

PUIT'S VEIL

What is Coven Involvement?



DARK CIRCLE

Nuit's Veil

A Coven Of Dark Circle

What is Coven Involvement?

An introduction to the Principles and Guidelines to how
Dark Circle runs it's local Sydney Coven
through the Nuit's Veil Covenstead.

Coven Motto

~ Fidelitas ~

Faithfulness

This is a working document with many of the key points still being reviewed by the Coven members.

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Preface

by Tim Hartridge

This document attempts to outline in some detail our Coven's ideals, methods of approach and opinions on Coven involvement. It has been written with the collaborative input from the Dark Circle Coven members and myself. Because much of what has been written here comes from my own personal experience in "how to" run a Coven, there is frequent use of the expression of "I". In other words, although I have written this outline, it is nevertheless an accurate portrayal of the feelings and opinions of the Coven members.

WHO IS DARK CIRCLE?

Dark Circle has a relatively long history, running for over twenty years (circa 1983). We have had many members in that time, a number who became formally initiated and many others who have participated as ordinary members. We have had a full and some might say a colourful history in that time. Detailing our history is beyond the scope of this document, but you can read a brief history on our beginnings in the notes attached to an introduction about the NOX ritual. See - http://www.ozpagan.com/nox/Nox_Introduction.html

To briefly summarize a response to the question, "Who is Dark Circle?" I offer the following description. Our activities are focused around a contemporary experience of Witchcraft, although we do not consider ourselves limited to this only as a method of practice. We freely utilise Thelemic, Hermetic and Shamanic techniques and have developed a number of original approaches to magickal work. We are aware of some unique differences in our sense of place because of our Australian location in the world. We identify the psychic function as the *Witch within* and encourage individual expression. Our philosophy is summed up in a short eight-point chapter entitled *Liber Primarius* (see a copy of this in the Appendix). For the purpose of this document the Dark Circle Coven are the members who meet regularly at the Nuit's Veil Covenstead in Sydney. I am the Coven founder and also one of five original and founding members of Dark Circle.

WHO THESE NOTES ARE DESIGNED FOR?

These notes are designed for three groups of people.

1. Our Coven members;
2. Interested potential members; and
3. Others seeking information about how Covens work.

For the members of the Dark Circle Coven who meet at the Nuit's Veil Covenstead, this document primarily serves the purpose of identifying some of the general study aims, initiation requirements and responsibilities we have as members. However, we have also designed this document to articulate the principles and standards we might expect from others seeking to join our Coven. Finally, this document might be of help to others seeking to form a Coven of their own. Practical insight into how others do things is frequently of more value than a thousand theories. Showing you how we do things and why is probably the best assistance we can offer.

This document is not the definitive text on Covens, but it does offer a number of key points and important insights from many of years of personal experience of working in Covens and groups.

Introduction

It is self evident to any established member that being involved in a dedicated Coven Circle is not like joining an online Witches' egroup. It is neither anonymous nor casual, as in attending an open Pagan meeting or festival. The level of involvement and intimacy in a Coven is more like a serious relationship. Participating in Coven work affects all areas of our lives, and this is because quite simply it influences our perception of the world.

With something that potentially will have such a critical impact on our lives and will involve a number of other people, it is bound to bring up issues of trust and intimacy. Therefore before one thinks about working in a Coven, let's look at some of things likely to be affected.

TIME AND COVEN TRAINING

Involvement in a Coven requires time. Building a Coven from scratch will take a lot more time, even years. One of the most misunderstood points people have when they decide they want to either join a Coven, or more ambitiously, want to create one, is the amount of time required to make it work. More and more I find I am telling prospective new Coven members to seriously consider whether they really have the time to be involved.

I only make available a Coven Training Circle to those people who have completed my introductory workshop, "Casting the Witch's Circle". And even then only for people who are seeking an ongoing involvement and are likely fit-in with the established members of our Coven. There is little point in doing otherwise because running the Training Circle is also very time consuming for me.

As a Coven we don't offer casual involvement, and so the Coven Training Circle is an intermediate level course. It is purposely designed to help demonstrate to the prospective member what it is like to be in a Coven. It holds a limited level of commitment to attend over one or two months. The trainee is expected to assess whether committed Coven involvement is what he or she is really looking for.

While Coven involvement certainly doesn't take an excessive amount of time, it will affect personal lifestyle. Its also not unreasonable to assume that most people are unlikely to have a clear idea about how much time might be involved. Participating in the Coven's Training Circle allows for a better understanding of what will be involved. (See more about this in the document "*How is a Coven Formed?*" or speak to any Coven member.)

So what amount of time exactly are we talking about?

*Does the Coven meet on weeknights as well as weekends? Yes, sometimes. Does it involve meeting every week? Yes and no. We ask that members be prepared to offer a minimum of 50% attendance to the Coven meetings. That means about two group meetings a month and an occasionally an extra meeting for training. Naturally, there are exceptions to this guideline, where for example family, work or personal commitments must take priority. There is a more in-depth discussion on this topic under a section marked *Attendance*, see blow.*

The Coven also provides opportunities for potential members to join them at social events as well as at some of their special workshop and ritual nights. The Coven social gatherings could be anything from birthday celebrations or other social meetings to some Sabbats that are held for a social purpose. The workshop evenings are used as part of Coven's regular ongoing internal training.

