration were women's rather than men's. (Walker, 117, quoting from P.M. Campbell, 432) She is referred to in Cormac's Glossary as Brigit the female sage and Brigit the goddess, whom poets adored. She was a typical feminine trinity: Brigit ruled, and her two sisters governed the arts of healing and smithcraft.

The Catholic church, finding the cult of Brigit impossible to eradicate, canonized her as a saint, calling her Bridget or Bride (pronounced 'breed'). Church scholars who specialized in biographies of saints declared she was a nun who founded a convent at Kildare. The story goes that she was born of princely ancestors near Dundalk, County Louth, Ireland, in 451 or 452. She received many offers of marriage when a young woman, but decided to become a nun and took the veil from St. Macaille. She lived with seven other virgins at the foot of Croghan Hill, but later moved to Druin Criadh, in the plains of Magh Life. There, under an oak, she erected what became the famous convent of Cill-Dara, or 'the church of the oak.' The city of Kildare was built there, along with a cathedral. St. Bridget founded two monastic institutions, one each for men and women, which were jointly presided over by St. Bridget and St. Conleth, bishop of Kildare. She also founded a school of art, including metalwork and illumination. She died on February 1, 525, and was buried to the right of Kildare cathedral's high altar, but her remains were later moved in the 9th century, due to Scandinavian raids, to Downpatrick, where they were buried with those of St. Patrick and St. Columba. (Douglas, 76)

Underneath the Christian trappings, however, Brigit remained more than a saint to her followers. The convent at Kildare "was noted for its heathenish miracles and evidences of fertility magic. Cows never went dry; flowers and shamrocks sprang up in Brigit's footprints; eternal spring reigned in her bower." (Walker, 117) Irish writers referred to Brigit as the Queen of Heaven, thereby identifying her with Mary. She was called "Mother of my Sovereign, Mary of the Goidels, Queen of the South, Prophetess of Christ, Mother of Jesus." (Walker, 117, quoting from W.G. Graves, 144)

Brigit was thought to be the mystic mother-bride of St. Patrick, who supposedly died as one of her sacrificial victims, and entered the underworld through her sacred grove at Derry Down. An old saying goes, "On the hill of Down, buried in one tomb, were Bridget and Patricius." (Walker, 117, quoting from Brewster, 140) This may be a reference to St. Brigit being buried next to St. Patrick at Downpatrick, or perhaps the story of the location of the remains stemmed from this old tale. At any rate, Patrick's origins and authenticity are as uncertain as Brigit's, and since his name meant 'father,' he may have been a new name for Brigit's old consort the Dagda, or 'father.' Patrick became part of Brigit's originally female trinity when it was semi-Christianized by the church as a 'Wonderworking Triad' consisting of Brigit, Patrick and Columba: the Mother, the Father, and the Holy Dove. St. Brigit's feast day was February 1, the first day of spring according to the old calendar. It was called

Oimelec, Imolc, or Imbolc, the day of union between God and Goddess. (Walker, 117)

GROUNDHOG DAY

February 1, Imbolc, and February 2, Candlemas, were very important to the rural folk. Imbolc was a lambing festival, and even today in the rural British Isles, many sheep farmers arrange to begin lambing. Although it's still the middle of winter, and special care must be taken to shelter ewes and lambs, this date has two great advantages: the lambs will be just the right age to graze the spring grass, and they are well-grown and ready for market in June and July. (Whitlock, 29)

In America, Candlemas Day is known as Groundhog Day, a time for forecasting the weather for the next six weeks. This custom was brought over to America by immigrants from Great Britain and Germany. The idea is that if the groundhog, or woodchuck, comes out of his hole on this day and sees his shadow, he'll retreat back into his quarters, and there will be six more weeks of winter. But if the day is cloudy he won't return to his hole for a long sleep, as the winter weather will soon give way to spring. In Germany it was the badger which was carefully watched; in the U.S., the custom was transferred to the woodchuck.

