

AODA

Ancient Order of Druids in America

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To whom it may concern:

The Ancient Order of Druids in America (AODA) is a Druid church of nature spirituality founded in Boston, Massachusetts in 1912, and presently incorporated as a religious corporation in the state of Oregon. In support of the effort by Druid religious organizations nationwide to have the Awen symbol, the emblem of the Druid faith, made available as an option for headstones for Druid veterans in our nation's military cemeteries, we are pleased to provide the following information about our faith and organizational practices.

As a church of nature spirituality rooted in the Druid Revival of the 18th and 19th centuries, AODA teaches a reverence for living nature as the foundation of our Druid faith. In our view, the world of nature is a spiritual as well as a material reality, that in which "we live and move and have our being," and the cycles and processes of nature teach the spiritual lessons humanity most needs to learn. Thus nature fills the same role in our Druid philosophy and theology that, for example, Tao – a concept often translated "the way of nature" – has in Taoism. The core doctrinal statement of our faith, the Doctrine of One, holds that all things in the universe participate in a common unity; thus human beings are not separate from nature, but share in its cycles and are subject to its laws.

Like other Druid churches and religious organizations, we offer reverence to the gods and goddesses of the ancient Celts, understanding them as the great powers of nature. Every one of the fundamental questions humanity has always asked, we believe, can best be answered by turning to nature with reverent attention and striving to understand what the way of nature is in that context. Thus the traditional Druid faith in reincarnation, for example, is in our view solidly grounded in the realization that all things in nature move in cycles and nothing is ever lost or wasted.

AODA distinguishes three aspects of a Druid path of life in harmony with nature, though in practice these three form a seamless web. The first aspect, which we call the Earth Path, consists of actions meant to "walk more lightly" on the living Earth; members are encouraged to recycle, conserve energy and materials, and practice voluntary simplicity, among other things, as an essential part of their Druid path. The second, the Sun Path, consists of four traditional celebrations of the yearly cycle of nature – Alban Arthuan (winter solstice, 12/21), Alban Eiler (spring equinox, 3/21), Alban Heruin (summer solstice, 6/22), and Alban Elued (autumn equinox, 9/23) – which are celebrated by AODA members and congregations. The third, the Moon Path, consists of meditation and other personal spiritual practices taught by AODA and practiced by its members.

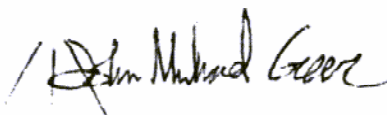
In organizational terms, AODA is headed by four Archdruids, who have roughly the same role in AODA that bishops have in many Christian churches. The four Archdruids and three appointed officers form the Grand Grove, the national governing body of our church. The Grand Grove charters local congregations and also coordinates the church's educational programs, which include a one-year program in the fundamentals of Druidry, a three-year program (including the one-year program as its first section) for those who seek to become Druid clergy, and a six-year program (including both of the other programs) involving substantial independent work, for those who wish to take up leadership positions in our church. We ordain priests and priestesses from among those who have completed the three-year program, and archpriests and archpriestesses from among those who have completed the six-year program.

On a local level, AODA has congregations known as groves, study groups in areas that do not yet have groves, and individual members who do not live within range of a grove or study group, or who choose not to affiliate with one. Each study group is headed by a priest or priestess, and each grove is headed by an archpriest or archpriestess; in either case the Chief Druid, as we term the head of a study group or grove, is responsible for the ceremonial functions usually performed by clergy in other religious denominations, including marriage and funeral services.

Like nearly all Druid religious organizations, AODA strongly discourages proselytizing but encourages its members to discuss their faith to those who express an interest in it. The Grand Grove hosts a website (<http://www.aoda.org>) with detailed information about our beliefs and practices, and sponsors an internet discussion group, open to members and nonmembers alike, to encourage communication among Druids and assist members with their work in our instructional programs. A book outlining our philosophy and practice and covering the essentials of our one-year training program, *The Druidry Handbook* by AODA's Grand Archdruid John Michael Greer, will be published in February 2006 by Weiser Books, and we anticipate that several other books on AODA's Druid teachings will follow over the next few years.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this information. Further inquiries about the teachings and practices of AODA may be directed to me at the address heading this letter.

Yours beneath the sacred oaks,



John Michael Greer
Grand Archdruid
Ancient Order of Druids in America