TRUST

The Coven is a path with two directions, above which is a gateway with the word *Fidelitas* written over it. This is Latin for *faithfulness*, being *true*, and to *trust*. This is our Coven motto and it is a principle upon which we work together. It is very similar to another word, *fidelity*, and carries the same implied nuance; your involvement must *ring true*. It's a principle I imagine that would apply to any Coven you might wish to join.

Speaking personally, because of the high degree of trust that is required, I think it would be fair to say that this is something not achieved overnight. Nevertheless, trust is in the hand that is extended when you seek to enter our Coven.

INTIMACY

The spirit and depth of the work entered into by our Coven means many personal things are going to be shared. Naturally, the very nature of these intimate experiences will move relationships from a level of mere acquaintances to that of close friends.

A circle of friends is certainly how I experience our Coven. I might even go so far as to say that without the development of genuine personal friendships, a Coven is not likely to survive, or work very well. Like a chair with one leg too short, it would prove to be a rather uncomfortable and shaky experience. Groups which only meet casually and require no level of intimacy are in my opinion not Covens, they are just groups.

PERSONAL REALITY

Because your own views on the nature of reality will be challenged, confirmed, and exposed to the new concepts, we ask that you be willing to both question and explore new points of view. Entering the Coven is to embark upon the discovery of new realities. Views that are held too rigidly are not encouraged in our Coven - allow for the possibility of new ideas. Allow yourself the freedom to change your mind based upon what you discover for yourself. Be open.

MAKING CONTACT

Let's take a look at some of the practical methods used by Dark Circle to make initial contact with people in order to form Covens.

Magick: Witches have commonly used magick to attract kindred spirits. It is one of the first things I did to get my very first Coven going in Adelaide, way back in 1973! So we use magick to attract people of like mind.

Internet: Since the advent of the Internet, Dark Circle has developed a strong and growing presence. In particular, I developed the Witches Workshop egroup to network with pagans and promote awareness of our existence. Currently, the Internet accounts for more than 95% of all contact we have with people searching for a practical introduction to Witchcraft and Magick. We are pro-active in maintaining a leading presence on the web in our region.

Workshops: People are not always sure that involvement in a Coven is what they are looking for. Even the very word smacks of cult-like imaginings where mindless followers are under the sway of a sinister cult leader!

Workshops are a way to provide a first-hand opportunity to get a taste of what Coven ritual practices can be like. Over several years I developed a practical workshop, now called "Casting the Witch's Circle". It is usually held over four weekly sessions. (See the [WitchesWorkshop](#) website for details).

Participants are able to gain an authentic experience of Circle work in a practical workshop. There is no commitment sought beyond the workshop and the sessions provide a safe ground in which people might develop and evaluate their interest in Witchcraft generally.

These workshops are purposely designed to fast track the individual into ritual and magickal practices. My goal is focused in finding people suitable for the Coven and providing them with the fundamental steps needed for a deeper Coven involvement.

It is up to participants to show an interest in taking their study and involvement to the next level. In this way, participants help me by qualifying their own level of preparedness. There is no point to attempting to talk people into creating a Coven; they must have their own reasons for being there.

Running workshops is also a chance for me to articulate what we do and begin the training of potential Coven members in all the fundamentals. More than anything else a workshop is the most practical and efficient way to make contact with people who are sincerely looking for a group or Coven.

Coven Training Circles: This is one of the next steps in preparing people for serious involvement with the Coven. No body comes straight into the Coven without having first done a basic workshop, like "Casting the Witch's Circle", and those interested and suitable are invited into a Coven Training Circle.

Again, speaking from experience as a seasoned Coven founder, you will waste a lot of time and effort on unsuitable people if you don't use some

form of introductory workshop with which to initially assess peoples' suitability to the Coven. You *can't* determine whether people are ready for Coven involvement by starting them *in the Coven*, or even at the intermediate level of a Training Circle. I know because I've tried.

Try to think of both the introductory workshop and Coven Training workshop like conducting an audition. Stepping people through the stages of casual contact, then an introductory workshop, to an intermediate Coven Training Circle and then into Coven involvement are probably the minimum number of stages. This happens for a reason. The process provides a chance for the new person to assess you and the Coven, and in turn you to get to know them.

Social Contact: Not all Covens offer formalized workshops or training Circles. We have opted to hold occasional social events as an alternative to providing only workshops to meet interested people. While a social meeting can be a stepping-stone to workshops, they are not intended to replace them.

A social night, like a birthday party might be held for the benefit of one of our Coven members. These nights are a good opportunity for anyone wanting to meet the Coven to come and get to know everyone. This can also be a good time to invite back past students and any partners of Coven members not usually involved. We have even held organised casual meet-up nights at the Pub. Such occasions are great for *uninvolved* partners of Coven members to meet us in an informal way.

LEADERSHIP

In the mid-1980's when Dark Circle came into being, we abandoned the hierarchical model for the Coven. This meant that there was no literal use of titles like *High Priest* or *High Priestess*. The very nature of our Circle was to apply the principal view that we work with *Peers*. This meant a strong level of shared leadership was developed. Our ideals were expressed initially via pamphlets, newsletters and even our own briefly running magazine. In the digital era we make a more efficient use of the Internet. And we try to articulate our ideas and expectations for what we wanted to have happen in the Coven through documents like this or more directly via the Coven's private egrouop, *Nuit's Veil*.

