

PAGANS

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Pagans generally believe in reincarnation. That means that after this life, the soul would "rest" a while and then enter this plain again as another being.

"We tend to believe that everything in the universe from stars to lunch meat is recycled. So most believe in reincarnation, but we don't know," she said.

Neo-paganism, which is constantly reinventing itself, is a religion of self-discovery. Rodemaker said that it was possible for someone to enter the circle and describe a dream they had which depicted a ceremony such as singing a certain song under the full moon.

"We don't know what the old religion was. We're recreating something that goes back to the dawn of human history," said Rodemaker.

"We'll probably try it and see if it works. If it works for us it could indoctrinated," she said.

NIU's Kisel said the neo-pagan movement goes back to the "radical '60s." He said there were probably many inspirations for the neo-pagan movement: the commune movement, dissatisfaction with organized religion and experimentation with several different religions including the eastern religions.

No set creed

Pagans have no one creed, book or set of doctrine, according to Rodemaker. So each group or circle can be considered a separate denomination of paganism.

There are, however, certain categories of religious belief into which the pagan religion can be broken down. They are: American Indian; European Wiccan or Wicca which has its own varied background and subsets; African indigenous religions, which is mostly practiced by people of African decent; Latino traditions, which is frequently closely related to Catholicism; and Dianic which is exclusively a women's religion.

"The biggest difficulty is that we need to find a way to ordain our ministers," said Rodemaker.

The problems that come about with no formal ordainment system is that pagan priests and priestesses are unable to perform legal functions such as performing weddings unless they are ordained through another church.

"The most common way is through unitarian church and ordaining system, but it's not ours," said Rodemaker. "It's certainly good training and we have a great deal in common such as thinking that this world we're in now is important."

The basis of the Unitarian Universalist church is that each person has the right to search for individual truth and meaning. It is that respect for each individual's search for truth that allows people of what seem to be different beliefs to come together to worship. It's why many UU churches have pagan circles holding worship in their church.

"UU (Unitarian Universalist) church is the only organized church I ever voluntarily belonged to," said Wolf. "I'm a board member. I'm on the long-range planning committee. I go there every Sunday."

Rodemaker said that she believes there are probably a couple of thousand pagans worshipping in the Fox Valley area.

"And there's probably another 5,000 people who are interested but who are afraid to check into it because they might run into Satanist by mistake or something," she said, pointing out that there are nonpracticing pagans just as there are nonpracticing Catholics.

When a member of the community joins a pagan circle it's not "converting". It's not "being saved." It is called homecoming.

"There's no change, no revelation; just the recognition that other people feel the way you do," said Rodemaker.

Wolf said she felt the beautiful thing about paganism is that it allows for differences in beliefs and perceptions.

"Every pagan you talk to has a different reason for being pagan and perceives the religion differently. That's what's special about it," she said.

"We are all sacred. Every one of us has a unique and sacred part within ourselves. No one is more sacred than anyone else," said Wolf.