

Military Pagan Network Inc

Point of Contact Handbook



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Section 1: General Information.

This publication was produced to consolidate all the available information on the volunteer position of Point of Contact. It expands on the duties outlined in the bylaws and acts as a guidebook on how to complete the duties and meet the expectations of the Board of Directors. This handbook does not replace the Membership Policy A-3 but explains it in greater detail.

Section 2: Why Points of Contact?

Shortly after the MPN was formed it became obvious that the collection of data for areas thousands of miles away was virtually impossible without local help. The position of Point of Contact was created to allow members of the Network to become more involved in the organizational activities and to assist in the collection of local data.

In 1998 it was determined that the local Point of Contact (POC) or POC Council would be more effective if the database was decentralized; allowing a POC to do whatever coordinating more effectively and efficiently at the local level than could be done at the National level. The decentralization also allows for a POC to take an active role when they wish. A POC is thus encouraged to initiate and foster new projects and activities as they can and Will.

Section 3: Expectations

Everyone has expectations, this area should make it clear to you who has what expectations and what you can do to meet them.

3.1 What Military Pagan Network Inc. expects

MPN has several expectations of you, here they are outlined and will be covered in more detail in section 4, "Duties of the Point of Contact".

- ◆ You are to function as a public contact for your area.
- ◆ Publish an address so that you can be reached, it does not have to be a street address.
- ◆ You are to take a proactive role in the organization.
- ◆ Work with other Points of Contact in your area to form a Council.
- ◆ Keep the National office posted by submitting quarterly reports in a timely manner.
- ◆ Maintain a database of stores/groups and events and have it available to the National office as well as the local military and civilian communities.
- ◆ Conduct yourself in a manner which reflects favorably on the Network.
- ◆ Encourage membership of the Network.

3.2 What the people who contact you expect

When someone contacts you for assistance they expect a reply in a reasonable amount of time. The Network does not function on “Pagan Standard Time”. They expect the information you provide to be accurate, factual and reliable, and if it is not then it reflects poorly on the Network and you.

The form and method in which information is passed is up to you. However; it should include any store and group listings, any events that are scheduled and basic directions on how to get to the stores. In regards to group information it is assumed by most people that the groups you send them too are not dangerous, it is not your job to screen these groups when adding them to your list, so make that clear.

3.3 What the local community expects

If you are active in the local community many will expect you to get involved in its internal politics. The approach that tends to be most useful is to be nice to everybody, not repeat unconfirmed rumors, be discrete and remain impartial whenever possible. If you have an ethical problem with a situation then do what is right and make the National office aware of the situation, so that we can prepare for damage control if it is necessary. MPN will support any decision you make so long as it is ethical, legal and does not go against the goals of the Network.

If you are a leader within your local community you need to be willing to promote groups outside of your own. This includes the Network as well as other circles, groves or sanctuaries in your area. We do not need people who want to be a Point of Contact for the Network in order to gain followers or further a personal agenda.

Section 4: Duties of the Point of Contact

The duties of the Point of Contact seem daunting to some and easy to others. Being that this is a volunteer position we have attempted to make it a job that is fulfilling but not time-consuming.

The most important function you have is maintaining your database of stores, groups and events. Without this database your other duties fail and your job as POC is fruitless for you as well as those you are trying to help. How you maintain the database is up to you but it should be easily managed so as to not take up a lot of time. I suggest using a computer so that you can print it out when you are contacted by someone asking for local information.

You are also the local contact person for any other military Pagans that are in, or are moving into your area. Your duty is to provide them with the information you have in your database as well as directions to the stores. You are not expected to drive them to any of the stores or events, to do so is on your own accord and is not a function of the Network. As part of this function your name and address are published in the Directory and your e-mail is on the website, your phone number will never be given out without the express permission of you. If someone in your local area contacts the National office

asking for information they will automatically be referred to you by e-mail or regular mail.

As a Point of Contact you have a responsibility to keep the National office informed of your activities. To facilitate this communication process you are to send a report to the National office on or around each Solstice and Equinox. The report need only have that information which you have not previously provided or any information that has changed. It should also contain updated information on any projects with which you are involved and some of the things you have been doing with the local community. If you feel you have nothing to report then you may simply send an e-mail or letter to the Coordinator stating such. You are not expected to have something new and interesting every three months.

An often forgotten duty of the Point of Contact is to help the Network increase its ability to do its job. By this we mean collect the required data from the military so that we can educate people on the rights that they have when dealing with religion, harassment and discrimination. We also need the data required to teach people how to become Lay Leaders or Denominational Service Leaders for the Pagans located on the base they represent. To meet these goals we need copies of unclassified regulations and forms. For a complete list of what we have see the website or ask the National office, if you are not sure then send in a copy. This includes local and regional policy as well as service wide regulations.

