

Minister Application for David D. Hahn, Jr.

What do you see as your major strengths or talents?

As I see it, my prominent strength is my thirst for knowledge and experience, both intellectually and spiritually. I am a person who THRIVES on learning and growing, and, as such, I am constantly seeking out new avenues of exploration, whether that means researching through the extensive literature on a subject of interest to me, participating in a ritual of my own design or one created by a trusted colleague, meditating on a question that is vexing me, or quizzing the experts in the field in which I require information.

In addition, my strong foundation in ritual magic and modification serves me in every aspect of my life. This knowledge and skill allows me an approach to the challenges of everyday life that isn't apparent to many people. It provides me with insight into why things happen the way they do, what influence I have over them, and what moments I need to hang on to versus letting go. In times of trouble, I can turn to my ritual modifications for clarity of thought, reflecting on what I've been through and achieved. For both myself and for others in need, I can craft a service tailored to the motive at hand with very little forethought if need be, on the fly, so to speak, or I can take my time and create an elaborate ceremony.

What do you feel are your major weaknesses?

Sometimes I set my sights TOO high, aim for the sky instead of something in front of me. I strive for perfection in my life, and that can be a slippery slope. The more you struggle for perfection, the more you slip away from that goal by trying too hard. It serves me better to recognize that I am on the path to perfection, struggling to be better than what I am in every moment, and accept that and rejoice in the journey rather than the goal.

What previous experience do you have that relates to being a minister in the CoBM?

First, I am a High Priest (Third Degree) in the Wiccan Majestic tradition. Attaining this goal required three years of intense study, extensive practice in ritual magic, and completion of a Third Degree project deemed to be a service to the Craft as a whole. My project related to "technopaganism," focusing on resources available for pagans on line and the potential for conducting ritual on line. As a High Priest in this tradition, I was part of an educational team of other Priests/Priestesses that taught dozens of students over the years and initiated them through all three of their degrees. This experience gave me a firm footing in conducting ritual, educating classes in ritual, and organizing a tightly knit circle of practitioners as well as interfacing with other circles in a much larger "organized" religion.

Second, through my education at University of California, Santa Barbara, I studied Religious Studies, taking the subject on as a Minor (with English Lit being my Major). Upon completing my studies, I was asked to continue my education there by Inez Talamanez, my Religious Studies advisor, based upon my research into analysis of the Dresden Codex and Mayan *tictil* healing rituals and techniques vs analogs in "modern" medicine. I chose, however, a path in education, continuing on to receive my secondary

teaching credential. That said, I plan to return to college at some point to complete my Masters in Religious Studies.

In your own words, what do you know about the CoBM and being a minister in it?

My understanding of the Church and its precepts revolve around the concept of RESPECT. The Church encourages members to respect their bodies, minds, and spirits, in conjunction, without the exclusion of any one of those three factors. It fosters respect for all outlooks on life and spirituality, especially in relation to how they relate to body modification in its myriad forms. The CoBM provides support and knowledge for those already on the path of ritual modification, guidance for anyone with questions regarding this field, and a forum for discussion and exploration of body modification and its relationship to all things spiritual.

Being a minister within the Church entails acting as a liaison between the Church, the world at large, and individuals seeking guidance on this path. Acting as a minister means being prepared to “teach to the moment,” to find moments in time where the opportunity to enlighten and educate present themselves, whether that means providing information on why we do what we do to lay people, pointing a student to possible practitioners or sources of knowledge, or facilitating a group event, be it a ritual or an educational forum. Being a minister means sharing my experiences with others freely, allowing them to question me and learn from what I’ve seen, done, and learned.

Why do you want to be a minister in the CoBM?

My life already revolves around a constant cycle, my life roles fluidly transferring from teacher to student and back again, endlessly. My thirst for knowledge and experience are only equaled by the joy I get from teaching, relating my experiences and the things I’ve learned to others. With that in mind, and the focus my life has on both ritual and body modification, it would be a logical and beautiful extension of who I already AM to OFFICIALLY take on the role of minister in the CoBM. It is something that rings very true for me. It is a path I already walk just because of who I am, what I’ve experienced, the rituals I’ve conducted and been a part of, and the way my mind and soul are hardwired. I LIVE to minister to others both spiritually and intellectually. I get a huge amount of satisfaction pointing someone in a direction that is going to enhance their own journey, particularly if it is both magical AND related to body work/play/ritual. This is who I am already...being a minister would be a validation and confirmation of that status in my life, and it would allow me to officially aid the Church in its mission.

What do you think you can contribute as a minister?

As a minister for the CoBM, I provide skills as a teacher and facilitator of experience. I’m trained to provide educational experiences, from curriculum development through actually conducting classes in a variety of ways. I can also provide editorial experience and the ability to convert any document created for the Church from what is informal scribbling into something ready for professional publication. I was a copy editor/developmental editor for Academic Press/Harcourt Brace for nearly 7 years, managing editorial matters for well over 20 journals (e.g., *The Journal of Surgical*

Research, Methods in Enzymology, Journal of Research into Personality, etc.) and at least twice as many books (including *Amniote Origins, Osteoporosis, and Stream Ecology*). Lastly, as a trained practitioner of ritual, I can help provide body modification experiences for those who present themselves as needing guidance on this path.

