



Circle Sanctuary

Annual Report: Samhain 2014 - 2015



www.circlesanctuary.org

A Letter from Selena Fox



For over forty years now I have watched this beautiful community grow and change, and I have marveled at the power of what we can do together.

Dear Friends,

Together we are powerful. As I stood in Salt Lake City recently at the Parliament of the World's Religions, joining hands and hearts with people of so many differing religions from so many countries around the world, I was struck by the grace and power around me. It reminded me very much of the same grace and power that I saw this year at Pagan Spirit Gathering, when I saw hundreds of people working together to help one another stay safe from the rising floodwaters. It is a power I also feel at our monthly Full Moon Circles at Circle Sanctuary, where we stand together and send healing energy to one another, to friends, family, and the planet.

This power, of people coming together with goodwill and common purpose, is one of the animating forces of Circle Sanctuary: as important as the rocks that lie under the soil, or the stream that runs through the heart of the Nature Preserve. What makes this land sacred is the intention of our community.

And our community is a wondrous thing, different and rare. We are a community not because we've been born into the same place, or even the same traditions. When we connect with the Divine we do not call upon the same names or faces. We are young and old, rich and poor, single or in families of many configurations, of different races, of different regions, professors and construction workers, homemakers and lawyers--but we have come together out of the conviction that we feel the presence of the Divine within the natural world, and out of the desire to connect with others who feel it too.

For over forty years now I have watched this beautiful community grow and change, and I have marveled at the power of what we can do together. Together we bought the property that is now our sacred land at Circle Sanctuary Nature Preserve. Together we built PSG from a weekend long festival with less than one hundred people to what is now a week-long gathering and one of the oldest and largest Pagan festivals in the US. Together we turned an old barn into the nerve center of a network that now serves Pagans around the country and the world. Together we cleared the brambles, dug the earth, and placed the marker stones to expand Circle Cemetery, so even at the end of life we can support one another.

As we celebrate Circle Sanctuary's 41st birthday, the Nature Preserve's 32nd anniversary, Lady Liberty League's 30th anniversary and our cemetery's 20th anniversary I know in my heart that I could never do all that I do were it not for the support and inspiration I receive from our wondrous community. I know that our strength will carry us forward now, and in the times to come.

Blessed Be,
Selena Fox

Senior Minister & Executive Director, Circle Sanctuary

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Featured Program: Circle Cemetery's 20th Anniversary

We are born, we grow, we laugh, we love, and inevitably, we all will die. We look to nature and we see that life is a cycle, with new growth following death. At Circle Sanctuary, we seek to honor all stages of life, including its end. Yet, during these difficult times at life's end, many Pagans experience trouble reconciling their deeply held beliefs with the generally available options for funerals and burial. From the very beginning, creating a national Pagan cemetery was part of the founding visioning of Circle Sanctuary, as a place where our spiritual community could have a final resting place in harmony with our beliefs. When the land that would become Circle Sanctuary Nature Preserve was found in 1983, the intent was always to create a cemetery, however the formal establishment was held off until 1995 when the property was fully paid for and we had title to the land.

Circle Cemetery officially began in 1995 with the ridgetop area dedicated for the cremated remains of Pagans from around the country. Ten years later, we began a process of expanding the cemetery to allow for full-body natural or 'green' burials. A total of twenty acres were surveyed for the expanded cemetery, including the original ridgetop, our Stone Circle, a portion of the restored prairie, and a woodland area intended for the burying ground. We began meetings with township and country government officials. In 2007, as a result of the successful 'Pentacle Quest,' the Cemetery received some of the first pentacle inscribed memorial markers issued by the US Department of Veterans Affairs. A public dedication of the markers took place that Memorial Day. After that victory, the cemetery expansion project moved to completion. On June 16, 2010, Circle Cemetery became the first green

cemetery established in Wisconsin. Now, in October 2015, Circle Cemetery is the final resting place for the remains of thirty-eight people from around the nation. A directory of those buried is available on Circle's website and on Find-a-Grave. Circle Cemetery offers options for the scattering or burial of cremains and full-body natural burials, with or without marker stones.

In addition to offering a peaceful and beautiful spot to be buried, Circle Sanctuary offers religious burial services, tailored to the beliefs of the deceased, and respectful of the surviving friends and family's traditions and needs. This past year we have held services both large and small, from a simple service with only a few loved ones to large gatherings of friend and family. Circle Sanctuary's staff coordinate and conduct these ceremonies. We are supported by several dedicated, local volunteers, who offer their time to help make the experience as smooth and meaningful as possible for the family and friends of the deceased.

While the passing of a loved one is never easy, we have over and over again witnessed the healing power that this sacred land has on those who mourn. After a ceremony punctuated by the sighs of wind through the leaves, or the call of birds overhead, many people who come wracked with grief leave able to talk about their loved one with smiles as well as tears. We are also hosting a growing number of visitors who come to connect with the grave of their loved one, and spend hours on the land or walking the trails. We know well that this land is special, but it is truly heartwarming to see how even those who have never been exposed to Nature Spirituality perceive something special here, and find comfort.



Featured Program: Pagan Spirit Gathering 2015

In mythology across cultures there are stories of the sacred test – the hero has to undergo a trial or journey, and though it is hard, he or she emerges at the end strengthened, tempered, and transformed. Many of the rituals and rites of passage at Pagan Spirit Gathering (PSG) are structured in this way, from the Sacred Hunt, to Fire Circle, to the vigils and night journeys by young adults. We build them this way because we recognize the powerful spiritual significance of hardship and recovery. This year the whole PSG community, and with it Circle Sanctuary, found itself tested and rose to the occasion magnificently.

For the fifth year in a row, our weeklong Summer Solstice festival, PSG, was held at Stonehouse Farm, a private campground in Northern Illinois, near the town of Earlville. We were delighted to welcome special guest presenters Janet and Gavin Farrar, and Laura Gonzalez, and musical guest Wendy Rule who quickly gained many friends and made themselves at home at PSG. Our setup crew had worked for days, in often rainy conditions, but everything was ready to welcome the first arrivals on Sunday morning with cheers, bubbles and a big 'Welcome Home!'

The next day dawned beautifully, and workshops got off to a good start. However, storms were predicted that evening and the PSG administrative team was watching the weather with concern. That part of Illinois had been receiving record rainfall and with the land already saturated, creeks were rising. After consulting with the campground managers, the decision was made on Monday afternoon that the low lying areas of the campground, comprising one

third of the total campground area, needed to be evacuated because of the threat of flash flood. This included several camping areas, the ritual green, many workshop areas, the sweatlodge, Psyche's Grotto, several program centers, and the adjacent parking field which held most of the cars.

Over the next few hours, our community leapt into action: center coordinators, Safety, and countless other spontaneous volunteers helped to move campsites away from threatened areas to higher ground. One of the affected areas was the parking field, and a crew of over thirty people helped push hundreds of cars mired in the mud. All around the campsite, PSG community members were helping out however they could. People looked after children so their parents could move their campsite or volunteer. Camps took in strangers, and provided them with meals and shelter. The Tween Center took in numerous kids as well as other displaced campers, and all evening people turned up there with offers of food, dry bedding, tents and more. The community's generosity was overwhelming, a testament to our Tribe as Family.

The next day everyone gathered for a morning meeting like no other. While many were enthusiastic about staying despite the disruptions and mud, contamination in the floodwaters from nearby farm fields and the campground's septic system, loss of parking and ritual space, loss of camping areas and personal possessions and the ongoing need to assist affected folks with extracting vehicles and campers from over-saturated camping and parking locations meant we just couldn't sustain the gathering in a safe and sanitary manner.





The decision was made to close PSG early for the first time in the festival's 35-year history. There were tears, laughter, music and a commitment that we'd get through this as a community.

While those on site at PSG were beginning the muddy task of packing up to go home, word of the situation had spread rapidly online. Messages of support poured in from Pagans across the country. Dozens nearby offered their homes as waystations (or just free showers) for those driving home. One community member coined the phrase #WeAreTribe, and another created a t-shirt with that slogan as a fundraiser for Circle Sanctuary.

Over the course of the next two days PSG packed up for the early departure. Tuesday evening the musicians of PSG threw an impromptu group-concert (spontaneously titled 'Bardapalooza' by S.J. Tucker). It was a magical few hours, and a joyous, though brief, counterpoint to a bittersweet day.

Even once the last of the tired-take down crew had departed Stonehouse, the work was far from done. Normally, on the Monday after PSG, a small crew of volunteers gathers at Circle Sanctuary land to unpack the PSG rental truck and put away all the tents and supplies for next year. This year was different. Nearly everything needed to not only be washed, but sanitized. Broken items needed to be discarded, and an inventory made so they could be replaced before next year. There was a huge amount to do, and more rain was threatened. We put out the call help... and once again the community responded. Over seventy-five people turned up, on just a day or two of rest, to help get the job done. We washed, scrubbed, carried, tallied and got the job done in time for a blissful, if exhausted, ritual and evening around the campfire.



Our community proved itself yet again.

Dealing with the after-effects of PSG continued through the summer and continues now. Throughout the summer Circle Sanctuary offered support and healing to those affected by the flooding, including a special PSG Full Moon Circle of Healing in July, led by Selena Fox.

The Financial effects of this PSG were significant, and will be felt for some time. Out of concern for our community, and to help peoples' healing processes, Circle chose to offer a discount certificate for any future festival or PSG to those who attended this year. Many people chose not to take the certificate, out of support for Circle's work, and many of those who did take it expressed gratitude and told us that the discount would make attending a future PSG possible. While not all of those who were eligible for the certificate claimed them, that reduction in future income will have a significant impact in coming years. Closing the festival early did not exempt Circle Sanctuary from the majority of expenses that putting on PSG requires. Yet it did mean that the PSG raffle, silent auction, t-shirt sales, and other fundraising opportunities did not take place. These fundraisers provide a needed source of unrestricted income, and their loss will also be felt. The #WeAreTribe fundraiser was very appreciated, both for its financial and moral support, but only raised a small fraction of the funds that normally come in during PSG. As a result Circle Sanctuary is having to 'belt tighten' in numerous areas.

Yet, if we have learned anything from the events of PSG 2015 it is that our Circle Sanctuary community is strong and resilient. We will come through this particular ordeal, and not only survive, but be made stronger by it.

Featured Program: Circle Sanctuary at the 2015 Parliament of the World's Religions



Circle Sanctuary is thankful to be part of many interfaith efforts designed to foster understanding between people of different religions and spiritual paths. For that reason, we have proudly participated in the Parliament of the World's Religions, the largest and oldest international interfaith event in the world.

Since its centennial reconvening in 1993, Circle Sanctuary has participated in all six Parliaments. A delegation of over forty Circle Sanctuary Community members from across the United States took part in the 2015 Parliament of the World's Religions held, October 15-19 in Salt Lake City, Utah. Circle Sanctuary's delegation included twelve Circle Sanctuary Ministers, five Ministers-in-Training, and other community members and networking associates. This was the largest Circle Sanctuary delegation to go to a Parliament.

Circle Sanctuary's presence at the Parliament was not just in numbers. This year Circle Sanctuary hosted a booth in the exhibition hall, where Parliament attendees were invited to learn more about Paganism, Nature Spirituality, and Circle Sanctuary's work. The



booth was made possible by the generosity of a few donors who committed to supporting Circle's interfaith outreach. Members of the delegation took turns staffing the booth, which quickly became a meeting point for many of the other Pagans also attending the Parliament as well as those of many other religions who were interested in learning more about us.

Circle Sanctuary delegation participants were also leaders and participants in a variety of workshops, ceremonies, and rituals. As part of this Parliament's focus on environmental issues, Selena Fox and Dennis Carpenter presented a talk on Ecopsychology & Global Climate Change. Selena and Nora Cedarwind Young gave a talk on Circle Cemetery and Greening the End of Life. Selena was part of panel discussions on Priestesses, Prophetesses, Sibyls & Seers which was live-streamed online. Selena also co-facilitated Enhancing Understanding & Community Across Religious, Cultural & Ethnic Boundaries, an interfaith dialog session with Interfaith minister Karen Ingvaldstad and Buddhist teacher & Lutheran pastor Bob ko shin Hanson -- all of whom have been part of an Interfaith group in Madison, Wisconsin for many years.





Shel Skau was part of A Final Gift to the Planet and Diversity & Interfaith Dialogue in Counseling. In addition to workshops, delegation members were part of numerous rituals and celebrations. Selena led a Brigid Healing Ritual and Circle for Planet Earth with assistance from several other ministers, ministers-in-training, community members, and others. Shel facilitated a Healing Mother Earth worship service. Jerrie Hildebrand facilitated the workshop Reviving the Heart of Religion through Storytelling, created by Audrey Addison Williams. Jerrie was also part of the striking Goddesses Alive! performance ritual with masks. Finally, several Circle Sanctuary members were part of the Parliament's first choir that performed the Songs of the Earth cantata and music for the closing plenary.

In between their many commitments, Circle's delegation found time to connect with one another, with other Pagans, and with people of many other faith traditions. Many participated in one of the daily Langar lunches hosted by the Sikh community. Some joined in the Sufi Dances of Universal Peace, and delegation members participated in plenaries and other activities. The Inaugural Women's Assembly was particularly stirring,



with speakers of many faiths calling for rights and respect for women and for the planet. Others came home with stories of meaningful connections and conversations with Christians, Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, Zoroastrians, Muslims, Native Americans, and others.

There were also several meetups and ceremonies for Pagans of many traditions, including a Pagans at Parliament reception on the opening day. Following the close of the Parliament, Crone's Hollow hosted a social, and the Correllians held a Lustration ritual and award presentation, at which Selena was honored with the Order of Tchalv award for world peace service.

The 2015 Parliament of the World's Religions was a powerful event, and Circle Sanctuary was glad to have so many community members taking part. Those who attended are still in the process of integrating all the experiences and insights, and they look forward to bringing them to our community in the year to come.



Featured Program: 2015 Volunteer Report



Volunteers are the heart and spirit of Circle Sanctuary. From ministers to event staff to land workers, we depend on volunteers to keep our organization running and community strong.

Events are the spokes of Circle Sanctuary's wheel of the year. We celebrate 9 events at Circle Sanctuary Nature Preserve, and all of them rely on volunteers. This past year, brand-new coordinator Heather put on Yule, Imbolc was coordinated by Shel, Heather coordinated Welcome Spring, new coordinators Daisy & John brought us Earth Day, Bob & Georgette gave us a magical Beltane, Bo & Jenn coordinated Welcome Fall, and Sharon & Amanda brought Samhain to life.

Our coordinators are supported by an amazing team of volunteer staff who do the hard work of setting up the festival, cooking the food, guarding the gate, cleaning, setting up workshop spaces, setting out the torches, and so much more to make our events a success. When all the other participants head home, they stay behind to take everything back down, clean up and make sure it's all ready for next time.

In between major events, our Full Moon circles are presented by Circle Sanctuary staff and ministers –



but volunteers make them possible. This past year Richard, Ashleigh, and Bryan particularly stepped up month after month to set out the signs that guide people to Circle Sanctuary, get the room clean and ready to become ritual space, and staff the Owl's Nest shop. They, along with other volunteers, are the backbone of our Full Moon community.

And of course, no discussion about volunteers and events would be complete without a round of applause for our PSG volunteers. A full discussion of the events of PSG 2015 is included earlier in this report, including how PSG's all-volunteer staff leaped to action during and after the flood. We remain in awe of the power of volunteers and the strength they bring to this amazing festival community.

If you wander the land at Circle Sanctuary Nature Preserve, you'll likely benefit from the labor of numerous volunteers. Our network of trails was maintained through the efforts of Bob and Dennis who have kept them mowed and accessible. This past spring the network grew even longer, as a team of volunteers from UW-Stevens Point, led by Bob and long-time Circle Sanctuary volunteer naturalist Reed, carved a brand new trail up the hillside at the rear of





the property to Transformation Ridge. In the early years of Circle Sanctuary this spot was used for vision quests, however, an overgrowth of prickly ash and honeysuckle had made it inaccessible for over a decade. Now, thanks to their work, augmented by Mary's skill with a chainsaw, the new trail is most of the way to the ridge and will be expanded in the future.