Shared leadership is essentially a combination of willing initiative and having in place the means for our voices to be heard. It has nothing to do with telling other people what to do and everything to do with enlisting group support. Active involvement is one way we as individuals within the Coven can share in the development of what happens. Taking responsibility for rituals, workshops and sharing training in areas we have become proficient at, all this helps to create our model of the Coven as a *Circle of Peer*.

THE INEPT'S BOOK OF SHADOWS

Some say this is a mythical book, akin to the Philosopher's Stone of the Alchemists, but I am here to tell it *is* real. Each Coven holds a copy (or should), carefully recording all mishaps and mistakes, states of confusion and catastrophes that have ever happened, in or out of Circle. In it you may read about the time the Priestess tripped over the cauldron went feet over fanny flying in the air, or the time some Coven member put turpentine instead of methylated spirits in the cauldron fire (please don't try this at home). By the time the neighbours arrived, alerted by the sound of the smoke-detector alarm at midnight, the said Witch was standing on one foot naked on a stool while attempting to silence the screaming siren. In a word, have a sense of humour, because sooner later your name and sins are destined to appear in the annuals of Witch-Bufferoonery!

How is a Coven Run?

There are lots of ways to run a Coven, and I doubt there is any magic formula to succeeding, but here I'll explain how the Dark Circle Coven does things.

DECISION MAKING PROCESSES

This will be arguable one of the most critical elements in establishing or working a Coven - being able to arrive at decisions. Discovering a method that best suits the group at the many stage in its development calls for maturity. Having in place an agreed decision making process is important.

At the beginning, a Coven Founder by default makes all the crucial decisions. If the group is be more than a passive follow the leader entity, it will need to move to the next stage of development by making its members accountable and involved in much of the decision making processes.

The decision making process in Dark Circle is done by Consensus. This is usually preceded by the Coven having a detailed discussion and time to think things over until a general consensus can be formed among the members.

So what is Consensus?

Consensus is the general or widespread agreement among all the members of the Coven or group to support a decision. It is not as some may imagine a unanimous agreement, nor is it a majority rules decision. It is simply where everyone agrees to lend her or his support in a decision. In effect, the voice of the Coven is giving consent in a decision made.

Decision making by consensus requires time and a cooperative collaboration of the Coven members. It encourages an unselfish and fair-minded awareness of what will be best for the group. It requires a reasonable degree of flexibility and evenhandedness. It requires maturity and sometimes an ability to delay the satisfaction of quick non-consultative decision-making by the Coven founder.

All this requires a lot of maturity in how decisions are made, tempered with a strong sense of fairness.

For example: Three members wish to meet on a Tuesday night, one of who is roistered to work on other nights. Four members wish to meet on Wednesday night. The Coven may decide by consensus that they will meet on Tuesdays, perhaps with the proviso that Wednesdays be used next time. The member who normally works on Wednesdays will have a chance to try and change their normal roistered work time, or they may have to forgo some meetings.

In this example, where someone misses out this time round, our Coven will make a conscious effort to see that there is an alternate decision made the next time.

Consensus decision-making works best if everyone knows it is a flexible form of determination. Dark Circle is different from most Covens in that it uses a high level of fluid Consensus in its decision-making. Many Covens have a 'written in stone' approach, a set of "Laws", which would require national referendum (or more often a 'bloody' coup) to change.

This level of personal power in the Dark Circle Coven provides a great sense of freedom, and creates a true Circle of Peers, not just in words, but also in actuality.

What is a Qualified or Considered Consensus?

This is a sort of final say where a clear decision cannot be arrived at by the normal process of consensus. In Dark Circle, it is a recourse used by the Coven Founder to arbitrate a decision for the Coven. The Coven Founder is given an authority or mandate to settle decisions if the Coven shows an inability to do so.

Important

Every time a decision has to be taken from the Coven by the Founder, the Coven gives up their ability to be self determining - and that is a dangerous and debilitating road to travel down. The best advise I can offer any Coven Founder is that you will better serve the Coven by not rushing the difficult decisions. Allow adequate time for discussion, an understanding of the issues,

and assist the Coven to work toward consensus through cooperative support of one another's points of view.

MANDATES

Because some individual roles within the Coven require an ability to use initiative and make an independent decision for the Coven, they are given a mandate. That is, the authority to act independently on behalf of the Coven.

Mandates are not generally a broad authority, but are given to individuals in very specific areas. This simply gives the Coven member the ability to make a decision without having run back to a Coven meeting to obtain permission.

For example: You have a mandate to buy supplies for the Coven, so you simply make choices based on what you think will best serve the group's needs. Such independence in decision making also means accountability though, so there is also a consequence to your decisions.

Mandates are merely roles, which help to make the Coven function smoothly. They are often temporary and should be rotated frequently.