What have you contributed thus far as a member?

As friend and partner of Board Member Tiffany M. LeClair, I've provided consultations regarding matters ranging from editorial assistance on her upcoming article on the relationship between First Amendment issues and the CoBM, helping her organize her articles, and challenging her on developmental matters and fact checking. Also, falling back on my experiences organizing an "organized" religion, both in terms of its intimate inner workings as a small, burgeoning circle and in terms of how it interacted with the larger realm of paganism (on line and in person) and all it entails outside of its own insular environment, I have been able to provide insight, guidance, and advice on how to approach the various pitfalls that face a growing and ever-changing religious order.

This question, for me, actually borders more on what have I done to prepare to be a member and my desire to contribute now and in the future as a member. All of the education that I have, all of the experiences that I've surrendered myself to and asked for, and all of the lessons I've taught and students I've guided have brought me to a place in space and time where I CAN contribute as much as I would like to...and that is a considerable amount, indeed.

Where would you like to see the CoBM 5 years from now?

Five years from now, I envision the CoBM as being a legally recognized, leading force both on line and in the world at large in the fields of both spirituality and body modification. I see the Church having an incredibly strong and well-respected role in providing ritual body modification enthusiasts and practitioners with sources of information, whether through articles, panels, forums, or rituals, and experience. I see the Church providing a repository on line for people to relate their experiences, triumphs, failures, struggles, and journeys...an experiential library, so to speak. I would love to see the Church officially join forces with some type of legal body, maybe sponsoring articles written by lawyers with an interest in body modification that relate to issues that impact us. Most importantly, I see the Church sponsoring live panels in various towns in which we have members to address all aspects of ritual modification, demonstrations, discussions, tours, etc. The potential for public outreach and education is immense, considering the quality of people the Church draws to it and the wealth of experience and knowledge they bring to the table.

Aside from the CoBM, what are your personal goals for the next 5 years?

For the next five years, I have a number of goals. Primary among them is the need/desire to increase both my knowledge of and experience with ritual body modification. That goal is twofold: to experience the modifications myself, especially procedures and rituals I've not yet participated in, and to educate myself in how they are conducted...to actually get hands-on education in techniques and protocols so that I may ACTIVELY participate

with those I encounter who need these rituals in their lives. Second, I plan on working extensively with Tiffany LeClair on a book exploring modern ritual body modification, providing editorial services, writing material for inclusion, conducting interviews, and guiding the book through the publication process I know and love so well. Third, I plan on devoting as much time as possible to nurturing and enjoying my new family, watching it grow and blossom from day to day.

What would you do if you overheard someone speaking negatively about the CoBM?

In a word: LISTEN. When you listen to what someone is saying...regardless of whether you agree or not, regardless of whether you think they have their facts straight, regardless of ANYTHING...you open the lines of communication, education, and understanding. When you look at something as multi-faceted as the CoBM, every view will reveal something different, and everyone brings their own opinions, experiences, preconceptions, and baggage to the table. As a minister of the Church, it is not my job to disabuse someone of their ideas about the Church. Rather, it is my role to foster open dialog, an exchange of ideas, where (hopefully) all parties walk away with a better understanding of the big picture as it relates to them and their experience. By listening and understanding what they feel and are trying to convey, I can better challenge them to listen to me, in turn, and maybe enlighten them a bit or help them see there are other aspects to what they perceive.

The CoBM has evolved greatly since inception. As a minister, you will be expected to be knowledgeable about the various evolutionary steps the CoBM has taken. If someone asked you about the current status and goals of the Church, how would you compare and contrast the Church's current state against previous years and under previous management?

Though my involvement with BMEZine over the years, I was privy to a lot of the early discussions regarding the status and validity of the CoBM. I saw the best and the worst arise in people over the topic. Certainly, the Church has been through some fairly rough times, but birth is hard by nature. Evolution itself is punctuated by dead-end paths and valiant but ultimately failed biological experiments. The Church is no different. However, I choose not to focus on the past, but instead cast my eyes to the FUTURE of the Church. Yes, hindsight is indeed 20/20, so let's use that hindsight and knowledge of the past to not repeat it. Let's learn from what did not work before to craft a model for the Church that DOES function smoothly and with the purpose of furthering our mission. I would point to the caution and careful intent being directed at the evolution of the Church now, under the current management, and shrug. That was then, this is now. Long live the new flesh...

List all of your modifications, past and present. Then choose one of those mods and describe what spiritual significance it has for you.

Piercings: 0 ga flats, 10 ga rooks, 00 ga traguses (big), 1 1/4" lobes, 10 ga labret, 10 ga (x2) brows (ret.), 6 ga tongue stud, 10 ga (x2 each) nipples, dermal anchors in neck (ret.), and 00 ga Prince Albert (ret.).

