



The magazine of  
World Pantheism



Issue 18

Autumn 2006

Exploring naturalistic spirituality since 1999

## Expressing and embodying our feelings

**O**ur Web survey of pantheist practice is giving us a much better picture of what spiritual practices we follow individually, and what formats we would feel comfortable with in local groups. This issue explores both of these aspects. It is an exploration of our diversity and inventivity, and how we can share both while including as many naturalistic folk as possible.

Over 300 people have taken the survey so far. We have in common a set of naturalistic beliefs and caring attitudes to nature, but it's clear that we have a wide range of attitudes to expressing those beliefs and the emotions that go with them. For many people, direct experience of life or Nature is all they need. Others feel a need to show their feelings in more expressive ways. We stretch from embarrassment with or dislike of ceremony, right across to a high comfort level with extensive use of symbols and paraphernalia and rituals.

This diversity of preferences poses no problems in everyday use. But it offers a challenge for us to find a format for local group meetings such that everyone can feel relaxed and satisfied and included. We need to encourage a style that draws people in and keeps them wanting to come back. Members and friends who are interested in local groups are mostly looking for something that is warmer, more positive and more fun than the average Atheist/Humanist/Bright discussion group, yet that avoids supernaturalism or required rituals and recitals. The survey indicated a high level of interest in local groups, but among some people, a certain anxiety about what or who they might find there. So here are some words of reassurance.

**Celebration** is a generic name for the deliberate expression of our spirituality, whether in private daily life or in lifestage events such as marriage. In a naturalistic framework it will always essentially be self-expression rather than required performance. In the WPM it will always be a matter of personal choice. We will never lay down required rituals or recitals. There's no compulsion to "get it right." There are no gods or spirits for us to please or plead with. There's no prophet with a special hotline to the Deity. There are no spells which can magically change

reality without any other action on our part.

Any celebration that a local group might do will always be simply for fun or for fostering a sense of community by sharing times of exploration, creativity, action or reverence. Our survey suggests that a restrained approach would deter the fewest people – for example, a background of natural sounds, found objects, sharing of food or of discoveries since the last meeting, and perhaps a guided meditation on some aspect of nature.

**Symbols:** The WPM has no symbols other than the objects and patterns of nature itself, such as our *Natutilus* and spiral galaxy. If individuals want to use symbols from various religious traditions, they are perfectly free to do so.

**Places of gathering:** We do not need to gather, as some religions do, in order to convince ourselves that our beliefs are correct. We gather for social or practical reasons: to meet like minds, to make friends, to enjoy intelligent exchange of ideas, to offer mutual support, to plan shared activities and actions. Local groups will always be free to meet wherever it suits them – in nature is best, where this is not possible, in parks, in people's homes and gardens.

**Organization:** The WPM will endorse celebrants so that pantheists can enjoy, for example, nature-oriented weddings, but we will never have a hierarchical priestly order. Our beliefs make that impossible. Reality is right there in front of us, all around us, and inside our bodies. There are no arcane secrets. There are no scriptures that reveal truths we do not all have access to. Nobody can claim special access to holiness. As our belief statement says: "Every individual has direct access to ultimate reality, which is the Universe and Nature. There is no need for mediation by priests, gurus or revealed scriptures."

The WPM exists to promote the ideas of naturalistic pantheism; to further nature conservation at local and planetary scales; to promote human rights, and religious freedom; and to encourage and support local groups. Any organizational structure we have exists merely to facilitate these goals and to serve the membership.

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# Know Thyself

## *It's okay to hug trees, stargaze - or just be here, now*



Most of us have some deliberate approach to expressing our feelings about life and Nature. Four out of five of us practice close observation of nature several times a week. A majority of us use music and/or found objects such as pebbles,

shells, burrwood, tree seeds as aids to our spirituality or reflection.

Altogether some 55 per cent personally observe a reflective practice such as meditation, ceremony, mindfulness once a week or more (see the box below for write-in comments). Meditation is most common, with 41 per cent. About one in four greet Nature/the Universe on rising and the same proportion think about them at bedtime, while 11 per cent thank them at mealtimes. 17 per cent never use any kind of reflective practice, all but 2 per cent think they might try.

Many use sensual aids to spirituality – two thirds use music and 56 per cent use found objects such as pebbles, shells,

burrwood, or tree seeds. There were some interesting write-ins on this one (see box, right).

Not many of us have actually celebrated nature-oriented lifestage ceremonies for themselves, family or close friends - 21 per cent for funerals and 24 per cent for weddings.

The proportions observing or celebrating different solar and lunar events ranges from 40 to 58 per cent – the winter solstice involves the highest number (58 per cent), perhaps because it coincides with Xmas and the New Year, traditional festivals observed by more than half of us.

Although a number of people in our mailing lists write about Pagan, Taoist and Buddhist approaches, it seems that only a minority observe any of their ceremonial/celebratory/ritual practices for symbolic or therapeutic purposes. Among these Paganism tops the list with 29 per cent, while 13 per cent use any Buddhist practice and 11 per cent Taoist.

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## Individual Practices

### **Physical engagement--walking, swimming and, especially, kayaking**

*Sensory awareness meditation; Pantheist affirmation (of my place in the Universe and ethical values)*

#### **'Be here now' mindfulness exercise**

*I light a red candle (on a white plate, surrounded by evergreen branches) to commemorate the Winter Solstice. I light the candle before the sun goes down, and keep it lit through the night until sunrise. It's strictly astronomical -- an acknowledgement of the tilt and spin of our planet and its place in the larger Universe.*

#### **Being loving and compassionate to others, on a conscious basis.**

*Ethical pantheism - working to leave the world a better place*

#### **Reflection on the interdependent web of existence.**

*Deep contemplation of scientific and philosophical ideas about Nature, and of art work related to Nature. Prayer (not petitioning, but using prayer to open myself up to the possibilities of my subconscious.)*

#### **Whenever I feel overwhelmed by life I often reflect on the beauty of the Universe and my place in it.**

*Carpe diem. "The wonder of the world, the beauty and the power, the shape of things, their colors, lights and shades: these I saw. Look ye also while life lasts."*

#### **I thank Nature for her gifts when I receive them.**

*I have a small oak table ("altar") by the entry way with simple glass bowls of salt (earth), water, candle (fire), incense (wind) that remind me of my physical place in space/time.*

#### **Eating foods that are unprocessed, natural, organic**

*Constant contemplation of the patterns around me, of which I am a part. Nature has its rhythms and processes, like a vast organism it has its metabolisms - these are the flow of life.*

#### **Night sky observation - weather permitting!**

*I watch the changing of the stars as the earth progresses through the seasons. As I take a few minutes to watch this progression, I think of how it reflects my life and the life of other human beings. And like the individual stars we also progress through the the seasons and finally fade from view.*

#### **Daily time outside with nature, feeling the elements, even if it's just a walk around the yard.**

*Just a general mindfulness, thankfulness (throughout each day) for the wonders of nature, for life itself.*

#### **Directly working to study and protect the environment**

*Thank "all that is" for including me. Feeling inclusive with all other things.*

#### **Regularly recognizing other 'creatures' who share the planet as beings no less than myself.**



## Aids for Reflection

*Rocks from places I  
have visited*

Prayer beads, hoop dance.