COVEN DEVELOPMENT

There are many practical steps, which can be taken to help in a Coven's development. Arguably one of the most important is the rotation of responsibilities. By identifying many of these tasks and creating a simple method for sharing the work, both occult and mundane, members become completely responsible and involved. At other levels it will demonstrate to both the Coven and any potential members that you have a mechanism for equality, not just in words, but put clearly into practice.

COVEN ROLES

A word of warning about static roles: People who insist on retaining certain roles run the risk of *defining themselves* through such roles. They may begin to feel the need to maintain a particular role because "*no body else could possibly do it.*" Generally, this behaviour is little more than power plays showing an immature personality. The world is full of disasters produced by little people trying to inflate themselves - just look at any dictatorship to see the results. So rotate roles frequently.

Because the rotation of roles forms part of our regular training routine, we manage to avoid the pitfalls of egocentric role-playing. We expressly demonstrate the concept of a *Circle of Peers* by having it form part of our normal practice.

While I have no wish to offend anyone using titles like High Priestess or High Priest, as might be used in some Covens, these actually have little real place in Witchcraft. Anyone who cares to research the history of Witchcraft will learn that these were not the terms traditionally used, but have been introduced in modern times. So despite the fact that we don't use titles, we do nevertheless acknowledge certain roles within the Coven.

COVEN MEMBERS

This is the principle role played by everyone in the Coven. We each bring to the Circle unique skills, knowledge and qualities, which help to make the experience of the Coven an enriching and a special feature in our lives.

There are many Covens and groups where infighting is common. I'm pleased to say that today that doesn't happen within our Coven. Within a group that is as culturally mixed and whose socio-demography is as diverse as ours that makes us even more remarkable.

I have come to understand that everyone in the Coven is there for a reason. Each person is the most valuable thing we possess as a Coven and the encouragement and support we can lend each other is the measure of our greatness. We are a remarkably unique group of people by any standards.

TEACHING

This is one role, which has come into play both within the Coven and outside our Coven. The teaching of workshops has been a proven method for introducing people to our practices. As evidence of this, everyone who is currently in the Coven has entered via the introductory workshop run by the Coven Founder.

This introductory workshop has usually been held externally from any regular Coven circle activities, although Coven members are welcome to

participate and occasionally do drop-in to meet new faces. These workshops have allowed others to make contact with us and discover whether our style of Witchcraft is what they are looking for in a group. Usually a further Training Circle is used for those seeking involvement in the Coven. It is at this point that Coven members are especially encouraged to be involved with the training of new people.

Teaching continues within the Coven, but the style of approach has frequently been in the form of shared research by Coven members, mini workshops and ritual development still presented by the Coven Founder. Much discussion and sharing of experiences has helped us to develop our confidence to rely upon ourselves.

WITCHES' CROMLECH

Many witches (and magicians) utilise something known as the Witches' Pyramid. A pyramid has four sides or supports and these are expressed esoterically as four laws: *"To Know, To Dare, To Will, and To Keep Silent"*. These are principles based upon Hermetic ideals and used as guidelines to the practice of magick. However, when it comes to working in Covens, I have found there are other principles were at work. I have called these the cornerstones of the *Witches' Cromlech*.

A Cromlech is a standing stone, usually found at megalithic sites from prehistoric Pagan times. I have used this model for the principles of Coven's Psyche because a Cromlech is designed to withstand the test of time and is anciently connected with our European Pagan ancestors.

The Cromlech is a solid object, made of very stable and durable material. It is an integrated object and has a cohesive strength that cannot be easily broken down. At the same time, these stones are known as conductors, which receive and transmit natural and as well as psychic currents of energies.

The principle qualities of the Witches' Cromlech are: Initiative, Optimism, Creativity, and Flexibility. These are the qualities I like to experience in myself and see at work in other Coven members. These four qualities really need no deep or elaborate explanation they are completely self-evident. The trick is in

creating an atmosphere in which these qualities can naturally develop within the Coven.

Whenever the problem of feeling *stuck* arises within myself, or in my relationship with the Coven, it may be time to re-examine these cornerstone principles. Checking and identifying in us, which one of the four principles is not functioning or is depleted is the first step toward solving the problem. Once you've pinpointed what is depleted the next step is ask for help from the Coven.

SKYCLAD RITUAL

Working skyclad brings us into a very special place. In personal, ritual and in Coven practice, it invokes the sacred – we literally have nothing between ourselves, others in the Coven circle or the Universe.

Within the Coven, you will find that you can only work skyclad with those whom you genuinely feel to be your friends. You are opening a very intimate part of who you are; and that is something you can only do if you feel completely safe and among true friends – *fidelitas*.

At the heart of skyclad ritual is a testament of acceptance of others as being beautiful just as they are. It is a privilege to share ritual in this way. It is a position of trust, extended by an open hand of friendship and must never be abused.

For someone new to the Coven, working skyclad also calls for an openness and honesty about themselves. If we can use this physical expression of who we are as a form of self-acceptance, then it may act as a step toward being accepted by the Coven as someone true with nothing to hide.

Summary to Coven Guidelines

This summary of guidelines is an overview of the practical responsibilities adopted by each member once they begin to participate in Coven meetings. It covers all the things that help make our Coven function and illustrates how things are done specifically in the Dark Circle.