Your final duty as a Point of Contacts is to increase membership. Due to several changes within the organization over the years, membership as gone from twenty to a hundred to eighty to forty-five. The transient nature of those whom we support is at fault to some degree but the lack of motivation has kept our numbers down. One side effect of being the only military Pagan organization is that we have the unique duty of keeping track of how many Pagans are serving in the military. The only effective way to keep track is to have as many members as possible as those who are not and never have been members can not be counted. This same problem occurred in the early years of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) community until they all realized that the only way to be effective is to let the world know there numbers. We need to do the same thing, be counted. Encourage all military Pagans that you know to join the Network just to be counted, they can be a General Member and refuse to be listed in any Network publication, no one will ever know they are a member unless they say. For \$5.00 a year, there is no reason why we can't have the entire military Pagan population as part of our organization.

Section 5: Finding the information

We do not have all the information for all the possible areas in which you can find yourself. Nor do we have all the regulations we require to meet the needs of the military Pagan community. This section covers the collection of data in areas that we do not have any information as well as gathering the regulations and forms that we do not yet have.

If you are in an area where the Network has not previously had a Point of Contact you the auspicious duty of putting together the initial database of the area. This is a daunting task for those who have not attempted to ever contact the local Pagans before but it is as easy as a few phone calls and or e-mails.

Begin with the local phone book looking under bookstores for categories such as New Age, alternative and even gay, lesbian or bisexual, these stores tend to cater to the local Pagans as well as there respective communities or may have contacts for you to utilize. If the bookstores have nothing to offer, look for a local free newspaper that lists local events and nightclubs and bars. If none of the above leads you to at least one local Pagan that can help you get established, your next best bet is follow the same procedure in the nearest large city.

The collecting of regulations will require some footwork on your part and may not be a task that you wish to take on. The best source of regulations for the Network is those people who have already been in contact with the Chaplains office and have already done some of the work independently. Find out what the Network needs in the way of forms, regulations and policy and if you have them available, send a copy to the National office.

If you are up to the task of collecting the information yourself then your two main contacts will be the Chaplains office and the publications library, both will have what you are looking for. The publications library will allow you to photocopy the documents that are wish but they do not usually have the forms available. All the forms that the Network would be interested in having are available at the Chaplains office. The problem is we do not even know the names or numbers of the materials that we would be interested in obtaining, so the search for those materials is difficult at best.

Section 6: Harassment and Discrimination

Points of Contact may find themselves in a situation where someone in the local area is having problems at work and is making claims of being harassed or discriminated against. These situations, though rare, are serious and need to be handled carefully as to prevent the situation from getting worse and dragging the Network into a frivolous suit.

When you are approached by a military Pagan who is allegedly being harassed or facing discrimination make it clear to them that the Network is not a legal service but we will help and support them by guiding them on how to handle the situation themselves. Assume that the individual is really in the situation and that things are as bad as they say, this is the trust earning factor. The next step is to get the complete story.

The full story must include several key elements for it to be useful to the Network in determining the next course of action. The story must include the names and ranks of all persons involved, the dates and times of all occurrences, if possible, what the individual has already attempted and detailed narratives of the incidents.

The final key is, will the person follow through. Try and determine if the individual has the drive and strength to complete the task, even to the point of an Inspector General investigation.

Once you have all this material in hand, immediately forward it to the Director of Harassment Affairs for review and investigation. Let the individual know that you passed the packet onto the appropriate office and that they will be contacted via e-mail or phone call. Your job at this point is to be the eyes and ears of the DHA and support the alleged victim.

Section 7: Reporting Procedures.

In an effort to make reporting efficient and the National office developed this format for filing your quarterly reports.

<name>
Point of Contact-Military Pagan Network
Quarterly Report: <quarter, year>
<location>

Bases Nearby:

New Groups/stores/BBS:

Assistance/service:

Additional information:

What I am up to:

Section 8: Basic Religious Rights in the Armed Forces (DoD)

As a POC, you may be asked questions concerning religious rights and regulations. Try to familiarize yourself with the regulations of your particular branch of service if possible. Remember though, you are not responsible for fixing a military member's problems yourself. You are simply there to help point them in the right direction.

The first place to start is with DoD Directive 1300.17 which states: "A basic principle of our nation is free exercise of religion. The Department of Defense places a high value on the rights of members of the Armed Forces to observe the tenets of their respective religions. It is DoD policy that requests for accommodation of religious practices should be approved by commanders when accommodation will not have an adverse impact on

military readiness, unit cohesion, standards or discipline." Later it goes on to say " The Military Departments should include relevant materials on religious traditions, practices, and policies in the curricula for command, judge advocate, chaplain and similar courses and orientations."