*Touch and smelling of plants,  
native plants in particular*

Aromatherapy

Drumming

My garden

*Incense and candle burning,  
mirror gazing, vowel sounds,  
deep breathing, concentration on  
all body parts.*

Lights, prisms, fires, candles,  
water (rivers, streams, lakes),  
sand.

Polished pebbles

Photography

*I chew the leaves of the legal  
drug Salvia divinorum to enter a  
mystical state of merger with the  
Universe.*

Art, poetry

Song

Rain Water, Sand/Soil, Rocks/  
Crystal, Wooden bowls, Fire

*Burr wood, seeds of trees such as  
Deodar cedar, eucalyptus, bark of  
trees such as sycamore.*



# Viewpoints on Celebration

*Since the WPM respects individual and group freedom, all  
opinions and suggestions in this section are purely personal.*

Traditions and rituals make me feel good, like I belong, like I'm connected to my family both present and past, and to my community and to my world. To mark the changes of seasons and days/nights reminds me of my connection to Nature. They give me something to look forward to and good memories afterwards.

I have loved rituals throughout my life, and as a pantheist, I'm no different. So maybe I borrow them from someone else or even another tradition and make them my own, and maybe we'll create some of our own unique ones. I find rituals/ceremonies to mark special events or passages of time both comforting and stabilizing in a world that's unpredictable and beyond my control and sometimes very stressful. Maybe it's my way of controlling some little part of my world in ways that I can to express my happiness at being alive and being part of the universe and my gratefulness for all the things that Nature has given me.

To have a brief meditation/reading time welcoming the sun and a brief bedtime reading remembering the day and looking forward to the next is comforting and relaxing to me. It helps start the day out better and helps me rest at night. I enjoy music, candles, readings or poetry, and a beautiful mountain view, whether in small close groups, or even solitary; I prefer simplicity and gentleness in contrast to the hectic electronic world that's my everyday life.

I love the idea of celebrating the seasons and my own pantheist group is going to combine Thanksgiving and winter solstice this year with dinner and a Christmas luminaire the first part of December, where the town is decorated with candles in bags all along the sidewalks, and we'll enjoy each other's company and hopefully will start our own brand new tradition to mark the beginning of winter. I still love Christmas - the reds and greens, the holly, the trees and lights, the candles, the dinners with family and friends, the smells of oranges and peppermint and chocolate. Just like I still love Easter and my family's tradition of going to a Georgia mountain inn for lunch and then afterwards petting the animals on the farm, watching the children hunt Easter eggs and talk to the Easter Bunny. I look at it as new beginnings, buds on trees, jonquils, baby chicks, and a sense of hopefulness.

I don't need fancy ceremonies and robes and such - in fact, I would be very uncomfortable in such a setting. Rituals should make you feel comfortable and relaxed, not miserable and obligated and embarrassed. That's why I respect anyone else's rights to participate or not as they feel like it.

Sharon Dobrovicz

I have absolutely no need to watch or participate in any ritual. I would think of any ritual as just symbolic stuff and not worth it, just made up. Reciting the Lord's Prayer, drinking wine, lighting candles or drawing pentagrams are one and the same to me. But what if we greatly expand our idea of ritual? Maybe to include sharing with the group major personal accomplishments (learned how to play the trombone, stopped drinking etc), things that may make you a better person thus making you a better Pantheist, since your last gathering. Any Pantheist values you expressed to the outside world, good deeds, showing compassion, volunteering in environmentally or humanitarian efforts could be shared. It would be a good thing, with a purpose. It doesn't have to be mandatory, but it could be an absolutely positive touchy-feely experience.

Stuart Stell /p4



(from p3.....) The main point in belonging to a 'religion' as opposed to merely having my own views, is to gain a sense of community, and for that, group experiences have to occur. In a religion, it is most sensible for group experiences to include spiritual experiences to help establish a sense of community. For myself, religious expression is through art, music and observance and awareness of natural things, phenomena, events, or concepts - if something involves awareness or expression of some truth of reality, particularly if it induces or expresses wonder, it counts as a religious or spiritual event.

I'd be open to trying a pantheist ceremony. If a formal ceremony were to be performed, it would probably need to be relatively sophisticated and well executed for me not to consider it hokey. What seems cool is a gathering in a circle in some natural locale, perhaps around a fire burning incense, or at the side of a river, singing choral music (preferably with multiple parts!). Songs should evoke natural imagery and reference commonalities in relationships and life experiences. Alternately, it could occur in a pantheist temple, by which I mean a building specifically made to evoke a feeling of wonder and a connection with nature and the universe, as opposed to a mere meeting place. I am presently a graduate student in architecture, and hope someday to design such a thing for someone to actually build, perhaps even a prototype with adjustable design features for different places on the globe. Shane Wells

If ritual implies belief in the efficacy of ritual count me out. If ritual is seen as theater, an aesthetically significant experience is possible - but as a theatrical performance. If ritual is intended clearly to SYMBOLIZE something significant to me, I might participate in it with like minded friends, as a purely symbolic and frankly quixotic gesture. There would be a tongue in cheek quality to it though.

I don't object to ritual for others who find it fills an emotional need. Just don't impose it on me. I suppose that if I were describing my Pantheism in terms of Christian analogies, I am a Quaker, not a Catholic. And I see the WPM as a 'Society of Friends' not a 'High Church.' But I am not on principle opposed to all ceremony and ritual. An example of ceremony meaningful to me: When my father died I conducted a Pantheist funeral ceremony in his memory. It was attended by family and friends.

An example of ritual meaningful to me: While walking in the woods each day, I recite to myself what I term a 'Pantheist Affirmation' (this is an affirmation of what is important to me, it is not a petitionary prayer):

*We pilgrims on a path of wonder,  
Mindful of the present moment,  
Call the Universe our Mother,  
This Earth our home,  
Nature our temple,  
And all life our kin.  
Celebrating life,  
Facing inevitable death unafraid,  
Following these guides:  
Truth, beauty, love, kindness,  
Fairness, gentleness, openness, curiosity,  
Wonder, acceptance, gratitude, empathy,  
Generosity, courage, determination,  
responsibility,  
Humor, reason, and commonsense.  
We revere Almighty Reality --- as our  
only 'God'.* Walt Mandell



For me, Pagan symbols as part of a Naturalistic worldview are a major part of my life, not just my "spiritual life." For years I was an Atheist, and didn't have any spiritual practice. This simply didn't work. The worldview was good and accurate, but felt hollow without the practice that religion supplies in the form of holidays, activities, and communities.