Our Coven uses a simple code upon which we base our involvement:

1. Be competent in coven work,
2. Be involved, and
3. Be caring.

Participation in the Coven is an earned privilege, involving an equal contribution by all members. In practical terms, this means everyone needs to be able to support the group through a competence in domestic responsibilities as well as in the rituals. In fact, the fulfilling of the ritual roles and house duties is used to assess a Coven member's eligibility for Initiation.

One of the first things I like to mention and advise any new Coven member about their involvement is the need for them to really *own* the Coven. Of course the only way we can *own* anything is by being responsible, and because the other *owners* have a vested interest in the Coven everyone will expect you to act responsibly.

WHAT YOU WANT?

It might sound presumptuous of me to know what you may want in joining a Coven, but experience has shown me that generally there are only three primary goals for most people. (If you find you have other goals write to me and I'll include them in my list.)

These are the foremost aims in a person's mind when considering joining a Coven:

1. Training via Initiation and/or the development of psychic experiences;
2. Companionship with one's peers and/or a partner;
3. Seeking Self-transformation and/or a change of circumstances.

The primary concern for any Coven should probably be in the focus of the first goal from the above list – *training via Initiation and psychic development*. Anyone seeking either of the other two goals will most probably find these aims happen of their own accord.

WHAT THE COVEN WANTS?

Once the honeymoon period of *being new to it all* has passed, or even at the outset, the Coven is likely to expect things of a new member. There will be general expectations about considerate, personal behaviour and that interactions with everyone in the Coven will be harmonious.

Ultimately, if there is going to be a problem in any area, it is likely to start with issues of *respect*. In Dark Circle, respect for other Coven members is measured in terms of how well we treat each other, how we talk to one another, and how we share the responsibilities of the operation of the Coven.

The following are the key practical expectations that Dark Circle holds its Coven members will fulfill.

ATTENDANCE

The level of attendance is expected to be 50% of the meetings. In practice, this means about 2 meetings a month, unless there are good reasons otherwise. If one's attendance is going to be less than this, then the Coven members need to be made aware. Make contact and don't leave people guessing - offer an explanation and you'll find people generally are very understand.

In the event that a person is unable to attend an evening, there is an expectation that they give adequate notice to the group. Calls giving notice should be ideally 24 hours in advance. If you can't attend you must also be able to discharge your responsibility or role for the night by having another Coven member do your job. That would require you to phone one of the Coven members and ask if they are able to fill-in for you.

Last-minute phone calls, emails or messages left on machines, are unacceptable, unless of course it's a real emergency. If you can't attend a meeting you must speak to someone who can offer your apologies and reasons for not attending the meeting. The Coven should never be left

wondering where you are, or have their meeting unnecessarily delayed. Such behaviour shows little respect for a group of people who see you as a friend.

If a longer period of time is to be spent away (a sabbatical), reasonable notice and an explanation needs to be offered to the Coven members. It will then be up to Coven consensus as to whether this can be agreed to.

DOMESTIC RESPONSIBILITIES

On any normal ritual night, the MC and Elemental roles taken in Circle are also used to distribute a number of practical tasks in the Coven. These are outlined below, and anyone not assigned a role is expected to help the others. The basic Elemental Roles are assigned at each Full Moon and hold for the full month.

MC: ensures that the Coven members assigned an Elemental role at each month at Full Moon there to fulfill their duties. The MC may reassign roles, but her/his principal role is to set-up of the temple space and makes sure everyone has her or his element in place. On special nights like full moon she/he make sure that all ritual requirements are in place. Finally, the MC makes sure the Coven are getting changed, taking showers and tries to get the ritual started on time.

Earth: if you are taking the Earth element for the night, then you are also in charge cleaning up the eating area, washing the dishes and glasses after circle (with assistance from the Fire person).

Water: keeps Loving Cup full, ensures wine and water are taken into the temple space. Helping to clean up the Temple space after a ritual is also expected.

Air: keeps censer perfuming, checks the container holds sufficient charcoal and matches, and that incense is available in temple room. Reminds members of Coven dues and records when, what amount and who paid.

Fire: lights the cauldron and/or candles where needed or directed, and ensures there is sufficient methylated spirits available in temple space. During

winter months checks to see the heater is on in the Temple. Helps to clean up the eating area, to wash and dry the dishes and glasses.

A Special Note:

1. Anyone not assigned a role must help with the setting-up and cleaning-up at the close of the night.
2. Everyone should hang his or her bath towels out on the line to dry. In wet weather, please hang or fold them neatly in the bathroom and please mop excess water up after your shower.
3. Everyone is expected to bring social wine and snacks. Some wine and snacks are bought with Coven dues, particularly the ritual wine.

Helping the Coven meetings to function so that there is an equal distribution of domestic work done by everyone is important. In our Coven, we generally divide the duties so that everyone can share the work. Anyone without a specific role should pair up to assist preparation and clean-ups. This enables the jobs to be done easier and quicker.

COVEN DUES

In our Coven, the dues are collected each month at Full Moon. The designated person taking the AIR role should remind, record and date the contributions into the Coven dues book.

Reasonable month dues may be charged to cover the ongoing running costs (e.g.: rent, incense, charcoal, methylated spirits, sabbat oils, wine for circle, etc.). NB. The Sabbat oils are quite expensive.

