

Minister Application of Tiffany M. LeClair

What do you see as your major strengths or talents?

My forte is not in what I know, but what I am capable of figuring out. There will always be someone who knows more than me, or has more experience. I enjoy seeking out such people and asking them my questions. As a minister, I would go out into the world with the questions of my members, as well.

I have a passion for body modification. In my case, the body modification comes second to my spirituality. I am a spiritual person, and modifications are my method. My experience with spirituality and ritual magic are another personal strength.

What do you feel are your major weaknesses?

I sometimes have an unreasonable expectation that the rest of the world should do their "homework" or research before jumping into a given activity. This might be with body modifications, or something on a personal level. When this situation arises, I offer to assist the person in their research. Usually, this is well received and appreciated. If not, I have learned to graciously return to my own activities and not worry about the troubles the other might encounter.

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

I have explored my own spirituality and its relationship with body modification for the last eight years. In that time, I have identified great sources for information and direction. I also have considerable experience in writing and performing ritual modifications. My hope would be to use this knowledge and experience to help others who are newer on their path. I am also very interested in collaborating with other spiritual modifiers so I may continue developing my own spiritual beliefs and practices.

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

As I understand it, the Church of Body Modification encourages members to respect their bodies. Modifying the body for spiritual purposes is clearly important, as it is reflected in the name of the congregation. Members are encouraged to share their experiences with one another, and respect those who modify as well as those who do not. The Church is about spiritual growth, and body modification is the main tool for that spiritual growth.

Being a minister within the Church means sharing my personal experiences openly. It also means helping other people with their spiritual and logistical questions where I am able, and helping them find answers when their question exceeds my knowledge or experience. A minister must sometimes lead, and sometimes follow. The members have an incredible amount of experience to pull from. The experiences of others may help me better define my spirituality, or it may assist me in my discussions with another member down the road.

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

As a Board Member with the Church, I am already in a high profile position. I receive emails on a regular basis from members and non-members. These emails range from advice on First Amendment violation issues, to requests for a practical application on how to incorporate body modification into one's spiritual system.

My position of Board Member is a logistical one. As a Board Member, I believe I have put myself in a position to offer advice and direction on the Church's development and future success. As a Minister, my goal would be to start a relationship with the members regarding spirituality. I would like to promote spiritual growth, and encourage people to talk about their spirituality in the Member's Only forum.

The position of Minister does have logistical benefits, however. When contacting a business to explain the spiritual side of body modification, I would rather introduce myself as a Minister within the Church. In that case, I would like to be a liaison between the member and their employer.

Long before meeting with member and their employer, I have every intention of counseling the member on how to resolve problems with others in regards to their modifications in a productive manner. These problems will undoubtedly encompass issues with parents, teachers, other students, as well as employers and co-workers.

What do you think you can contribute as a minister?

The largest contribution I can make as a minister is my time. Although I have considerable experience with spiritual modification, I know I do not have all the answers. I know a great variety of people all over the world. By making myself available by way of email, instant messenger, and even by personal appointment, I hope to lend the guidance necessary for each member to achieve their desired goal with spirituality and modification.

What have you contributed thus far as a member?

As a Board Member for the Church of Modification, I have helped numerous people with their various needs.

I have counseled several individuals on how to communicate with their employer in an effort to keep their piercings. I believe most issues with employers and parents can be avoided if an open line of communication is maintained. Additionally, should a true First Amendment case arise, it is imperative that the Church member document having told their employer that their modifications were part of their spiritual system. If the employer was not reasonably notified, it would be nearly impossible to pursue a First Amendment right violation.

I have also assisted several members with research papers pertaining to spirituality and body modification. Because I have a strong background in research, I am able to help people find the answers they are looking for on the internet. My own opinions and experiences are extensive, but I like to find sources to back up what I tell people.

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

In 5 years, I would like to see the CoBM with a true presence. I would like us to be well known, and have a good reputation for helping with spiritual and body modification related matters. I would like to see us have 5 solid board members, at least 5 senior ministers, and at least 15 ministers. I would like to see an organizational structure in place, making sure that each person had a job and no one was having to work harder than their share (unless they want to). I would like to see us incorporated in at least one state, possibly even more. I would also like to have a secure foundation to legitimize and legalize any ceremonies (like weddings) that ministers could perform.

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

In the next 5 years, I hope to continue my spiritual, philosophical, and piercing related studies. I hope to experience additional modification “performances” (as with CoRE), and meet people I believe have been influential in the evolution of modern body modification. I have been writing a book on ritual body modification, and believe I should put effort into its completion and subsequent publication. I am not sure if I want to transmit these ideas via the printed word or by electronic distribution as with a website, but I believe the content has value and is worth sharing. I would also like to spend more time sailing and traveling with my two wonderful kids.