Recognizing this, I started with simply watching the sun rise on the Winter Solstice. This worked so well that I soon added celebrating the Summer Solstice, then the Equinoxes, and then their thermal equivalents when temperatures change. /p7

## Suggested activities

### Fire circles

*Art projects - e.g. watercolor stick painting of natural scenes, music and poetry and journaling workshops, etc.*

### Activities for children

*Stone Soup Parties and other Food/Nature related activities.*

### Discussing experiences and beliefs.

*Outings to key natural events - migrations, breeding grounds, blossoming, fall colors.*

### Charity work: nature restoration, home building, humane assistance, etc.

*Gatherings in a social setting that is not judgemental or closed minded but based in reality and nature and science.*

### Family activities

*Music like "Enya" or other, singing. Playing instrumental music. Literary nature poetry.*

### Lectures

*Astronomy outings to view the planets and meteor showers*

### Funerals, weddings, child namings



# *How would you like your meets to be?*

*Hot or cold? Sedate or animated? Dry debate or warm support?*

There is a high level of interest in local groups. Three out of four people would be interested in attending a local pantheist/nature reverence group if there were one near them. Some 27 per cent would be willing to travel up to 50 miles to attend one, and 15 per cent would be willing to try to start one. 11 per cent have attended a local group and liked it. Only 12 per cent have no interest in joining a local group, even if it were close by. Among those who thought of attending but decided not to, the main reason was that it was too far away.

Most people do not currently attend organized social groups – nature and environmental groups score highest, with 22 and 16 per cent respectively. About 14 per cent belong to a UU congregation.

The survey told us a lot what kind of group people would prefer. It seems that we would prefer a group that is quite clear about its naturalistic orientation, and that has a majority of people with naturalistic beliefs, but not intolerant of people who join in error. Open-minded about some form of ceremony, though probably of a fairly restrained kind. And a group that does more than just sit around and debate, but also discusses books, has science or nature outings, picnics or potlucks, celebrates the seasons, and shares life wisdom, discoveries and experiences of nature.

Most people want local groups to be either not explicitly open to people with supernatural beliefs (19 per cent), or at least having a majority with supernatural beliefs (43 per cent). Of course these two approaches are not mutually exclusive: a certain but small proportion of people who join the WPM, perhaps without always reading our belief statement first, have supernatural beliefs and as long as they express these in a non-confrontational manner they do remain.

Most of the suggested activities for local groups are popular. Nature outings top of the list (82 per cent) followed by science outings and general or book discussion (75 per cent each). Environmental conservation came next at 72

per cent. The other options such as sharing of experiences, celebrations of seasons and moon phases, potlucks and picnics appealed to 61-63 per cent.

85 per cent of people were at least tolerant of the group having some kind of ceremony, with the largest number (27 per cent) preferring restrained ceremony such as guided meditation or handholding in a circle. 19 per cent would

Perhaps this is a given, but “fellowship” is something I miss from the church experience. The feeling of companionship one receives in a group of like-minded people who support you and bring you a feeling of belonging. Also the feeling of oneness. The breaking down of artificial barriers people construct between themselves and others. The almost familial, virtually unconditional, love that one might feel in such a setting.

I believe we need this aspect of traditional religions to help unify us. Such togetherness and support is not exclusive to supernatural religion.

*Survey Respondent*

add flourishes such as dancing around a tree or singing songs, while 11 per cent would participate in more elaborate ceremony such as dressing up, group chanting, and using symbolic “props”. Only 9 per cent would not join any group which had ceremonies of any kind, even restrained.

*Left to right: Atheist meeting, Humanist meeting, Pantheist picnic in California, Pantheist midsummer meet on Hampstead Heath.*



# Personalities and preferences

We have the full spectrum of attitudes toward group ceremony. The survey allowed us to separate out certain clusters of people on the basis of their preferences. This simplification helps when thinking about what kind of group meeting format would have the widest appeal. In reality, everyone is different and we represent a continuum.

## Anti-ceremonialists (9%)

These are people who would not join a group if it used any form of ceremony – even the restrained kind. Generally this type is less into groups of any kind. One third of them are not interested in attending a local Pantheist/Nature Reverence group – even if there was one nearby. Almost half said they dislike any form of organization for spiritual feelings.

Even so, 57 per cent of this group

say they would be interested in a local group, but only 3 per cent would travel up to 50 miles to attend one. Their preferred activities are general or book discussions and science outings, and their least preferred is celebration of seasons. In terms of personal practices, 53 per cent of this group do not regularly meditate (but 30 per cent do).

Half of them celebrate Xmas and New Year, and 40 per cent observe the full moons. None of them hug trees and only one in ten uses any pagan symbols.

## Excused (5%)

This group would be willing to join a group that included some ceremonies, but would prefer not to be present. This was a very small group so analysis of percentage preferences would not be meaningful.

## Tolerant (16%)

These are people who would not participate in ceremony but don't mind being present while others do. They have a stronger (70 per cent) interest in a local group, of whom 7 per cent would travel up to 50 miles to one. Their favored activities were science and nature outings (80 per cent each) while their least favored are celebrating the seasons (43 per cent).

60 per cent of this group do not regularly meditate. Nature observation is their favored form of reflective practice, and 57 per cent of them use natural found objects as aids. 40-50 per cent observe or celebrate seasons and full moons and a quarter of them greet Nature/the Universe on rising. Only 10-13 per cent observe any traditional ceremonial/celebratory/ritual practices of supernaturalist religions.

*Some people just love to dress up . . . .*

*Others seem less at ease with the idea.*

## Group warmth (31%)

This group would participate in ceremony of a restrained kind, such as group meditation or handholding in a circle. Some 85 per cent would attend a local group if there were one nearby, and of these 40 per cent would be willing to travel up to 50 miles to attend. One in five have actually attended a pantheist group and liked it. They are interested in every suggested type of group activity at high levels (72-96 per cent), with Nature outings and general or book discussion the most popular, and sharing

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of experiences the least.

As far as personal practice goes, three out of four meditate, half of them several times a week. Some 28 per cent greet Nature/ the Universe each morning, 25 per cent think about them at bedtime.

About one third of them observe some limited and purely symbolic forms of pagan symbol or practice, and the same number Christian. Less than a quarter celebrate the pagan quarterdays.