Residual funds and extra dues may be collected for such things as developing the Coven library, or purchasing Coven equipment, e.g. Circle mats, etc.

Currently, the Coven dues are \$30, paid monthly at Full Moon.

COVEN VALUES

We each come from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and so never presume that what you may hold as normal will be normal to others

in the Coven. We demonstrate this by insisting that we each hold a non-judgmental and supportive role with one another. Open friendship, communication, trust and respect are held at the highest level of value in our Coven. One might argue that this is what is meant by the Wiccan motto "*Perfect Love and Perfect Trust*" and our Coven's motto, *Fidelitas*.

Coven members and their family or friends are likely to come from many different cultural customs and have different socio-economic backgrounds. Dark Circle holds that the expectation that a respectful understanding of these differences, customs and backgrounds be in evidence in how we addressed and act toward each other.

PARTING WAYS

Life sends us many challenges and the more people that are in the Coven, the greater likelihood that this principle is tested true. In my experience, it is most often external events, which will cause a Coven member to make the hard decision to leave.

The external forces influencing their decision are many and various. It could be a personal relationship breakdown, or the start of a new one, a loss or gain of a job, travel, studies, or moving house, sometimes a personal illness, a death of a loved one, or a birth - any and all of these reasons can push people out of the Coven. Rarely in our experience is it incompatibility. It is more likely to be the pressure and limits of personal time that push some people out of the Coven.

When someone has decided to leave, it is important that the rest of the Coven acknowledge that there will be grieving and feelings of lost friendships. One way to help the healing process is to allow people to share their feelings via "farewell" emails or sometimes even a party. Discussing and understanding emotionally why the change is happening will help heal the Coven back into a cohesive group of supportive friends.

Never bury the reasons for leaving, but help clear the air and dispel any misunderstandings through discussions. It's a good idea to do this even if someone is only taking a temporary leave of absence.

Avoid burning bridges and try to find social venues where people can see one another. For example, the regular Pagans-in-the-Pub meetings, or the monthly Witches' Meet-ups can be used. Because our Coven holds birthday parties for members, these too can be an appropriate time to catch-up with past members.

DIFFERENT LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT

Sometimes, the same reasons that push some people out of the Coven can just as easily heighten the need for another person to decide to be more seriously involved. For some people, the Coven meeting nights becomes *sacrosanct* – it is their personal time away from family responsibilities or work pressures.

Elsewhere I discussed the expectation of time commitment we hold for Coven involvement, but we realize there can be changing circumstances. If your circumstances change, it's very important to let the Coven know what they can expect from you. A considerate explanation will prevent any disgruntled feelings being projected toward you. If your level of involvement has to change, it is better to talk to everyone at a formal meeting. Get an agreement, and then stick to it.

COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN

The most common form of communication breakdown is with people not properly notifying others when they are unable to make a meeting. Pissing-off a group Witches, who waited for your non-appearance, is never a good idea, and it's no way to treat your friends. There is a simple solution – *pick-up the phone and tell someone*.

If you can't make a Coven meeting, always phone and speak to a real person and simply say you won't be there. Call as soon as you know, the earlier the better, rather than just at the last minute. Never leave a message on an answer machine, never send a text message, and absolutely never ever send an email. These messaging mediums are unreliable and are unacceptable for use in our Coven.

The second most common area of communication breakdown is where you had a responsibility to fulfill on the night you can't be there. Everyone in our Coven is obliged to dispatch the duty they can't do to another member. That will mean enlisting their aid and support. Never just expect others to carry your responsibilities; you must be prepared to do something in return.

Finally, where someone is consistently irresponsible and has allowed the communication to breakdown sufficiently, as Coven founder, I will use initiative in discussing my concerns with that person and the Coven. If I have not been satisfied that there is good reason for their behaviour, I will seek to have them step back from Coven involvement all together.

Naturally, it is better for them to clear the air and offer an undertaking and explain what the Coven can expect from them. If the Coven considers what is offered is acceptable, then as Coven Founder I'll support their decision.

COVEN SIZE

As discussed above the Coven needs to know at all times what can be expected of its members. I mention this point because it is critical to understanding what size your Coven needs to be in order to run well. The Theory of Coven size states that:

The size of the Coven needs to be inversely proportional to the level the member Witches agree to be involved.

So for example, a small Coven needs a higher level of attendance of its member Witches. While conversely, a larger Coven can manage with a lower level of attendance by its members.

This is why the level of members' involvement needs to be upfront and understood in order to determine the optimum size your Coven needs to function well.

Our Coven determined that a 50% level of attendance was acceptable. With this low level of attendance I can determine that in order to experience a good quality of energy and enthusiasm in the Coven rituals, we would need at least 15 members. With that number we could expect to have 7 or 8 people at least at any meeting.

Putting the Theory to the Test

At one time we had 11 actives members, one of whom was on a temporary sabbatical, leaving only 10 members available. As the 50% attendance level shows, we frequently have only 5 or 6 members present at some Coven meetings.

For a Coven to function well at the 50% agreed attendance rate we will need a group of about 15 people. This will provide the number attending any meeting in the mean-range of 6 to 8 Witches.

After many years of experience in working with Covens, running many workshops, as well as both large scale and smaller Pagan events I'm qualified to be able to accurately described the social dynamics of groups.