The second place to start is Equal Opportunity. Your local Equal Opportunity office can assist you with information concerning your branch of service. For instance, U.S. Army Equal Opportunity policy, AR 600-20, states; "The policy of the U.S. Army is to provide equal opportunity and treatment for soldiers and their families without regard to race, color, religion, gender, or national origin and to provide an environment free of sexual harassment. This policy- (1) Applies both on and off post. (2) Extends to soldiers and their families. (3) Applies to soldiers' working, living, and recreational environments including both on- and off-post housing."

Each service has its own regulations governing religious practices and how they can be exercised. Military members and their families have the right to believe as they so choose, but how they practice their religion privately in government quarters, or publicly in a chapel or other government building, is up to the rules and regulations of each branch of service. In addition to the regulations of an individual branch of service, there may be local or area supplements as well. Many regulations can be viewed at the Military Pagan Network website, or by visiting your local military library.

In regards to what religions are recognized by the military, there is nothing. There is no such thing as a DoD list of recognized religions because the DoD does not recognize religions, they authorize Ecclesiastical Endorsing Agencies which is not the same. The chaplains handbook that people cite as "official recognition" is nothing of the sort. The *Religious Requirements and Practices of Certain Selected Groups: A Handbook for Chaplains* is just a handbook of various world religions so that Chaplains have some idea as to what to expect from people who follow one of them. Remember this if a Chaplain ever mentions that you need to be part of a religion that is on the "official DoD list."

Section 9: Basic Religious Rights in other services (DoT, DoC, DHHS)

As a POC you are also expected to know about the religious accommodation regulations of the three non DoD services, Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, Coast Guard and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration Corps. At this time the only regulation that the Network has been able to obtain is COMDTINST M1730.4B Religious Ministries Within the Coast Guard.

Section 10: Lay Chaplaincy for Pagans

For Denominational Service Leaders and Lay Leaders there are special regulations and forms for putting in an application. The rules that govern the application process and requirements vary among the services so you will have to check regulations to be sure. The basic information is the same, ordained by a church recognized by the IRS as

501(c)3 or listed as an Ecclesiastical Endorsing Agent by the DoD. If the church is not part of the DoD database then you will have to provide the church's information as part of your application. Three churches that have already been used as Agents without being an Ecclesiastical Endorsing Agency are The Sacred Well Congregation of Texas, the Temple of Isis and the Aquarian Tabernacle Church.

Section 11: Correspondence as a representative of the Network

These guidelines for correspondence are for use while acting as a representative of the Network. Failure to follow these guidelines may result in the embarrassment of the Network and yourself, as well as removal as a POC.

11.1 Initial Contact

When initiating a dialogue with other organizations always introduce yourself and the Network. This provides a background that the recipient can check. The tone of the letter should be professional as opposed to familiar. It is possible to be friendly without being too familiar.

The paragraph following your introduction should be the introduction to the purpose of your letter. The following paragraphs should support the initial purpose of the letter, without going into great detail. As the discourse continues you can elaborate on the points made in the initial letter.

The final paragraph should reiterate your purpose in writing as well as remind the reader of the organization you are representing.

11.2 Replying to contacts

When someone has contacted you from another organization your reply should be written with the same format as if you initiated the dialogue. Maintain a professional tone even if the original letter was hostile. This will set the tone for future letters and hopefully diffuse any further hostility.

11.3 After first contact

If the organization with which you are corresponding is not a government agency and is "Pagan friendly" it is permissible and expected for the tone of the letters to be friendly and even familiar. When dealing with hostile organizations or government agencies your tone should always be professional even in the face of open hostility.

11.4 Closing

When closing a dialogue you should always thank the other person for the time they spent replying to your inquiries. This "closure" actually creates an open ended dialogue and allows for future friendly discourse.

If the dialogue has been with a hostile organization then you should close the conversation by including verbiage that makes it clear that the organization should not make contact with you again, but should contact the National office.

11.5 Don'ts

We mention being “professional”, “friendly” and “familiar” but these are just the “tone” of the letters. These terms do not state what you should and should not do in a letter to another organization. In an effort to clarify, here is a list of things you should never do when sending a letter to another organization while acting as a representative of the Network.

Don't: Give personal life information. This makes the reader uncomfortable and is usually not pertinent to the purpose of the letter. This DON'T should be adhered to even in friendly letters.