### Fun lovers (20%)

These are people who would participate in moderate ceremony, eg dancing around a tree or singing songs. Equally keen about local groups if nearby, 46 per cent would travel up to 50 miles to a group. They are enthusiastic about every type of group activity, with nature outings at number one closely followed by celebration of the seasons and moonphases.

Almost two in five attend an organized nature group more than four times a year and 27 per cent attend a Unitarian Universalist congregation. Just under a half use pagan ceremonial/celebratory/ritual practices for symbolic or therapeutic purposes. Two thirds celebrate full moons and one third observe pagan quarterdays.

### Ceremonialists (15%)

This group would participate in more elaborate ceremony such as dressing up, group chanting, and use of symbolic "props." They like all suggested group activities, but 100 per cent of them would like seasonal celebrations. Sharing of experiences and environmental conservation score lowest, but still 78 per cent each.

In terms of their individual practices, two out of every five use dance as an aid to spiritual practice and one in three uses costume and/or crystals. Two thirds use pagan ceremonial/celebratory/ritual practices for symbolic or therapeutic purposes, and three out of five observe the pagan quarterdays. One in three are frequent tree-huggers, two out of five meditate.

(from p4.....) It was only later that I found that these eight holidays are celebrated by millions of Pagans as the Wheel of the Year.

The Wheel provides many levels of meaning that organize and unify my spiritual practice, and indeed, my life. The image of the compass reminds me to remember the whole earth, not just the tiny piece of it I see every day. The Wheel provides direction as to which spiritual concept to celebrate when. Without that, every idea clamors for attention all the time, and so none can be properly celebrated.

One of the main cycles mapped by the Wheel is the sun cycle.

Another, superimposed cycle is the human lifespan, with each holiday reminding us to pay specific honor to loved ones at that stage in life.

I'll use Samhain as an example.

Samhain commemorates the powerful realization that life is wonderful, but each life eventually ends in death.

The life of the earth is seen to rapidly retreat as the leaves fall, plants wither, chill winds blow, and darkness asserts its dominance. Without death, removing the old, we could not have room for the new life of infants. Death and Life are two sides of the same coin.

Samhain is thus the time to express our gratitude to those who have gone before us, those who have made our lives possible, those who have influenced us, and those who we remember. For this reason our ritual usually includes tributes to our ancestors and others. As with any of the eight holidays, the day is sacred. I take the day off work, and spend time with the family, usually in activities themed to the holiday.

In addition to holiday celebrations, my spirituality is part of my daily life. I often pause to think of the moon phase, and look for manifestations of the universe's glory to enjoy, such as a glowing sundog or a wondrous mushroom. My only structured daily practice is a short meditation, where I sit facing the cardinal direction associated with each season and ponder my place in the universe. Lastly, I often take walks in the woods, and have a decorated staff for hiking. It has carved onto it major aspects of my spirituality, including a Wheel of the Year. These walks are a little more likely on the date of the full or thin waxing crescent moon. My past experience with simple Atheism showed me that without this structure and these practices, my spirituality simply just didn't happen – day to day concerns crowded it out. Jon Cleland-Host

My personal reflective practice is based on immediate presence in nature, through nature hiking, nature observation and nature photography. I engage in this almost every day in the beautiful area that where I live - the Santa Monica Mountains. It is a deep emotional and aesthetic experience. Because I never forget the connection and the immediacy, I don't feel a need for anything extra special to remind me of the connection. I express appreciation and gratitude for what I see through photography, which honors Nature and Reality. Working in Photoshop is a continuation of the experience and allows me to see details I might have missed at the time. At bedtime I relive each step of my walk, and am always asleep before I reach half way.

I have attended various pagan ceremonies out of curiosity but did not find them satisfying. I know that some people present were deadly serious about the casting of the magic circle and the invocation of spirits and gods, and I felt uncomfortable with that, just as I would at a Christian mass. I dislike the word ritual, as it implies compulsion to get it right, repetition and/or acceptance of an outside rule. In general I have no need for the symbol and prefer the reality: I feel there can be a danger of the symbol getting in the way of seeing the



## *The Quality of Attention* by Paul Harrison



*In Malibu Creek the water flows all the year round and has small fish and crayfish. Green-backed and night heron fish here, along with great white and snowy egrets, pied-billed grebe and a rare visiting osprey. The blue heron fishes the whole length of the creek, swooping from reach to pond to pebble shoal. She stands perfectly still for minutes on end, observing. Often she tilts her head to one side. Sometimes she raises her crown feathers to shade her eyes from the sun.*

(from p7.....) reality. The direct experience is always more important to me. I always remember a pagan full moon celebration which was entirely symbolic, and which ended about 20 minutes before the moon rose. It was far more meaningful to move on to a mountain road where we had a perfect view of the real moon.

There are a few symbols that have great resonance for me. I have seen photos of the Beltane Fire Festival in Edinburgh and if I were around I would probably join in to celebrate the element fire. I love the Green Man because he expresses the felt identity of human and nature (there needs to be a Green Woman too). There are Earthday festivals and I think we pantheists need to be part of them. I believe that Pantheist groups need to be more lively, sensual, emotional and fun than your typical Atheist or Humanist gathering focused on intellectual discussion or heated hammering of other religions. Paul Harrison

I think that ceremony is a good thing and I believe that there will be many groups as part of the WPM which will have ceremony, besides just as many who will have no ceremony at all.

Many religions have a set ceremony because they were set up by a holy man, and then perpetuated by an organization of leaders. This makes it possible to establish a ceremony, because the leaders set it up. We don't have this. Because we are not the type of religion that has a holy book or prophet, I do not believe we will ever have an official ceremony. We have a basic set of beliefs, but this will never be enough to build a ceremony from.

For ceremony to be successful, it must come from the heart.

Religions like UUism and Bahaism have no fixed ceremony. Each group sets its own ceremony. What works in those cases is to have a collection of suggested ceremonies. We can do this, and still keep those who are antagonistic to ceremony. Some of the groups who successfully set up regular meetings as part of the WPM will establish ceremony amongst themselves. We as an organization can share this information so like-minded groups can pick and choose the ceremony they like.