This preoccupation with the weather on Candlemas Day may be due in part to the fact that in Britain, Candlemas was held to mark a milestone in the return of the sun. The length of the days are increasing; Katharine Briggs says that candles were lighted to strengthen the power of the sun. (Whitlock, 29) The increasing daylight led people to look beyond winter for the first signs of spring. Some of the Candlemas lore is cautionary: *In the barn on Candlemas Day, should be half the straw and half the hay.* In other words, in spite of the approach of spring, winter should be considered as only half over. *As the day lengthens, so the cold strengthens.* (Whitlock, 30)

Other rhymes concerning the weather on Candlemas Day include: *If Candlemas Day be dry and fair, half the winter's to come, and mair; If Candlemas Day be wet and foul, the half of winter*s gone to Yule, and If Candlemas Day be fair and bright, Winter will have another flight; if Candlemas Day be shower and rain, Winter is gone and will not come again.* A German saying is 'The shepherd would rather see the wolf enter his stable on Candlemas Day than the sun.' Douglas says that the belief that the weather on Candlemas Day forecasts by contraries the weather of the next several weeks has no connection with any religious festival or saint. (Douglas, 78)

In the early part of this century a group of men with a merry sense of humor, living in and around Quarryville, Pennsylvania, organized the Slumbering Groundhog Lodge. "On the morning of February 2 its members don silk hats and carry canes and go into the fields seeking the burrow of a woodchuck. When one finds a burrow he calls to the others and they all assemble to await the awakening of the animal from his hibernation and his emergence into the outer air. They watch his behavior and then return to the village where they interpret his actions and report them to the public. According to the records of the lodge the woodchuck's prognostications have been verified by the weather eight times, have been indefinite five times and have been wrong seven times since the observations began." (Douglas, 78-79)

Notes:

Douglas, George William. *The American Book of Days*. 1948. The H.W. Wilson Co., New York, NY.

Frazer, Sir James George. *The Golden Bough*. 1922. Macmillan Publishing Co., New York, NY.

Hole, Christina. *British Folk Customs*. 1976. Hutchinson and Co. Ltd., London.

Pennick, Nigel. *The Pagan Book of Days*. 1992. Destiny Books, Rochester, VT.

Walker, Barbara G. *The Women*s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*. 1983. Harper & Row, San Francisco, CA

Whitlock, Ralph. *A Calendar of Country Customs*. 1978. B.T. Batsford, Ltd., London.

CST Calendar:

Church of the Spiral Tree welcomes church members, beginners, newcomers, solitaries, and anyone else interested in participating in rituals honoring the Sabbats. You need no experience or knowledge to participate, but we do request you come with an open mind and heart, and show respect for your fellow participants. Email us for directions. We share a potluck dinner after each Sabbat, so those who come are asked to bring some type of food to share.

Please wear something comfortable and appropriate for outdoors. Ritual robes are welcome but not necessary. Children of all ages are welcome. Donations to the Church are entirely optional but appreciated.

Note: the schedule below is subject to change! Firmer times and locations of all rituals will be available closer to the date of the ritual.

2001

January:

No ritual scheduled.

February:

Imbolc ritual, February 3, at Waverly, AL. We will meet at 6:00 pm, with a pot-luck and party afterwards. Weekend of Board of Director's meeting.

March:

Spring Equinox ritual, March 17 OR 24, at Waverly, AL. We will meet at 6:00 pm, with a pot-luck and party afterwards. Weekend of Board of Director's meeting.
Serpentstone's Ostara, March 16-18, Dragon Hills.

April:

Beltane, April 28, at Waverly, AL. We will hold our traditional May Day celebration. Arrive by 9:00 am, (morning!!). There'll be a pot-luck and party that night. Cost: CST members are free; others \$1.00. Also, weekend of Board of Director's meeting.

Spiral Rhythms, April 19-22, Dragon Hills.

May:

Serpentstone's Beltane, May 4-6, Dragon Hills.

RowanFest, May 17-20, Dragon Hills.

Moondance, May 24-28 at Dragon Hills near Carrollton, GA. Includes CST's General Membership meeting and election of officers.

June:

Summer Solstice ritual, June 23, at Waverly, AL. We will meet at 6:00 pm, with a pot-luck and party afterwards. Weekend of Board of Director's meeting.

Serpentstone's Solstice, June 29-July 3, Dragon Hills.

July:

No ritual scheduled.

August:

Lammas ritual, August 4, at Waverly, AL. We will meet at 6:00 pm, with a pot-luck and party afterwards. Weekend of Board of Director's meeting.