This *magick* number of 15 Witches for our Coven was chosen because I know what will be needed to create the social enthusiasm we expect at meetings. I'd suggest that 7 members the minimum number to have in attendance at any Coven meeting and be able to maintain the best level of energy. In a Coven too small or with an attendance of only 5 or less, we experience a significant flattening of energy. This theory has been many times and consistently put to the test, so that I am confident in offering this advice - do not let the membership fall below 12 if at all possible (oops!).

For example, with a Coven of only 12 members there will be meetings where you might have 5 or 6 members present. This is a workable Coven size and acceptable attendance level. You are not likely to experience too much loss of enthusiasm, frequently felt in a smaller group. However, should even one member leave the Coven, or be called away on personal business, the Coven will be put in dire straights. The Coven is likely to feel very dishearten when the attendance slips to 4 or 5 on some nights. I guarantee you'll hear cries of "*Where is everyone?*"

With 15 Coven members the momentum of enthusiasm, the support and camaraderie will always be there. There will always be enough people to run Coven-size rituals, and individuals are not likely to feel over loaded with responsibilities.

The Initiations

Initiation is the traditional and usual approach used by Covens to make people members. Dark Circle, unlike traditional Covens does not put Initiation as a first priority. Instead we use Initiations to mark a true level of accomplishment and an earned privilege for each member.

Qualifying for any Initiation degree within the Dark Circle is achieved via a combination of competency in ritual, comprehension of knowledge fundamentals and fulfilling one's domestic responsibility. This provides a direction for each Coven member's development and forms the general goal of accountability within the Coven membership.

TO OBTAIN 1ST DEGREE:

Ritual Competence

The following ritual responsibilities are to be logged or roistered, so that every member has an opportunity to demonstrate their comprehension of ritual work. It is important that all Coven members are able to carry out the following ritual roles confidently:

All roles within Circle Casting rite, including MC, as well as the Elemental parts;

Middle Pillar rite – an ability to run this ritual confidently as MC;

MC the Pentagram ritual using invoking and banishing pentagrams;

A good knowledge of Elemental correspondences;

Demonstrate a comprehension of how to charge and load thought-forms with elemental qualities;

Knowledge of how to create astral doorways;

NOX Ritual - participation, must have a good comprehension of the ritual, have taken on Elemental roles and have recorded several diary trance experiences.

Admittance Rites - Everyone should demonstrate an ability to take the role of MC and Summoner/Black Guard in the various Admittance ceremonies with confidence.

Personal Ritual Tools

Everyone needs to acquire his or her own set of basic ritual tools. Everyone is expected to understand the nature and uses of the Tools in both a practical and metaphysical sense. This basic set includes: the four elemental tools (censer, pantacle, chalice and brazier/candle holder), an Athame, a robe and white cord (which should measure exactly 9ft in length).

Spell craft

Everyone must be able to demonstrate an ability to construct *spells* using the principles of Sympathetic Magick and Sigil Magick.

Loyalty and Contribution

Everyone is expected to demonstrate his or her loyalty to the Coven via consistency of involvement. This is extended into a general expectation for members to demonstrate their reliability, their trustworthiness, their allegiance and their fidelity.

Defining Practical Roles

Assisting in preparing and cleaning temple space and clearing and cleaning up afterwards. A log or roster of duties is used to record the above duties.

Book of Shadows

Required to have commenced a hand written Book of Shadows. Many of the rituals and practices can be obtained from direct involvement and from Coven archives.

Reading List

Both the on-line and physical Coven Libraries provides a broad range of books, but Candidates must have read the following nominated texts:

What Witches Do - Stewart Farrar AAA

Outline of contemporary practices (Classic)

Mastering Witchcraft - Paul Huson AAA

A book of ritual practices (Classic)

Aradia – Gospel of the Witches – CG Leyland AAA

Compiled in the 19th century it contains the base upon which contemporary Wicca was formed (Classic)

Cults Of The Shadow - Kenneth Grant AAA

An important book if you want to understand Dark Tarot principles

Initiation Into Hermetics - Franz Bardon AAA

The standard primer on Hermetic Magick (Classic)

Liber AL vel Legis - Book of the Law - Crowley

Witchcraft Today - Gerald Gardner

This is one of the principal and influential texts on the rediscover of Witchcraft in the twentieth century.

Essay

The Candidate is to write an analytical essay on one of the above books. The essay should be at least 1,000 words in length and to be comprised of:

i. A summary of the book; ii. An explanation of a selected chapter (or if relevant more than one chapter); iii. A summarizing critique, offering the candidates option on how well the author has presented their case - or if appropriate, present a case for how this book is significant.

Some useful considerations might be:

Describe the book's content material; and analysis the quality of the information presented by the author (e.g., was the book well referenced; were the claims made in it well supported; were the exercises presented understandable, reproducible and productive?)

Sponsor

Each Candidate for Initiation requires a Sponsor, someone already initiated into the Coven who is prepared to vouch for the Candidates sincerity. The Sponsor will also have the responsibility of preparing a small feast at the end of the Initiation rite. They also play a significant role in the ceremony as Summoner.