In addition to restoring access to that sacred site, volunteers also worked to make one of our best-loved sites more accessible. Mary, along with Brad and other volunteers, worked hard to add a handrail and steps to Brigid's Spring, restored one bridge over the creek and built a new one further south in Meadowvale, and added a brand new set of stairs down to the spring area. As a result, we're now able to have larger rituals focused on that space, and some of our older community members were able to touch the spring water for the first time in years.

Volunteers are also working to maintain Circle's buildings and facilities. Brad, rallying teams of other volunteers, has slowly been revamping the storage space in the lower section of the barn. This fall he completed a series of shelving that is already winning high praise from event setup volunteers. Marla, Jim,



Ana, and Blodie have done wonders reorganizing the kitchen area, and other volunteers have worked to reclaim the library as usable community space. We've been lucky to have such fantastic teams of volunteers come out on our Sanctuary Days and Work Weekends, helping us to maintain the spaces that our community relies upon.

Those spaces are drier and more secure thanks to the ongoing generosity of one volunteer who is also a very generous donor. This past year it became clear that Circle's barn roof was rapidly deteriorating. Thanks to the generosity of this donor, we were able to replace it with a beautiful new asphalt-coated metal roof that will last for fifty years or more. Donors are also a critical part of the Circle Sanctuary community: many who are unable to come out and lend a hand physically have generously offered financial support to magnify the work being done 'on the ground.' We give thanks!

Volunteerism doesn't stop at Circle Sanctuary's gate. All around the country, volunteers are working for Circle Sanctuary and for the good of the whole Pagan community, in Circle Sanctuary's name. As we discussed elsewhere in this report, Circle Sanctuary had a booth at the Parliament of the World's Religions





which was staffed solely by volunteers, led by Circle Minister Dawnwalker. Other volunteers have staffed tables and given out literature at events and Pagan Pride Days around the country. Circle Sanctuary annually brings a large booth to both Chicago Pagan Pride Day and Madison Area Pagan Pride day, and we absolutely rely on the volunteers that help us setup and staff these booths, providing us with valuable opportunities to spread the word about Circle Sanctuary and our events and services. This year we were glad to have the help of Tina, William, Rich, Barb, Nyx, Colleen, Judith, and Ana in Chicago, and Bob, Georgette, Ashleigh, Bo, and Bryan in Madison, as well as several other Circle Sanctuary community members who spontaneously showed up and lent a hand!

Circle's Ministers are all volunteers who act in service in their home communities from coast to coast: coordinating events, rituals, and festivals; hosting Circle's internet radio shows; providing ministry to members of the military, at colleges, and in prisons; giving pastoral counselling; and representing our community to the wider world. This year we added three new ministers to our ranks, Rev. Debra Rose, Rev.



Cern, and Rev. Bo, all of whom have been dedicated Circle Sanctuary volunteers for years before their ordinations and continue to volunteer their time and talents serving Circle Sanctuary and the broader Pagan community.

Ministers are far from the only off-site volunteers Circle depends upon. The Lady Liberty League is also coordinated by Minerva and supported by a larger team who volunteer their expertise as needed. This year we had a particularly impressive group working on an issue of religious freedom for Pagans at a military facility, including Casey, Tiffany, Michelle, Bob, Chiron, and other volunteers. Volunteers also contribute to Circle Sanctuary's Military Ministries, Campus Ministries, interfaith networking, and more. Online, we have several volunteers including James, Bob, and Casey who help us track and monitor our social media pages.

This is but a small sampling of the work that volunteers have done for and with Circle Sanctuary this year. We give thanks to all our volunteers who have offered their labour, their talents, and their love. Blessed be!