Tony Van der Mude

The ceremonialist approach offers opportunities for the development of Pantheist music, poetry, arts and crafts, which celebrate Nature and Pantheist values. The use of ceremonies and symbols enriches Pantheism, and satisfies many with an artistic temperament. At least three forms of worship can be made into ceremonies, by verbalizing our emotions, and developing fixed forms of poetic and decorous wording. They should preferably be held out of doors. "Adoration" of the Universe and Nature. This is essentially a private matter, and each individual should formulate his or her own mantras, eulogies and vows, and even include spontaneous utterances. No artifacts, music or special clothes are required. "Communion" can be a private or a communal ceremony, performed at the full moon and at the solstices and equinoxes. Artifacts such as candles, incense, and chalice, engraved with Pantheist symbols where appropriate. The artifacts used should be specially

***When she moves she does so slowly and sinuously and with infinite care. She waits and waits, looking for distinctive shapes and movements in the water. Then suddenly her focus will sharpen, and she will tense in readiness, and lunge, and emerge with a fish.***

***I learn from the quality of her attention. Standing still for minutes on end, in the shade of oaks buzzing with bee colonies, with camera set and ready, I wait and watch her patiently for significant forms and motions, then suddenly, often in close parallel with her moods, I tense, sharpen the focus and shoot, emerging with a photo.***

***I am present only in that moment, I am nowhere else. All worries and concerns have long evaporated. I fuse with the scene, I am what I see. All sense of self has dissolved.***

***No camera is needed for this exercise, only a body and eyes and brain and memory on which to record the moment.***

***Every instant is as precious as a fish or a photograph.***

consecrated, also the elements of bread and wine or water consumed in the ceremony. Where the ceremony is communal, wearing similar clothes enhances the esprit de corps. White is appropriate for lunar ceremonies, yellow for the summer solstice and green for the vernal equinox. "Agape" is essentially a less formal ceremony involving the use of natural objects and "objets trouves." Participants sit in a circle and recite verses which relate to each object and its symbolic significance. Each recites a stanza in turn and all join in the refrain

*Everything that you can see  
Is part of a great Unity.*

*Around your temples tie a band  
And form a circle, hand in hand.  
On this earth, our aim should be  
To live in peace and harmony.  
By the Sun that gives us light,  
By the Moon that shines at night,  
By the radiant Stars above,  
To All, I vow unending love.*

Tor Myrvang

# Make your own Meetup

Meetup is the social networking site that got Howard Dean's movement growing so fast. Meetup allows people to sign up on the Internet, to agree on meeting places and times, and to keep communicating in the meantime. It seemed a great way to get local pantheist groups moving. We were doing quite well, small gatherings were starting up in many places, sometimes just two or three people, sometimes many more. But then Meetup needed a source of revenue and started charging people \$144 a year for the privilege of organizing groups. This was a huge deterrent for tiny groups or for people hoping to start new groups. We more or less gave up hope.

Earlier this year the WPM board decided we would pay for up to five organizers, each of whom – under Meetup's rules – could organize three localities through assistants, making fifteen in all. We put the Meetup link back on our front page. The number of groups, and of pantheists interested in a local group, started growing rapidly.

Then Meetup introduced a "great new feature" whereby groups could list themselves under three other categories that might have people who were interested. Very soon atheist, humanist and pagan groups added themselves to Pantheism, and were listed as if they were pantheist groups. Since they are larger, they have been taking over the "top ten" and it looks as if we don't know who we are. We have protested and will keep trying to get a better policy implemented.

With appropriate warnings, Meetup can still be used successfully. Washington DC is going strong. Groups have started in San Francisco, Atlanta, London, Zagreb. Perhaps the most striking success story is the Western North Carolina group, whose attendance rocketed from zero in May to 13 people in July, thanks to dedicated work by Sharon Dobrovicz and her assistant Sherry Austin. Sharon tells the story, and the benefits.

## *How I built my local group* **by Sharon Dobrovicz**

I knew I wanted a pantheist group here in western North Carolina. I don't attend church, I consider pantheism my religion, and I wanted some in-person interaction with other pantheists to celebrate the seasons, discuss issues and share resources, explore some of the beautiful sites in the mountains where we live, and I hoped in the process to make some lasting and deep friendships.

I wasn't sure I was the right person to start a group, being kind of quiet, but my interest in starting it outweighed my own timidity, and in the spring, I set up the first meeting in my own very small town....one other person was supposed to come but didn't show up, so I sat there for an hour alone. How glad I am that I didn't let that discourage me.

It occurred to me that I should list the Meetup in a place where future meetings are most likely to be held and where there would be a bigger audience to reach. So I set up the next one over in Asheville, North Carolina, a bigger and more well-known town, a very liberal and eclectic place, with many great venues for Meetups that are nature oriented, easy to find and get to for

people coming from different directions. It doesn't mean that every Meetup has to be located there, but it's a good place to list my group and get the most responses and use as my base.

I chose the Nature Center as the venue, for a picnic and then a walk through the Center itself. There were four of us at that meeting in June. Two of us stayed to walk through the Nature Center (and I "adopted" a bobcat which I was pretty excited about!) and to have a picnic after the four of us had a brief meeting and discussion about future plans.

One of the people at that meeting I had found on the Frappr pantheist site, so remember to look on there for people in your geographic area (also the WPM Geodata group on the member pages)! She later became my assistant organizer for a while and did a great job of writing letters, working on our Meetup web site, and just generally helping spread the word and helping plan the next Meetup, looking up other potential locations, putting a note in the Asheville paper, etc. A good assistant can be a great asset if your membership is growing fast and if

you plan on actively reaching out to the public or to specific target groups other than the Meetup website itself or the WPM site. She and I both wrote notes to go in local papers and sent emails to the local UU churches in the area. This got quite a few responses, and many of those UU's became part of our core group of members. We worked hard on making our website current and fresh and informative.

Since that time, some of the members themselves have helped spread the word to their own friends, coworkers, etc. and we have grown some that way, too.

The July meeting was a hike up on the Blue Ridge Parkway. We had 13 people. It was a cold and drizzly day, but we had a great time and I was thrilled with the turnout. Everyone seemed eager and excited to participate and to contribute their own ideas.

The next month at the NC Arboretum brought seven of us out for a very nice afternoon, including a new member who found us through the WPM site. We have a total 20 members total listed at the moment, a number which has fluctuated a little. Four of those members are actually couples who joined as one person, so we really have 24 members, and the couples are part of the active core group. We did lose a few members due to people being too busy with other events, moving out of town, and living too far away to realistically attend the meetings. Here in western North Carolina we have a lot of seasonal residents who return to Florida in the winter, so through the winter months we will actually lose at least 4 of our members temporarily. If this kind of thing happens to you, don't get discouraged. When those people left, new people found us.

It helps to choose a convenient time when people are likely to be available. In order to make our own meetings more member-friendly, we are scheduling regular meetings on the 4th Saturday of each month. I encourage all of the

*Western North Carolina Pantheist Meetup heading for the Blue Ridge Parkway*



members to participate in ways they want to (and they have), including meeting in October at a couple's solar home, having focused discussion topics, time for sharing a poem or a reading, and I post a monthly newsletter to recap what has happened in the last month and what's coming up, plus some new links or info from the WPM or from around here. I try to stay in touch with them without going overboard on the emails, but I want this to be "our" group not just "my group" and they know that.

We have a great core group, and I'm really happy to have between 20-25 on our list and have anywhere from 8-10 or so show up at any given time, sometimes more, sometimes less (around here there's other things going on almost every weekend that potentially is of interest to pantheists). My own group prefers not to get to huge numbers but to stay small and reasonable so we can have nice lunches and pull our chairs up together and talk and get to know each other a little better.

We are becoming friends. Our newest member commented on the website that we seem to enjoy each other, and it's true. We laugh a lot and have fun together. I wouldn't have likely met any of these people if it hadn't been for taking a chance and starting a Meetup group. I wouldn't have seen the hidden treasure of Turks-cap lilies or met a couple of local published authors. I'm so glad I didn't give up after that first time when no one showed up. If one thing doesn't work, then I just try it a little different way. I really like these people. They have become my local "church" community, to help give me some of that social interaction and friendship and support that I miss from my old church days, laughter, sharing food together, expressing our spirituality in natural and everyday ways, and just taking in the beautiful forests, waterfalls, and mountain views.

Hopefully, this group will last a long time. I have made some wonderful new lifelong friends, who have shown

me how to take better care of the environment, and with whom I can share my own love of nature and a spirituality grounded in reality, not the supernatural. Among others I met an author (which then led me to a book fair where I met and talked to a couple of other local authors and got autographed books); and a couple who live totally off the grid, with solar power and hybrid car.

I have learned a lot more about the area I live in. I would have never known about the unmarked trail that leads to the beautiful abundance of Turks-cap lilies, for example. There's so much around here to see and do, so many parks and trails and mountain peaks and gardens off the Parkway, the Smokies, and many others. Some of them I have never visited before; some I have, a long time ago - but sometimes it takes

seeing it through another person's eyes to see it again for the first time. Most of the people in my group are what we mountain people call "transplants," many from up north or from Florida - I may be the only native mountaineer in the bunch, so they bring their own unique view to this area and open my eyes out of my complacency and familiarity. So I am becoming reacquainted with my own beautiful country.

It's been pretty good for my self-esteem too. It has helped me come out of the protective shell I had built up around me to buffer some stressful events in my life, at a time when I was going through a lot of changes over the last year or two - to

begin opening up and sharing with others through our mutual love and appreciation of Nature.

It has been a great experience for me personally to step outside of my comfort zone a little bit to take the initiative to reach out to people I don't know and to organize these meetings, and to see the pleasure that many of them have expressed to me to find a group like this, a group of like-minded people who call themselves pantheists. I feel like I'm making a difference and that people are appreciating what I'm doing. Maybe it's a little selfish - but it's a great feeling!

**Meetup:** <http://pantheist.meetup.com/about/>

## *Two more ways to start a group going*

by Paul Harrison

### **Use the WPM's email lists**

When I lived in the United Kingdom I used the WPM's local list (wpmukeire) to coordinate meetings with people on the list. It was basically just a matter of agreeing where and when to meet. People proved willing to travel quite considerable distances of up to several hundred miles - we had people from the North of England, from Northern Ireland, and occasionally from Rome. We visited Stonehenge and the stone circles at Avebury, and the teeming seabird cliffs at Bempton in Yorkshire. More often we met on Hampstead Heath, the largest park in London, which has many different natural woodland, grassland and water habitats. Usually we had a picnic in the woodland, near one or other of my venerable tree friends on the Heath. Such ceremony as we had was entirely for fun. We danced around a maple - facing outwards is most exhilarating because it's more risky and you can't see where you're going. We tested how many people could squash into a hollow beech. One midsummer (see photo) Tor brought yellow T-shirts for everyone and declaimed poetry in a bright yellow wig. Those who did not feel moved did not join in but looked on benignly.



*UK group on Hampstead Heath at midsummer*

### **Create a 'small group ministry' in a UU congregation**

This is a relatively easy method if there is a congregation near you. When I moved to the Santa Monica Mountains in the USA in June 2002, I had only one friend here. I joined the local Unitarian Universalist congregation. I had been told it was a good place to make open-minded friends - atheists, humanists, pantheists and very liberal Christians - and so it proved. This UU congregation has many small groups, so after a few months I formed a Pantheist/Nature Reverence group. I started with a course based on my book *Elements of Pantheism* - which anyone could use as a workbook, doing one chapter or section each meeting. Then we shifted over to less formal meetings. As introduction we play natural sounds such as birdsong, frog choruses or running creeks. We often bring rocks, tree seeds, or other found objects, pass them around and place them in the center of our table. We share the nature experiences we have had since our last meeting. We discuss science stories. Sometimes we share meditation to words about some aspect of nature. Every other meeting we devote to green matters - how to live more sustainably, in practical detail. We have had several nature trips up the California coast, to see the overwintering monarchs in a eucalyptus grove in Goleta, and to see elephant seals breeding at their beach at Piedras Negras, near Hearst Castle. We keep the literature table stocked with WPM leaflets and leaflets about the local group. Occasionally we lead a service about pantheism, nature or the environment.

Local lists:

[www.pantheism.net/localgroups.htm](http://www.pantheism.net/localgroups.htm)

UU resources:

[www.pantheism.net/uu/uupantheists.htm](http://www.pantheism.net/uu/uupantheists.htm)

*Pantheist service at Conejo Valley UU fellowship*



# The Broadening Network

**G**rowing a spiritual movement is a long process of outreach. Messages and interests are carried by many different individuals, in many different directions, through many different outlets, and in many different social groups. Earlier this year we added two new facilities to our broad range.

We created a World Pantheism map at Frappr - a service that integrates Google Maps with Myspace-style social networking. People can place a tag on a world map to show where they live, and add a photo and a quote. The map can be used to find pantheists near you - messages can be sent to other users, through the Frappr system. It has an array of services such as a personal profile, photo albums, friends list, blog, guestbook, and even chat. By October we had nearly 300 people. One of the nicest and most useful aspects is to put a human face to the word pantheist - we seem to be a diverse and lively-looking bunch of people! You can add yourself to our Frappr map at <http://www.frappr.com/worldpantheism>

In the same month Nikki Lucchesi developed a profile for us at Myspace, where we now have 182 "friends." Add yourself as a friend of the WPM at <http://www.myspace.com/thewpm>. We also have two discussion groups there: World Pantheism, Secular Humanism and Positive Atheism (<http://groups.myspace.com/worldpantheism>) with 270 members and Pantheism (<http://groups.myspace.com/pantheism>) with 128 members. If it sometimes seems that we have too many initiatives and locations going at once, it's worth bearing several things in mind. It's best to view these various locations as places where you can hang out. Each of them has a different setting and emphasis. You can hang out at one, several, or all, whatever suits you. This approach also creates smaller and therefore less impersonal groups.