At various times in the history of Dark Circle we have required a Candidate have two Sponsors. This gave some guarantee the people seeking Initiation were fully involved with the Circle and its members. From the Coven members' point of view, taking the role of Sponsor is a practical way of demonstrating how each member helps to build and develop the group. In practical terms, the Sponsor helps to see that all Initiation requirements have been met and to help arrange the date for the Initiation ceremony.

TO OBTAIN 2ND DEGREE:**Ritual Competence**

Everyone is expected to have mastered the following rituals:

Middle pillar - Knowledge of chakra points and their functions;

NOX Ritual - Ability to lead ritual confidently, ability to assume the spirit of the presiding deity (Anubis) as psycho-pomp and all god-forms. Qualifying account of the experience (psychic phenomena as observed by self or others);

Luna Rite, also called *Drawing Down the Moon* taking principal roles as

Priestess/Priest - Qualifying account of the experience (psychic phenomena as observed by self or others). Regularly fulfill principal roles;

Dark Moon ritual - Qualifying account of the experience (psychic phenomena as observed by self or others)

Sabbat MC: Organise and run a Sabbat celebration. This involves researching the Sabbat, and organising ritual celebration based around research. Other coven members can be called upon to assist and support the MC.

Initiation rites - Demonstrate competency to act as MC in conducting 1st Degree Initiations rites, and all significant roles within the ceremony.

Demonstrating an esoteric understanding of the ritual.

Finally, an ability to help prevent disasters during ritual.

Book of Shadows

A comprehensive Book of Shadows containing all significant rituals sighted above is to have been created.

Magnum Opus

Create a record of a significant magickal experience, describe your understanding of what occurred, how it affect your life and your conclusions about this experience. This ideally should in detailed written form of the caliber of a short thesis available for other Coven members and placed into the Coven Libraries for archival purposes.

Reading List

To have read nominated texts from 2nd Degree reading list.

ESSAY

Compose a critical essay of two books from list as nominated by Coven. A critique consists of two parts. The first is a summary description of the book's

contents. The second is a critical discussion of the quality of the information presented by the author. For example: Was the book well referenced? Were the claims made in it well supported? Were the exercises (if any) understandable, reproducible and productive?

Loyalty and Contribution

Demonstrate your loyalty and contribution to the Coven via the following:

Defining and maintaining practical roles;

Record of attendance from minuted meetings;

Supervising the preparing and cleaning of the temple space and the clearing and cleaning up afterwards;

Helping to keep Nuit's Veil calendar up-to-date;

Supervising Sabbats;

Supervising Esbats;

Acting as regular MC - nominating roles for the nights, e.g.: elemental roles, circle casting roles, etc.

Assisting where possible to assess new people seeking membership to the Coven.

Teaching

The Candidate should be able confidently teach all Coven rituals. The Candidate should also have some specialised field of interest or expertise that may be offered to Coven members via occasional workshops.

TO OBTAIN 3RD DEGREE:

This would normally be offered after many years experience and service to the Coven especially where someone wishes to form their own Coven under auspice of Dark Circle.

APPENDIX

Dark Circle

Liber Primarius

*An intimation of the philosophical stance of
the Dark Circle Collective*

History in Brief of *Dark Circle*

Dark Circle was established in Sydney in 1983 as a private working Circle. We were simply five friends who had roughly similar levels of magickal experience, although with a wide range of different backgrounds. We quickly attracted others who sort involvement and so became a *collective* of more than twenty people by early 1984.

The use of the word *Collective* more accurately described the variety of magickal practices we used and have encouraged people to explore. Ours was a non-conformist Collective of people. Keenly aware that we wished to maintain the level of respect for one another's unique differences, we based our Coven upon an ideal of working among *peers*. We acknowledged that we each bring into the Circle our many different life experiences as a valuable resource of learning.

The notion of a *Collective*, or group of peers, more accurately expresses our general approach and relationship to working with one another. We have always been a very inclusive, and have freely embraced an experimental approach to our magickal work. We have used, and do still, a wide variety of magickal and ritual styles not normally associated with traditional Witchcraft.

That said, we have always considered ourselves Witches. It is in this model of the Witches' Coven, with a philosophy of reverence to Life and the Sacred, which has well suited us and continues to.

Liber Primarius

Dark Circle encourages the development of a personal philosophy through magickal experience. Consequently, the Collective has no dogmatic position and offers a personal interpretation of magickal ideals.

Do What Thou Wilt Shall Be The Whole Of The Law

1. Behind Nature we acknowledge the existence of an Eternal Metaphysical force.
2. This force has Dark and Light aspects, both of which are equally valid.
3. These aspects manifest in the great variety of Gods, Goddesses, Demons, Angels, Archons and the like; names change according to culture and tradition.
4. Nature is the outer form of this Force and hence all matter is to be considered sacred, nothing is profane.
5. Evil is ignorance and has no metaphysical reality.
6. The aim of existence is to achieve Self Knowledge.
7. Self Knowledge or Initiation can be achieved through a wide variety of spiritual technologies, of which Sorcery, Witchcraft, Magick, Hermeticism and Shamanism are examples.
8. Ritual Initiation is simply the acknowledgement of personal experience.

Love Is The Law Love Under Will.

Authorised by the Dark Circle Collective.