September:

Fall Equinox ritual, September 22, at Waverly, AL. We will meet at 6:00 pm, with a pot-luck and party afterwards. Weekend of Board of Director's meeting.

Dragon Harvest, September 27-30, Dragon Hills.

October:

Earthdance, October 12-14, at Dragon Hills.

FallFling, October 18-21, at Dragon Hills. Includes CST's General Membership meeting.

Serpentstone's Samhain, October 25-28, Dragon Hills.

November:

Samhain ritual, November 10, at Waverly, AL. We will meet at 6:00 pm, with a pot-luck and party afterwards (tentative).

December:

Yule ritual, December 22, at Waverly, AL. We will meet at 6:00 pm, with a pot-luck and party afterwards.

For info on any of the above, email Linda Kerr at <cst@spiraltree.org>.

Upcoming Festivals (Not CST events):

Moondance	May 24-28, 2001	Dragon Hills, Carrollton, GA
Earthdance	Oct. 12-14, 2001	Hard Labor Creek St Pk, Athens, GA
FallFling	Oct. 18-21, 2001	Dragon Hills, Carrollton, GA

Contacts:

Remember, you get a free listing with your paid membership. You may also submit your listing at any later time.

Cassandra Lee: <Cll19@hotmail.com> .

Coven of Nocturnal Flight: HP: William (Gwalchmai) Moore; HPS: Linda (Pelayah) Moore.
< http://hometown.aol.com/Pelayah/Falons_Way.html >

Curtis Fuller: Male, 60 yrs of age, interests: Paganism in general, Wicca, runes, and hexcraft in particular. Seek contact with male and female, any age. P.O. Box 1023, Aberdeen, MS 39730-1023.

Frank Palmer: #546776, 2101 FM 369N, Iowa Park, TX, 76367-6568. Eclectic Druid student (nearly full Druid priest), male, feminist, seeking anyone who wishes to correspond. I study Ayurvedic Healing, plus any other healing methods. I'm knowledgeable in several forms of magic and divination. Please write? I practice a zoomorphic form of Druidism and am a 2nd year Shaman student.

James Pesci: Youthful prisoner desires correspondence for spiritual support and friendship. James R. Pesci, #270633, B.K.C.C., P.O. Box 430, Dillwyn, VA 23936.

Laura J. Arendall: 170 Co. Rd. 1130, Cullman, AL 35057, email <larendall@hotmail.com>

Lori Irex (Magickal Name: Aradia BlueWind): Eclectic Solitary, practicing for approximately 15 years, with my focus being mainly on (but not limited to) Celtic Shamanism. I am located in the Orlando, FL area. Contact info: ireytribe@mindspring.com.

Melody Pettus: I would welcome meeting or writing to any like-minded Faery trained folks in the Atlanta area. 2347 Melinda Dr., Atlanta, GA 30345-1914, or email to <mpettus@telco.com> or <mpettus@atl.mediaone.net> .

Misty C. Renfro: 20 yr old open-minded individual who is still fairly new to all this, would like to correspond with any and all members. I am interested in all aspects of everything so as you talk I shall learn. Write to me at 27-A Gasline Rd., Phenix City, AL 36870. (Magickal name: Riverwolf!!)

Norna Kat Steingraber: 1373 Dunbarton Rd., Montgomery, AL 36117, 334-279-6071.

"Skippy" Rob Von Allmen: Tired? Bored? Wanting to find true love and happiness? Well, what are you doing talking to me?! I don't have all the questions, much less the answers. But I do have a clue (I found it in a cereal box) and am licensed to share the wisdom of the ages (answered an ad in Rolling Stone). If you also ponder such mysteries as "Is there life after death?," "Was he a man dreaming he was a butterfly...?," and "Where am I parked?," then please drop me a line at: Swann's Tr. Pk. #1, Lot 130, Auburn, AL 36863, <skippy_the_witch@yahoo.com>, 334-826-3953.

Stacy Bandura: sbandura@tuckercapital.com

Steven D. Richert: Celtic shaman, still new to this path, is seeking any others of like mind to correspond with while I'm in prison and out. Steven D. Richert #17987, W/D-225-T, U.S.P., P.O. Box 250, Draper, UT, 84020.

Stormy: stormycloud@mindspring.com, earthdance@mindspring.com, <http://www.mindspring.com/~stormycloud/>.