## Frappr comments

Love the earth and she will love us back *Dave D Mt Airy, MD*

Dwell among the beauties and mysteries of life.  
*Kim Hayes, Atlanta*

We'll have peace when we realize that we are all part of the same thing.  
*Esteban, FL*

Animals make us better people. *Sabrina Paris New Milford NJ*

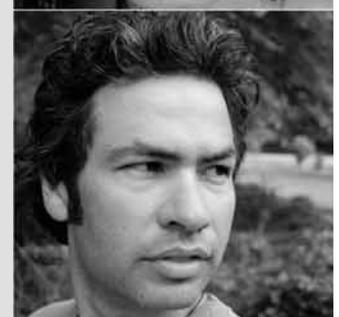
We are all one in the universe! *Mago, Netherlands*

Imagine no religion... *Mildred Vasquez, NY*

Energy is our "GOD " *Sugavanam, India*

The world is a beautiful place. Smile! *Andie, CA*

It is through nature that our souls become cleansed!  
*Jesse Bartlett, NH*



# World Pantheist Movement Accounts 2004 and 2005

Here are our accounts for the fiscal years 2004 and 2005. Our income grew healthily by 40 per cent between the two years. This was based on a similar growth in our membership (from an average 288 for the months of 2004, to 401 for 2005), which in turn was brought about mainly through our decision to use search marketing – at first with Google only, then adding in Yahoo and MSN. We also set up for credit card payments late in 2004, which increased the number of people joining especially from outside the USA.

The main development on the expenses front was the substantial increase in advertising. The great majority of this is in the form of search marketing, which is extremely well targeted at people looking for our kind of material (based on individual words and phrases). Our ads take the form of very short (haiku-length) items describing key ideas, values or slogans, linking to our site.

The advertising serves two key elements of our goals: one is to expand the number of members and friends, which will make it easier to create local groups in more locations. The other is to spread awareness of naturalistic pantheism and of a few of its central concepts.

Printing of the magazine and (in 2004) of our color leaflets continues to be a major expense. Our conference activities have so far related mostly to

the Unitarian Universalist Association's General Assembly, since one of our strategies is to encourage groups inside UU congregations. In 2004, when the GA was at Long Beach California, we had a stall and the charge for stall furniture was rather high. In 2005 it was in Fort Worth Texas, when Paul Harrison gave two well-attended lectures for which we also needed the projector. The scanner is

needed to generate royalty-free images for Pan magazine.

Our reserve balances currently represent about 18 month's income. This may seem rather high as a proportion, but in absolute terms it is a prudent and modest insurance against unforeseen events. It also allows us to respond rapidly to new opportunities.

2004		2005	
<b>INCOME</b>		<b>INCOME</b>	
<b>Membership Dues</b>		<b>Membership Dues:</b>	
Checks, cash	\$3,872.00	Credit Card memberships	\$5,852.00
PayPal - Payment Received	\$5,482.64	Check memberships	\$4,593.00
		PayPal memberships	\$2,731.00
	<b>subtotal</b>	<b>subtotal</b>	<b>\$13,176.00</b>
<b>Miscellaneous Income</b>		<b>Miscellaneous Income</b>	
Other Inc	\$60.00	PayPal Money Market Dividend	\$42.79
Interest Inc	\$60.17	Interest Inc	\$73.95
Uncategorized Income	\$19.28		
	<b>subtotal</b>	<b>subtotal</b>	<b>\$116.74</b>
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$9,494.09</b>	<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$13,292.74</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		<b>EXPENSES</b>	
<b>Bank/CC/PayPal fees</b>		<b>Bank/CC/PayPal fees</b>	
PayPal Fees	\$219.69	PayPal Fees	\$112.53
Bank Charge	\$20.80	Bank Charge	\$19.63
CC processing charge & setup	\$512.02	CC processing charge	\$300.12
<b>Advertising/Affiliations</b>		<b>Advertising/Affiliations</b>	
Advertising	\$1,756.50	Advertising	\$5,012.20
Affiliations	\$100.00	Affiliations	\$205.00
<b>Printing/Postage</b>		<b>Printing/Postage</b>	
Postage and shipping	\$535.70	Postage and shipping	\$681.20
Printing Costs	\$4,205.97	Printing Costs	\$3,096.23
<b>Conference expenses [UUA]</b>		<b>Conference expenses [UUA]</b>	
Equipment Rentals	\$675.00	Travel	\$235.39
		Conference fees	\$379.93
		Equipment Rentals	\$120.00
<b>Other expenses</b>		<b>Other expenses</b>	
Supplies/Misc	\$350.50	Supplies/Misc	\$219.34
Web hosting	\$182.00	Web hosting	\$422.50
		Equipment	\$944.64
		Projector for talks	[\$674.04]
		Scanner	[\$270.60]
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$8,558.18</b>	<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$11,748.71</b>
<b>TOTAL INCOME - EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$935.91</b>	<b>TOTAL INCOME - EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$1,544.03</b>
<b>Account balances as of 31 dec 2004</b>		<b>Account balances as of 31 dec 2005</b>	
Citibank Checking	\$16,488.96	Citibank Checking	\$18,361.64
Bank of America checking	\$1,671.95	Bank of America checking	\$1,503.95
PayPal	\$1,985.42	PayPal	\$1,824.77
<b>TOTAL ACCOUNTS</b>	<b>\$20,146.33</b>	<b>TOTAL ACCOUNTS</b>	<b>\$21,690.36</b>

# Now you can marry your friends and relatives

## WPM offers two tiers of celebrant status to members

Since we opened for membership in late 1999, it has always been our ultimate goal to organize a network of celebrants, able to perform weddings and funerals in pantheistic or nature-oriented style, so pantheists would not need to turn to traditional religions for their most important life events..

There are various models we studied while deciding how to approach this. At one extreme lie the Universal Life Church and Spiritual Humanism - a newcomer following the ULC model. These offer ordination free for anyone who applies - regardless

of their religious beliefs. Note that both these organizations make money out of selling clergy materials, some of them useful, some of them (many, in the case of the ULC) frivolous, such as parking placards, honorary doctorates, fancy titles, and certificates of sainthood.

At the other extreme, within the area of liberal religions is Unitarian Universalism, whose ministers must have a Master of Divinity degree including Christian scriptural analysis and church history. These requirements have worked to select UU ministers from the theistic end of the spectrum, so that Ministers are much more likely to be somewhat more theistic than the "average" for congregants.

There have been many discussions of what the WPM should do and it has taken us a long time for us to reach a consensus or compromise. Some people favored the free and easy route - though rarely to the full extent of the ULC. Others, on the other hand, wanted us to move towards the status of established religious/spiritual organizations, and proposed that candidates do an extended correspondence course before they qualify as celebrants. Discussion of the alternatives at times reached such an impasse that we had to take a prolonged timeout.