Tattoos: Choctaw pipe head (shoulder), Nephilim in Hebrew (neck), Kandinsky-inspired piece (shoulder blade), heart of thorns (chest), bite mark (collar bone), Dark Crystal rejuvenation design (entire back), Zombie/Don't Blink! (shoulder), Finch (forearm), Green Man (forearm), Barry Ween (Winick and Alred, both forearms), Global Frequency (wrist), "has" from Skin Project (wrist), daughter's handprint (shoulder), star (shoulder), Clive Barker original art #1 (calf), Clive Barker original art #2 (calf), outlining of Thai bat flesh removal (calf), and Hugin and Munin (Norse crows, shoulders).

Cuttings/flesh removals: three bars (cutting, right shoulder), power symbol (cutting, left shoulder), Clive Barker original cutting design (the only one in existence) (cutting, left shoulder), 37th hexagram of the I Ching (cutting, chest), and Thai bat design (4.5 hours of flesh removal, calf).

Once piece that stands out in my mind, spiritually, is my tattoos of Hugin and Munin, the crows representing "thought" and "memory" that the god Odin sent out each day to retrieve news and information, relating it to him by perching on his shoulders and whispering in his ears. I have always, since my earliest memories, known that crows/ravens/rooks were my totem animal, so my affinity for them is well established. I had reached a moment in my life where I was desperate for clarity of thought...I was in pain, confused, and casting about in all directions just to try to understand the world around me when the rug was pulled out from under me, so to speak. I knew I could call upon my totem for guidance and I did...and they began to appear everywhere I looked. I took this as a sign, and I consulted with a friend who is not only a mage, but also a tattoo artist. Under ritual conditions, in my home, surrounded by candles and objects of magical significance to me, he tattooed my symbols of thought and memory into my flesh and blood, one flying before me, to bring me news and knowledge, and one flying behind me, to remind me of how I have arrived where I am.

What do you think the differences are between a person who modifies their body with piercings, tattoos, etc. and a person who never explores body modification?

Honestly, I think that question is extremely subjective. Who is to say how a person modifies their bodies? Is it just piercing, tattooing, branding, etc.? Or is it hair styles, body building, breast implants, etc.? Do all of these qualify? I try to remind myself daily that there is really very little difference between myself and someone who modifies their body in other manners. Our bodies are our temples, and each of us is decorating our temple to meet our own individual needs. We all worship our bodies and the Maker who gave them to us in different ways. Maybe, if there really is a difference, that divergence lies in the path to that modification. Our path, that of those of us that practice ritual body modification, entails pain, pain that we asked for and brought upon ourselves. Unlike breast augmentation and body building, both of which have painful elements, our modifications engender pain intrinsically...the pain is not a side effect of what we are doing, like the pain of surgery, but an integral part of the experience. We offer up our blood, flesh, AND pain in our journey to get where we need to go, willingly and often lovingly. We do not shy away from the pain. Rather, we embrace it as part of what we need to experience to become who we are or want to be. Our mindset leads us to extremes of experience not often encountered by mundane people in their day-to-day

lives. However, that does not make us better. It only makes us different, and we should embrace those differences as much as we can.

Can a person with only a navel or ear piercing claim to be as spiritually modified as someone with brandings and a split tongue?

The answer to this question is simply YES, they can...easily. None of us, without asking, knows the significance of any other person's modifications or their motivations for getting them. A child with store-pierced ears might be part of an ancient tradition of piercing girl-children's ears 7 days after birth. A sorority girl with a Tweety Bird tattoo on the small of her back might have gotten that tattoo to honor a respected elder who raised her on their own under trying conditions but always made time to watch cartoons with their wards. A young man with a single small-gauge hoop in his ear may be bucking a very strict religious upbringing that forbids such a thing, in an effort to assert his individuality and power in this world. That said, someone with a split tongue may have bolstered their bravery with alcohol to numb the experience completely and had the procedure done just for spectacle's sake...it means nothing to them other than the ability to shock their mother into tears. None of us knows what motivated anyone else's modifications unless we are blessed with that knowledge by the person involved. Part of being a minister for the CoBM is being open to ALL experiences, regardless of how mundane or extreme they may seem at first glance. All paths lead to the same place, and part of the beauty of our religious convictions is learning to see the honor and perfection in each of them.

Describe what spiritually modified means to you.

Spiritually modified, to me, means choosing to modify your body not just as a means to change the shape, structure, or adornment of it, but more to enhance your relationship with the Universe and the Powers That Be. It can be a matter of the act itself being a religious experience or the modification/jewelry in and of itself can have spiritual significance to you. What it comes down to is INTENT. What is the purpose of the modification? Is it simply adornment or spectacle, or is it an effort to become more enlightened, closer to "god," become part of a family, act as a rite of passage, etc.? Being spiritually modified is more than just the selection of candles, the music playing, the chant being said, or the symbols involved. It's about what you take from the modification process. It's about how it changes you INSIDE more than changes you OUTSIDE. When you are spiritually modified you take away more than a scar, a piece of jewelry, or a bloodstain. When you are spiritually modified you are ADDING to your soul as much as you are adding to (or taking away from) your body. You walk away altered both in body and in soul.

Have you ever been convicted of a crime, other than a minor traffic violation?

Certainly not.