Don't: Insult the reader. This includes things like, calling them an idiot or telling them to seek help for some “obvious” mental instability

Don't: Attempt to explain the recipient's religion to them. It is not the place of the Network to tell a person of another faith what they should be doing as a Christian, Muslim, Buddhist etc.

11.6 Examples of what not to do

Finally, here are a few examples of actual e-mails sent to hostile organizations or people by representatives of a Neopagan religious rights organization. The names have been removed to insure the privacy of the author and organization. All misspellings and poor are part of the original e-mails.

Example 1:

May I suggest a therapist, or at least some therapeutic drugs and some time away from all of your problems. I don't think your mode of thinking is healthy, to you or anyone around you.. Please seek help.

Example 2:

I have a question for you. You have on your webpage that, and I quote, "Ideas frequently associated with the New Age movement include anthroposophical teachings, inner transformation, reincarnation, extraterrestrial life, biofeedback, chanting, alchemy, yoga, transpersonal psychology, shamanism, martial arts, the occult, astrology, psychic healing, extrasensory perception, divination, astral travel, acupuncture, massage, tarot, Zen, mythology, and visualization." So these things are evil? Not Christian, so there for....evil? What if a psychic helps a family find the murdered that strangled and burned up their beautiful 23 year old daughter? Is that evil? What if acupuncture saves a cancer patient's life? Is that evil? What if martial arts helps a woman escape from a rapist? Is that evil? And what if inner transformation helps someone realize that

they are really a Christian and wish to come back to Jesus?
Is that evil?

The reason I ask you these things is because they are true life stories, the psychic helped my grandparents find the murderer of my Aunt. *Bless her soul* And my grandparents are good Christian people. If it had not been for the martial arts I had taken I very well could have been raped 3 years ago. I had to literally fight for my life. And my father (a non-Christian his entire life) went to a class on inner transformation and realized that Jesus was his way. AGAIN I ask you...is that evil?

Section 12: Advertisement

Some military papers have a free advertisement policy, while others charge a nominal fee. While the Network can not reimburse for advertisements at this time feel free to use one of the given examples or create your own based on what has been given. The first example is the largest and most expensive version, the following two are usually fairly inexpensive in the smaller papers and magazines.

Military Pagan Network Inc.: Serving the networking needs of the military Pagan community. We support those Neopagans that feel that they are being harassed and provide information to military agencies regarding various Neopagan practices. We also provide military agencies with suggested additions and modifications to regulations and policies to include and take into consideration Neopagan religions and practices. For more information stop by <http://www.milpagan.org/> or write to us at MPN, PO Box 253, Ellicott City, MD 21041.

Military Pagans: If you think you're the only Pagan in your area contact the Military Pagan Network Inc. We have a database of stores and people in your area. For more information stop by <http://www.milpagan.org/> or write to us at MPN, PO Box 253, Ellicott City, MD 21041.

Military Pagan Network Inc.: Serving the networking needs of the military Pagan community. For more information stop by <http://www.milpagan.org/> or write to us at MPN, PO Box 253, Ellicott City, MD 21041.

Section 13: Approaching the Chaplain (and other officials)

Some people may wonder why there need to be guidelines for meeting military Chaplains. What people forget is that Chaplains are regular people, susceptible to prejudices, likes, dislikes and other character traits, just like everyone else on this Earth. Chaplains also have their own agendas; they are employed by the military and their respective churches. In a sense, they serve two masters, neither of which is necessarily sympathetic to Pagans as a religious minority and a frequently misunderstood culture.

This section is meant to help you function as a Point of Contact for the Network in a potentially hostile environment. We must communicate with military Chaplains to dispel misconceptions of our culture and to make sure religious discrimination is not an issue in the lives of military Pagans.

When making a request in the name of an organization make sure you understand the mission and goals. Do not try and function as a representative of the Network if what you are seeking does not full fill a goal or mission of the organization. If you have any questions ask the Coordinator to be sure.

Plan ahead for meetings with Chaplains and other military officials. First impressions will make or break your future relationship with the official. If you come across as disorganized or flaky your job will become harder than it has to be. In order to prevent disaster from occurring the following things should be considered before the meeting takes place: clothing and personal appearance, subject matter, presentation, and the regulations and local policies that will effect how the meeting is handled.

Obviously you should bathe, brush your teeth, comb your hair and try to avoid having dirt under your nails or strong smells emanating from your body. You should always wear civilian clothes for these kinds of meetings, it is against the law to represent a civilian organization while in uniform. Your clothes should be casual and clean and wrinkle and hole free. Do not wear t-shirts or buttons with conversational insignias or sayings as these will detract from your appearance and in the instance of a button like "My Goddess gave birth to your God", it may be offensive. These all sound like common sense but we can not assume that everyone has common sense.