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

Most of the conversation I hear regarding the Church of Body Modification is in an inquisitive context. Any negativity is usually in the form of a question. Rarely does anyone have facts to produce. If the situation is appropriate, I would like to answer their questions.

The most difficult question to answer is “why?” Why should I join the Church? Certainly, I do not need to belong to a group to validate my spiritual system. For me, the Church brings together like minded people so we can grow together. The Church is about communication and the transmission of ideas. I enjoy reading through the forums and hearing what other people accomplish by way of piercings or tattoos. I also like helping other people find their way. The documentation pertaining to spiritual body modifications is rather limited. I feel like we are in relatively uncharted territory when it comes to urban spirituality. But the more I read about various spiritual systems from around the world, I find that we are not in uncharted territory. In some cases, we are re-inventing the wheel. The only way to determine this is by way of research and networking. The Church provides a wonderful avenue for comparing ideas and knowledge.

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?

I believe I first joined the Church in 2002. By that time, there was already some discussion about the Church’s validity and the motivations behind its inception. The Church has had a number of “bumps” in the past, but I believe this is to be expected in the growth of any establishment. I believe that previous management, including board members and ministers, had good intentions. I do not believe that there was any malice or forethought in the problems that occurred. The current management has the benefit of seeing what problems occurred

previously, and can make every attempt to avoid those problems in the future. I strongly support the plans and projected timelines for the growth of the Church currently underway.

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

Right now, I have ½” lobes on both sides, the second lobe hole is 4g, and the third lobe hole is at 8g. In front of my tragus on both sides I have 16g ½” surface bars. Both of my nostrils are pierced (18g), as is the bridge of my nose (14g). I have my septum pierced and stretched to 8g. I also have my navel pierced (14g). The “retired” piercing is rather extensive. I have a number of tattoos and scarifications, each with spiritual significance.

My nostrils have each been pierced 6 different times, though only one hole in each nostril at any given time. The reasons for piercing and retiring the piercing have varied over the years. When I was 7 months pregnant with my son, my left nostril was ritually pierced to mark his likely survival if born early. My right nostril was pierced when I was 7 months pregnant with my daughter also. After both children were born, my septum and bridge of my nose were ritually pierced. When my daughter finally weaned, I took out both nostril piercings and the bridge piercing. The removal was ritualized as well. The removal of the jewelry marked my physical independence from my two children. They no longer needed my body for survival. The two scars left by the bridge piercing looked like an extra set of eyes, and certainly as a new mother I needed all the help I could get. In the last year or so, I re-pierced both nostrils and the bridge again. The significance was my own. The piercings were given new meaning in the subsequent ritual. That meaning being, life is cyclic, balance must be pursued, and nothing lasts forever. I cannot choose one specific piercing when it comes to spiritual significance, but I can say that all of the piercings in my nose are vital to my spirituality.

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?

Preference is hard to pin-down. Why do I like Mozart? Why do I prefer black sheets? In many cases, I think it comes down to the notion that the individual likes the way something looks or how it makes them feel. Some people have a difficult time with the perceived permanence of a tattoo. Many people also find jewelry, any jewelry, a nuisance.

I believe that the main difference between those who modify and those who do not have aesthetic roots. Some people can go beyond what it looks like and become curious about piercings and tattoos that can be hidden. These people can stay within the comfort of general acceptance while still exploring the physical and spiritual experiences that come with modification. I believe this is a sliding scale from no modifications to heavily modified. We slide along this scale to a point where we are comfortable. Some people are comfortable pushing their limits. Others are not.

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 modifications one has exist independently from the extent of their spirituality. Whether you have no piercings or a “collection,” your spirituality and your spiritual attachment to those modifications can vary greatly. Just as a virgin can have a sexual preference, I also believe that an “unmodified” person can acknowledge the spiritual significance of having a modification

performed. I would encourage those with such an observation to join the Church of Body Modification and further explore that concept.

Describe what spiritually modified means to you.

Spiritually modified can have many different meanings. To some, the performing of the modification is ritualized to give it spiritual meaning. In other cases, the modification itself has spiritual value.

In my own case, both are true. I ritualize my piercings and scarifications. The jewelry is spiritually cleansed, and frequently assigned a purpose. Captive bead rings remind me that life is cyclic. Straight barbells remind me that all things have a beginning and an end. Natural stones may also be introduced for various purposes including strength, grounding, and healing.

Whether a piercing, scarification, tattoo, pulling, ritual, or other modification, each has a spiritual purpose, both during its inception and long after.

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

No.