Recently the directors took up the issue again. We found that the same two camps still existed, so to break the impasse we created an online opinion survey and rated five different options. The leading option, with the greatest net support, was to offer all supporting members free ordination certification to perform weddings and funerals of friends and relatives - with a simple questionnaire. This approach ties in very much with our principles in clause 8 of the belief statement, which rules out any hierarchy of special privilege or sanctity: "Every individual has direct access through perception, emotion and meditation to ultimate reality, which is the Universe and Nature. There is no need for mediation by priests, gurus or revealed scriptures."

Three issues concerned us especially. The first was that the WPM should not be misrepresented - if people are going to claim to be WPM celebrants, then they should at least be WPM-oriented, and show some minimal sign



**If these are what you had in mind, please ask elsewhere. Above, the regalia of a Greek Orthodox bishop. Below, the hilarious Vatican fashion parade from Fellini's *Roma*. Right, the "Parking Placard" of the Universal Life Church**



## WPM Personnel News

### Same sex marriages

On principle the WPM opposes all forms of discrimination, so on principle we are in favor of same-sex marriages. Where people wish to celebrate such marriages symbolically or as a demonstration in favor of changing legislation to recognize such marriages, then we would support this in principle and encourage our celebrants to facilitate this. On the other hand same sex marriages performed where they are illegal are, ipso facto, not legal. So it's essential not to raise expectations beyond the realities, and for all parties to be aware of the legal situation where the ceremony will take place..

of commitment such as becoming a subscribing member. This is not the same as selling certification. The second was that people should not abuse the status of celebrant to gain any special privileges, since we do not believe in a privileged "clergy" that is any different from regular members or people in general. Finally and most importantly, celebrants should be responsible and sensitive, and should respect the wishes of the people getting married.

Even the "free and easy" party has always recognized that in the longer term we might develop a somewhat more demanding path, leading to the kind of certification that would allow someone to advertise publicly as a civil celebrant. In the meantime we decided that if a subscribing member already has a ministerial or a civil celebrant qualification, they would already have done the training involved in being reliable and respectful of people's wishes for their celebrations.

So now we have our two-track scheme:

- On request, subscribing members can get free certification to officiate at the weddings of friends and relatives. All they need to do is sign a statement that they will faithfully respect the wishes of participants, and represent WPM faithfully - or not use the WPM name at all.
- Members with suitable prior qualifications can get certification to marry anyone, and have the right to use our name in advertising, on signing a similar statement.

We will be putting up a web page with the questionnaire which you can fill in, and will announce when it is in place. After an application has been reviewed, we will issue a certificate of good standing.

Since legislation will vary a lot between countries and states/provinces, it will be your responsibility to find out the law that applies in the location where the ceremony is to take place.



We have two new directors.

**Sharon Dobrovich** has been a familiar face on the Community and Spirituality lists. Earlier this year she set up a thriving local Pantheist Meetup group in Western North Carolina, where 13 attended the last event, a hike on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Sharon has taken over the job of membership secretary from Gudrun.



**John Hagan** has been very ably running our WPM merchandise shop at Cafepress, where you can buy beautifully designed T-shirts, caps, many other clothing items for men, women and babies, posters, mugs and so on. John has two excellent new designs based on quotes from Frank Lloyd

Wright (I believe in God only I spell it N-A-T-U-R-E) and Mikhail Gorbachev (Nature is my God, trees are my temples and forests my cathedrals.) John is a retired businessman who is planning to set out with his wife on a long odyssey around the USA in a RV.

These appointments follow the resignation of former directors Beryl Mclachlan and Mike Dolph, to whom we offer good wishes and thanks.

The other directors at present are:

Paul Harrison, President  
 Tom Moore, Vice-President Americas  
 Tor Myrvang, Vice-President Europe  
 Hilary Caws-Elwitt, Secretary  
 Bruce Merkle, Treasurer  
 John Love-Jensen (Eljay)  
 Walt Mandell  
 Anthony van der Mude  
 Gudrun Schindler  
 Stuart Stell  
 David Wright



**Gudrun Schindler** recently resigned as Membership Secretary for health reasons. Gudrun has done the job flawlessly and smoothly for the past three years. We are forever grateful for her services and wish her the very best for a successful outcome.

These are the criteria we use when choosing directors:

1. Good sense, respectful of others, very mature handling of disagreement.
2. Agreement with the WPM belief statement and enthusiasm for WPM goals.

In addition one or more of the following:

1. A considerable level of active commitment shown through volunteer efforts.
2. A long history of wise posting.
3. Special skills we are in need of.



**Destruction leads to new creation. This is the Hubble's brand new image of the Antennae, two colliding galaxies which - after a long dance lasting hundreds of millions of years - will merge into a single elliptical galaxy. As the galaxies interact, billions of new stars are born, mostly in groups and clusters. Our own Milky Way will collide with the Andromeda galaxy in a few billion years. The photo was taken by the Advanced Camera for Surveys . © NASA**

## Membership: Join or Renew

The World Pantheist Movement depends on the generous support of its members to sustain, improve and expand its activities and services. If you would like to join or renew by check in US \$, please fill in the form below and mail check and form to us. Otherwise please renew at <http://members.pantheism.net/imdms/> or join at <http://www.pantheism.net/join.htm> Please tick as applicable if this is an address change and if you wish us to correct the database entry for you.

Name			
Address 1			
Address 2			
City			
State etc			
Zip code			
Country			
New?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Change it?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	I'll do it	<input type="checkbox"/>
Membership level:			
Basic (\$30)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Family (\$60)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low Income (\$12)	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Other amount	_____		

Please mail this form with your check (US \$ only) to:

World Pantheist Movement  
P.O. Box 103, Webster, NY 14580, USA

## Calendar & Almanac

### Special events

#### November

- 1 All Souls/Day of the Dead
- 16 International Day for Tolerance
- 21 World Television Day [Switch it Off]
- 24 Spinoza born [1632]
- 30 John Toland born [1670]

#### December

- 1 World AIDS Day
- 2 International Day for the Abolition of Slavery
- 3 International Day of Disabled Persons
- 10 Human Rights Day
- 25 Birth of Isaac Newton [1642]
- 29 International Day for Biological Diversity

#### January

- 11 International Laughter Day
- 16 Martin Luther King Jr. Day Religious Freedom Day
- 22 Surrender of Native lands by Chief Seattle

### Equinoxes & Solstices

#### Winter solstice

December 22 00:22

#### Spring Equinox

March 21 00:07

### Full Moons

November 5	12:58
December 4	00:25
January 3	13:57
February 2	05:45

All times Universal time = Greenwich Mean Time