Tony Jackson: Seeker desiring contact with those of the Green Path who would enjoy sharing their knowledge as well as testimony of its role in their life. Tony Curtis Jackson EF183981 D-2, CSP, 4600 Fulton Mill Rd., Macon, GA 31208.

MINUTES

CST Board of Directors

December 2, 2000

The meeting was called to order by Craig Kerr at 5:30 pm, at Auburn, Alabama, with the following Directors and members present:

James C. Kerr, President; Linda C. Kerr, Secretary-Treasurer; and Cathy Rankin, Member-at-Large.

Old Business

Minutes of the last meeting were read and approved.

Rituals, Events

The Yule ritual is December 22, Friday. There was some discussion about whether to hold the ritual at Craig and Linda's house, or out at Waverly. The next ritual after that will be Imbolc, on February 3, then Spring Equinox. For the Spring Equinox, we need someone to write and run the ritual, since Craig and Linda will be out of town on both possible weekends, March 17 or March 24.

Cathy offered her house for a ritual and pot-luck. She has lots of room both indoors and outdoors, and plenty of privacy. She lives in Columbus, GA.

Disaster Relief

CST has rented a storage room in Auburn to store items donated to Jay and Alice. Things will stay in the storage room till they have re-built their house. After that time, we may continue to lease the storage shed, or consider buying or constructing a building, in order to store items for use by CST and community members in need. The storage room costs \$50 a month, so we would be better off building something. We could keep items for a year or two, then sell them off at a yard sale if no one wants them, and give the funds to CST.

Maybe we could have a building party in the spring. Craig said he doesn't want to use CST funds to do it, since it would probably be built on his and Linda's property. Would rather use private donations for the project. There was some more discussion, and the topic was tabled till the next meeting.

Future Plans

We need to talk to Stormy about her idea for doing a fund-raiser in Auburn with live bands, so CST can purchase land or construct a building. Hopefully we can accomplish this next year.

Other Business

The next two meetings were scheduled to be held February 3, 2001, in Auburn, AL, and March 17, 2001 in Auburn, AL.

There being no other business the meeting adjourned at 6:00 pm.

S

Church of the Spiral Tree

Membership Application

Legal Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Do you wish to be listed in the **Contacts** section of the newsletter? If so, please use the space below to write your listing exactly the way you want it published. Be sure to include a way for people to contact you. **WRITE LEGIBLY!** We are not responsible to errors due to "chicken scratch."

We have several different types of memberships available to suit your needs. All include full membership benefits, and run for one year, with a renewal notice sent to remind you next year.

_____	Individual	\$20.00	
_____	Student/Poor Person:	\$15.00	(please attach a short note demonstrating financial need)
_____	Family (includes kids):	\$35.00	(must be in immediate family only, same address)
_____	Sustaining Member:	\$50.00	(receives all benefits plus our undying thanks)
_____	Contributing Member:	\$100.00	(receives all benefits, our eternal thanks, and a listing in the newsletter once a year)
_____	Patron(ess) Member:	\$200.00	(receives all benefits, our everlasting gratitude, a yearly listing in the newsletter, and a certificate)

OTHER:

_____	Donation to CST	\$5 & up	(all donations are tax deductible; you will be sent a receipt for your records, as well as our undying thanks)
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Make checks out to: The Church of the Spiral Tree, Inc., and mail to:

Spiral Tree
P.O. Box 186
Auburn, AL 36831-0186
334-821-4683

cst@spiraltree.org

Visit us at our web site! <<http://www.spiraltree.org>>

Important Dates

Board of Directors' Meetings:

February 3, 2001, Auburn, Alabama; March 17, 2001, Auburn, Alabama

Annual Meetings of the General Membership:

May 27, 2001, Moondance, Dragon Hills, near Carrollton, Georgia (includes election of officers)

October 20, 2001, FallFling, Dragon Hills, near Carrollton, Georgia

CST Sabbat Dates:

Imbolc	February 3, 2001
Spring Equinox	March 17 or 24, 2001
Beltane	April 28, 2001
Summer Solstice	June 23, 2001
Lammas	August 4, 2001
Fall Equinox	September 22, 2001
Samhain	November 10, 2001 (?)
Yule	December 22, 2001

Church of the Spiral Tree
P.O. Box 186
Auburn, AL 36830

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED