



# COVENANT OF THE GODDESS CHARTER DOCUMENT

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## HISTORICAL NOTE

*This Charter, and the By-Laws which accompany it, were ratified by members of thirteen local congregations of nine different Traditions of our religion on Summer Solstice, 1975, at Coeden Brith. The Covenant of the Goddess was incorporated as a non-profit religious, charitable, and educational corporation under the laws of the State of California on October 31, 1975.*

*The first Regular Annual Meeting of the Church was held in August, 1976; the council has met in August or September of every year thereafter.*

*Charter adopted Summer Solstice, 1975; Amended August 29, 1998*

## PREAMBLE

In the fullness of time and by the providence of our Lady, it seems good to us that we covenant with one another, as members of an ancient and honorable religion, to establish a Church that will further our mutual interests and purposes in the service of our Lady and our Lord, in order to be better able to serve the religious needs of the lay members of our religion, and to be better able to assist one another in the training of our clergy and in all other matters that may benefit from improvements in our communication.

We are agreed: that we worship the Goddess and recognize the Old Gods; that we are ethical persons, bound by the ethics of the traditional Laws of our religion; and that we recognize one another as being members of the same religion.

We are also agreed that we are not the only members of our religion. If the members of a local congregation choose not to join this Covenant and the Church thus created, their choice creates no presumption that they are not members of our religion.

We are agreed further that the reality of our religion lies within each local congregation, of whatever Tradition, and that there is no sovereign authority in our religion outside each local congregation. Therefore, the local congregations which enter into this Covenant with one another cede to the Church thus created only as much sovereignty as the Church will need in order to function effectively as an instrument of their joint will.

## ARTICLE I. NAME AND NATURE OF THE CHURCH

The name of the Church shall be: The Covenant of the Goddess.

The Church shall be a confederation of sovereign and equal local congregations. It shall be referred to herein as the Church, to emphasize these local congregations taken jointly, or as the Confederation, to emphasize these local congregations taken severally. It shall be incorporated as a nonprofit religious, charitable, and educational corporation, or as a corporation sole of the same nature, under the laws of the State of California.

## ARTICLE II. MEMBERSHIP

A Regular Membership in the Church shall be held only by a local congregation as a whole, not by individual persons. However, certain other types of membership shall be provided for in the By-Laws.

## ARTICLE III. GOVERNANCE

- A. Each local congregation that holds Regular Membership in the Church shall have the right to send official representatives to a Regular Annual Meeting, and the representatives present at each such meeting shall constitute the Great Council, hereafter referred to as the COUNCIL, which shall be the governing body of the Church.
- B. At each Regular Annual Meeting, the COUNCIL shall choose a chief executive officer, and up to twelve other persons as provided for in the By-Laws, to be the Executive Board (hereafter referred to as the BOARD), charged with overseeing the affairs of the Church for the following year. The chief executive officer shall be the chairperson of the COUNCIL and of the BOARD, and shall be referred to only as the First Officer.

- C. At any meeting of the COUNCIL, decisions shall be made by the following process: each issue up for discussion shall be thoroughly discussed by all present who wish to discuss it, and all points of view, suggestions, objections, etc., shall be taken into account in shaping a proposal about how to deal with the issue, until official representatives are agreed that the best possible proposal for the moment has been arrived at. Only if such unanimity cannot be reached shall the COUNCIL vote on the proposal, but acceptance of the result of such a vote shall still be subject to the unanimous consent of all official representatives. The COUNCIL may decide to alter, restrict, or prohibit the use of the veto in election of officers or approval of the budget, provided that a decision to do so is itself subject to unanimous consent.
- D. The BOARD, and any body or committee to which the BOARD delegates any of its authority, shall be composed of persons from as many different Traditions of our religion as possible, and shall in no case consist of persons who are all from the same Tradition.
- E. A person does not and cannot become a Priestess or Priest of our religion by receiving Ministerial Credentials from the Church. Instead, such credentials shall be issued merely to recognize the real and previous existence of a status that a person has earned according to the usages and traditions of a local congregation, a status that can be conferred only by a local congregation, not by the Church. Such credentials shall be intended merely to guarantee to the person as well the advantages, rights, responsibilities, and privileges, if he or she should desire them, which are enjoyed by ministers of religion under the laws of this country.
- F. In order to provide for its own viability and proper governance, the Church shall establish in its By-Laws certain minimal criteria that must be met before a Certificate of Membership or Ministerial Credentials will be issued. However, in establishing such criteria, the Church shall in no way attempt to define the nature of a local congregation, to interfere with the autonomy of any local congregation, or to establish universal procedures that local congregations should follow.
- G. For the sake of its viability, the Church shall have the power to expel any person or group from the fellowship and privileges of membership in it, and to revoke and Charter, Certificate, Credentials, or other instruments issued by it. However, any such expulsion or revocation shall be carried out only for due cause as defined in the By-Laws. Toward the goal of clarity and fairness in such a potential situation, the By-Laws shall include a general code of ethics as a minimal, mutual, and common agreement on how the traditional Laws of our religion shall be interpreted, for the sake of preserving the usefulness of the Church for all its members.