When you go into the office know what you plan to accomplish. If you appear unsure about your goal the Chaplain will not take you seriously and you can not afford that if you plant to work with them on a regular basis. You should also remember that Chaplains are very busy and we should not waste their time by not being prepared. There are four main reasons you are approaching any military official: religious discrimination, networking, places to worship or dispelling misconceptions.

We have already covered the method for handling religious harassment and discrimination so lets look at networking. There have been many instances where a new

person to the area has approached the Chaplain looking for other Pagans. In most cases the Chaplain does not know any Pagans and may not know what being a Pagan is all about. We can prevent this by letting the Chaplains office know who we are and educate them on Neopagan religions.

Some people may wish to approach the Chaplain to seek a place of worship. On most military bases there are no groves or circles or regular places for Pagans to meet. As military members and dependants you are entitled to use Chapel facilities. There are instanced where the Chaplain has refused but these should be handled on a case by case basis.

The last major reason to visit the Chaplain is to dispel misconceptions. Many Chaplains know little to nothing about Neopaganism. If they anything it is mostly what they see on television or read in sensationalist articles. If there are problems with “occult crime” in your area this kind of dispensing of information may be especially necessary.

Now that you know what you want to talk about you have to have a nice presentation. Your attitude and speaking ability are very important. You must be polite but firm and most of all professional. Anything you say reflects on the Network.

Do not carry a chip on your shoulder, a bad attitude will not win you friends, allies or sympathizers. If you make the Chaplain mad they can make things very difficult to get anything done. They have the ability to bury you in red tape.

Do not claim, announce or admit to psychic or magical abilities. Although these phenomena may reflect you belief system, these claims can put a strain on your credibility due to the mainstream view and religious belief of the Chaplain.

Do not use controversial labels for yourself, your group or your beliefs. In particular Witch, Magician, or psychic. These words have certain effects on the minds of society at large and none of them are positive. While there is much controversy over the reclaiming of such words the Chaplains office is not the time nor the place for such encounters. Try more politically correct words like “Wiccan”, “Shamanism”, “nature worship” or “Earth centered spirituality.”

Be prepared for strange questions, especially inquiries concerning sex, rituals, and animal sacrifice. Some of these are sensitive subjects and sometimes it is hard to tell if the Chaplain is just being curious or if he actually believes there is something amiss with you or the Network that you represent. Try to be polite and if the question(s) is offensive or just inappropriate, let him know.

Do not go to an official with only a problem. Always have suggestions of a possible solution to any problems to present. If you always complain or make difficult requests, he may begin to consider you a whiner and will probably refuse your requests and ignore your problems. When you go to the Chaplain or any official with a possible solution, you

give them something to work with and makes him look good to his superiors which may make your presence less stressful.

These are just the basic guidelines but they should be taken into consideration. You are strongly encouraged to follow these guidelines until you have established a rapport with the Chaplain, then you can move into more controversial areas of discourse. These guidelines are useful when approaching other military and government agencies.

Section 14: Other duties that a Point of Contact may do

One of the things we do as an organization is provide military and government agencies with information regarding various Neopagan practices and suggest additions or modifications to regulations and policies to include and take into consideration Neopagan religions and practices. As a Point of Contact you can take the initiative to approach any one of the many agencies that may need our assistance and do what you can to educate. Some of the agencies include the Chaplains office, Legal, Social Actions, the Equal Employment Office, mental health and substance abuse.

There are a couple of positions that you may volunteer to fill. Some of the duties sound like what a Point of Contact may do but in these positions those duties take precedent over the Point of Contact duties. Both positions are appointed by the Board of Directors and do not have a limited time to serve.

Director of Harassment Affairs: The lead agent in the handling of harassment and discrimination cases within the military. The DHA will receive any complaint and investigate to determine if an actual case of harassment or discrimination exists. With the help of the appropriate Service Advisor, the DHA shall assist the plaintiff in filing any grievances or in the seeking of legal counsel.

Service Advisor: This position requires the member to research the regulations of the service which they represent. The Service Advisor is expected to have a complete understanding of the procedures for filing grievances in the service they represent. They are also expected to supply the Network with the regulations that govern religious accommodation, grievance procedures. The SA acts as a procedural guide for the Director of Harassment Affairs.

Section 15: Close

In closing, the Network gives thanks for your work. Your active role in the Network is vital to its operation and influence. The Network hopes that this handbook has fulfilled its purpose and will be of good use. From many paths and all branches of the Uniformed Services, the POC makes a difference. You aid and defend your country and way of life in more ways than one.

Thank you.