

From the Lady Liberty League: So You Think Your Religious Rights are Being Violated, What's Next?

by Minerva Thalia
Lady Liberty League Case Manager



Lady Liberty League

*The following article
is offered as a general
discussion of religious
discrimination and
how you can obtain
assistance from the Lady
Liberty League.*

In the United States, our religious civil liberties are guaranteed by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. Specifically:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

You may well ask what that means to you. In general terms, it means that no one may interfere with the practice of your faith or may discriminate with you for faith-based reasons.

What is Discrimination?

Discrimination can take many forms. The consensus is that religious discrimination involves treating a person unfavorably because of their religious beliefs. The law protects people who belong to well-known organized religions (i.e., Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism) and those who have sincerely-held religious, ethical or moral beliefs.

Religious discrimination can also involve treating someone differently because that person is associated with (dating, married to or lodging with) an individual of a particular religion or because of his or her connection with a religious organization or group.

Discrimination can happen in a variety of places and situations. It is against the law to discriminate against a current or potential employee because of their faith. Aspects of employment that are protected include hiring, firing, pay, job assignments, promotions, layoff, training, fringe benefits, and any other term or condition of employment.

It is illegal to harass someone because of their religion. Harassment can include, but is not limited to, offensive remarks about a person's religious beliefs or practices. The law doesn't prohibit teasing, offhand comments, or isolated incidents that aren't very serious. However, bullying and harassment when it is so frequent or severe that it creates a hostile or offensive environment are illegal.

Additionally, a landlord may not deny a lease based upon the faith of the applicant. It is, likewise, illegal to berate a student because their faith may be different than that of the instructor. The potential for discrimination is as varied as the many ways in which we might practice our Paganism.

What to Do When You Think You've Been the Victim of Religious Discrimination?

There is a variety of actions that you can take if you feel you've been the victim of religious discrimination. You can determine whether there is an administrative process (through a governmental structure such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) or fair housing offices. You might choose to find an attorney and work through the court systems. Alternatively, you might reach out to the Lady Liberty League (LLL). We will be addressing LLL through the rest of this article.

Founded in 1985 by Selena Fox and others, Lady Liberty League (LLL) is the religious freedom and civil rights support organization sponsored by Circle Sanctuary. It is an international Wiccan church and Pagan resource center headquartered in Wisconsin. LLL provides information and networking assistance to individuals and organizations concerned with religious freedom issues pertaining to Wiccan ways, Paganism, and other forms of Nature religions.

Volunteers of many and varied experience come together to deal with the religious discrimination issues brought to LLL. An important aspect of LLL is that everyone involved is a volunteer. LLL members include specialists in a various focus areas, including public relations, harassment situations, employment issues, child custody issues, military affairs, law enforcement relations, legal affairs, interfaith relations, scholars support, and many others.

How Do You Contact LLL? (And Then What Happens?)

So, you think you are the victim of religious discrimination and you don't know where to turn. You might want to reach out to Lady Liberty League for help and advice. The best way to reach LLL is to complete the "Help Request Form" on the LLL page of the Circle Sanctuary website: www.circlesanctuary.org/LLLhelp. Be sure to fill out all the information as clearly and fully as possible. Although there are other ways to contact LLL (Facebook, Twitter, telephone and mail) the best way to reach our volunteers is to complete the form. When you submit the completed form, it is sent directly to the LLL Case Manager. This is the quickest manner to have your situation reviewed.

Upon receipt, the case manager will review your situation and assess LLL's ability to assist you. This is why it is very important to be clear and concise in your information. The case manager may then contact you for more information. Be sure to provide contact information in your form. Contact may be email or by phone.

Once the case manager has a clear understanding of your situation, they will take your information to the LLL team in order to determine what, if anything, LLL can do to assist you. Assistance can take many forms; *networking*, *education* and *support* are the principle forms of aid LLL provides.

For example, yours might be a case in which *education* is what's required to rectify the situation - the alleged discriminator may not understand Paganism and learning more about it can help them understand and change their behavior.

LLL assistance may take the form of *networking*, such as when the discrimination may be a case of lack of awareness. In this instance, LLL can get the word out locally, regionally, nationally or internationally. This kind of action can shed light on the situation and change behavior. LLL might also be able to direct you to other organizations for assistance. In these cases, LLL may assist you in finding someone in your region who is better equipped to assist you in your situation.

There is also the possibility that there is no assistance that LLL can provide. This could be because yours is an upcoming or ongoing court case; in which instance, your attorney will handle the situation. *LLL does not provide legal advice and does not have the funds to pay for attorneys.* However, if needed, LLL can provide information about Paganism to your attorney, and this might aid them in giving better representation. In other

instances, yours might be a situation where there is an administrative route to recovery. For example, if yours is a situation of employment discrimination then you must follow the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) process.

Even if there is no active action that LLL can take, we may provide *support* during this time. That support might come in the form of energy and prayers or of someone to talk with. Just in knowing that there are people out there who understand what's happening can help diminish the burden of the situation.

The Lady Liberty League will do all that we can to come to the aid of those Pagans who suffer from religious discrimination. You can find more information about LLL's mission and our activities on our web page: www.circlesanctuary.org/liberty. You will also find news, case updates and summaries of other situations published quarterly in the Lady Liberty League Report, which is a regular section of *CIRCLE Magazine*.

To send news of cases and concerns; to request help; to volunteer legal, counselling, or other services; and/or for other information, contact Lady Liberty League via our online form at www.circlesanctuary.org/LLLHelp or email liberty@circlesanctuary.org. LLL can also be reached at:

**Lady Liberty League, c/o Circle Sanctuary,
PO Box 9, Barneveld, WI 53507, USA**

or by phone at (608) 924-2216.

Watch this space in future issues of *CIRCLE Magazine*, there will be more information about volunteering with LLL.

For more information about the Lady Liberty League visit: www.circlesanctuary.org/liberty

General Advice:

There are a few basic things that you can do in any situation where you feel that you've been or are being discriminated against. These times can be scary and infuriating but if you can manage these things, providing assistance will be easier.

- **Be sure to document what has happened or is happening.** Answer the basic questions: who, what, where, when, why and how. Details help only if they are relevant details. If there have been a series of encounters, create an easy-to-read chronological log.
- **Try to be objective.** These situations can be upsetting; being objective and clear-headed, if possible, can help LLL help you better.
- If you aren't sure if you need help, you can **reach out to Lady Liberty League for guidance or assistance.** LLL can help you evaluate the situation.
- **Do your best to determine if the reason for the discrimination is due to your faith.** Is this a case of religious discrimination or is it a case of something else and the religious aspect just got threaded into the situation? If you aren't sure, report it. The discrimination can be subtle and talking with someone might help.
- **Contact LLL in a timely manner, if possible!** Contact the night before an event where you might be harassed makes it hard for LLL to provide adequate assistance.