## **ARTICLE IV. POWERS OF THE CHURCH**

- A. The Church shall have all the powers, rights, and privileges normally exercised by a church under the laws of the State of California. However, nothing in this Covenant, or in any By-Laws or procedural rules adopted by the Church, shall limit the right of each local congregation to continue to operate in its customary way, or shall be construed as giving to the Church, or to any agency or instrumentality created by the Church, the power to abridge or impair the autonomy of any local congregation in the management of its own affairs. The autonomy and sovereignty of a local congregation are inherent and are modifiable only by its own action. The affairs of a local congregation include, but are not limited to, the following rights: to retain or adopt its own methods of organization, worship, and education; to retain or secure its own charter or name; to formulate its own theology, beliefs, and liturgy; to admit and train members, to confirm them in membership, and to provide for their discipline or dismissal in its own way; to ordain or dismiss its own Priestesses and Priests by such procedures as it shall determine; to acquire, own, manage, and dispose of its own property and funds; and to withdraw from membership in this Church by its own decision at any time without forfeiture of ownership or control of any real or personal property owned by it.
- B. The Church shall have the power to issue instruments, which shall include but not be limited to the following: Charters, to establish Local Councils of the Church; Certificates of Membership, to recognize a local congregation that has joined in the Covenant and this Church; and Ministerial Credentials, to recognize the status achieved by a person who has been ordained as a Priestess or Priest by a local congregation.
- C. A Local Council shall be any Council of the Church representing local congregations within an area smaller than the entirety of the United States of America. A Local Council shall have all the powers, rights, and privileges of the Church as a whole, including the power to issue instruments, and shall be empowered to do for itself, and for the local congregations that make it up, all the things the COUNCIL can do for the Church as a whole. Each Local Council shall be structured like the COUNCIL, and shall abide by all the provisions of this Covenant and of all By-Laws adopted by the Church, except where specific exceptions are allowed in the By-Laws.
- D. A Local Congregation, being sovereign in itself, is not and cannot be created by the issuing of a Certificate of Membership by the Church. Instead, the issuing of such a certificate shall merely recognize the real and previous existence of a local congregation of members of our religion, and shall be intended merely to guarantee to the local congregation the advantages of having as well a legal existence, should those advantages be desired.

## **ARTICLE V. AMENDMENTS AND BY-LAWS**

The provisions of this Covenant may be amended only by an affirmative vote that is equal to two-thirds of all the votes exercised by members of the Church, subject to their unanimous consent. The provisions of this Covenant shall be implemented by means of such By-Laws as may be adopted by an affirmative vote equal to at least two-thirds of all votes exercised by members of the Church, subject to their unanimous consent. Any provision of this Covenant that is ambiguous may be clarified by means of the By-Laws, but By-Laws that conflict with any provision of this Covenant shall be invalid, null, and void.

## **ARTICLE VI. EMPOWERMENT**

This Covenant and the Church it creates shall come into existence on the day when this Covenant and its accompanying By-Laws have been signed, and thus ratified, by duly authorized representatives from a majority of the local congregations that have participated in their conception and writing. Those who sign it shall choose from among themselves the officers and other persons to make up the first BOARD and Standing Committees of the Church. The BOARD shall be empowered to obtain legal counsel and to undertake all steps necessary to enable the legal incorporation of the Church as contemplated in Article I; to revise and augment the wording of this Covenant and its By-Laws, upon the advice of legal counsel, if such changes are needed to satisfy the requirements of California State law about what can serve as the charter of such a corporation; to approach other local congregations throughout the United States of America to invite them to join in this Covenant and in the Church thus created; to make all arrangements needed to enable the first Regular Annual Meeting of the COUNCIL; and to undertake whatever other tasks the members of the BOARD may deem necessary to bring the Church into full realization. The Covenant and the By-Laws, if revised, shall be submitted to the Confederation for ratification and approval subject to the provisions of Article V. If the first regular Annual Meeting of the COUNCIL has not taken place within fifteen civil months after the date on which this Covenant and the Church it creates has come into existence, then this Covenant shall become null and void, and the Church created by this Covenant shall be deemed never to have existed.