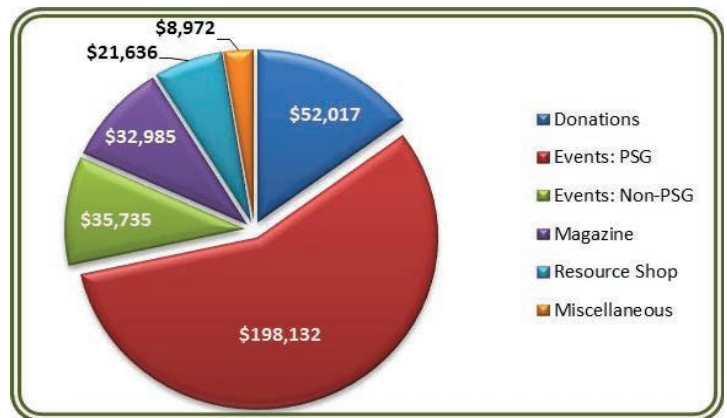
Circle Sanctuary, Inc. 2014 Financial Summary

INCOME

The majority of Circle Sanctuary's income in 2014 came from three sources: **Donations** (15%), **Contributions** (16%) related to CIRCLE Magazine and the Resource Shop, and **Event Registrations** (67%).

Pagan Spirit Gathering and other Circle events brought in **11%** more than in 2013. Unrestricted donations were down **9%** over 2013, but donations for the pod project more than made up the difference.

In 2014, Circle Sanctuary brought in a total of **\$349,477**, which is an increase of **9.1%** over 2013. By way of comparison: this is **66%** more than 2009, when we first started providing these summaries.

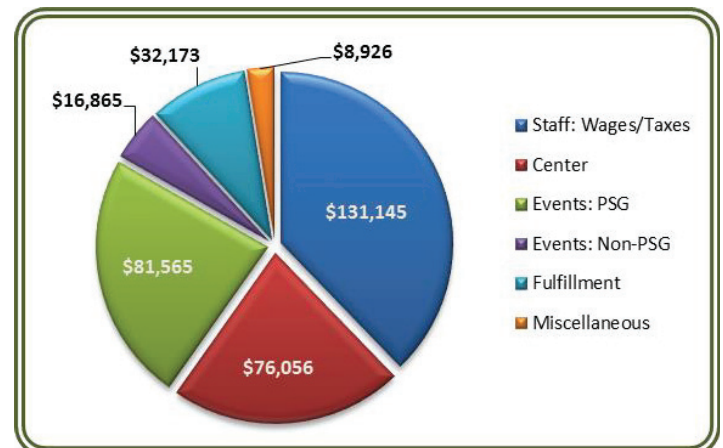


EXPENSES

In 2014, Circle spent a total of **\$346,729**, which is an increase of **8.3%** over 2013 -- leaving a surplus of **\$2,748**. As has been true for many years, *Circle Sanctuary carries no debt*.

Most of Circle's expenses went into four areas:

- **Fulfillment** (9%): Stocking the Resource Shop and printing & mailing CIRCLE Magazine.
- **Center** (22%): Day-to-day operation of Circle Sanctuary's office and facilities, including utilities, office supplies, equipment leases, bank & merchant fees, buildings & grounds maintenance, insurance and property taxes.
- **Events** (29%): expenses of running festivals and other events organized by Circle Sanctuary, including PSG.
- **Staff** (38%): Wages, taxes and benefits associated with the three full-time staff members employed in 2014.



NOTEWORTHY FIGURES

- **Pagan Spirit Gathering** (PSG) is Circle Sanctuary's largest single revenue source, providing **57%** of revenue.
- **CIRCLE Magazine** published 4 issues in 2014 at a gain of **\$10,539**. A corrected price structure, efforts to win back lapsed subscribers, cost containment measures and increased digital distribution all contributed to this improved performance over 2013.
- **Unrestricted Donations** declined by **9%**, though there was a substantial increase in targeted donations relating to the storage pod project. Improved solicitation strategies will continue to be an area of emphasis moving forward.
- **Credit Card Merchant Fees** cost Circle **\$6,882** in 2014. With the shift to processing everything through PayPal, we saw a **7% reduction** in merchant fees despite higher gross receipts and a higher proportion of credit card transactions than ever.
- If one considers only Staff and Center expenses, Circle requires **\$568/day** to finance operations at current levels. By contrast, **Unrestricted Donations** came in at a rate of **\$112/day**. Circle is still dependent on a "fee for service" model, wherein events like PSG are critical ways of funding year-round operations.

Community, Spirit, and Magic

