

Patheos Pagan Contributor FAQ – June 2014

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What does a Managing Editor do, anyway?

I recruit bloggers, give advice on writing and marketing, copyedit columns, edit the Agora blog, help bloggers with technical aspects of their blogs, and update the landing page. I am your liaison to Patheos proper. (Pronounced PATH-ee-os, by the way.) I also send out a weekly newsletter and run most of the Pagan social media.

I am very part-time and primary caregiver for an infant, so there will be times when I may take up to 72 hours to answer your e-mails. I also do not usually answer e-mails over the weekend. If I'm going to be gone longer than a weekend, I'll set a travel responder. If you have an emergency of some kind, mark your e-mail URGENT.

Who runs the Patheos Pagan social media?

I run the Patheos Pagan Facebook and Google+ pages (the Twitter feed is automatic), with occasional assistance from Patheos staff member Kristi. As many of you probably know, Facebook has been throttling page traffic – now, in order to receive the posts, you have to “Like” the page AND check “Show in News Feed”... but you'll probably still only see every fifth post or so. If you “Add to Interests” and THEN actually check your Interests list, you'll see every post. All I can say here is ARGH.

I encourage you all to promote your posts via your own social media and also remind your audiences to follow you via e-mail or RSS (or follow highlights from the entire channel by subscribing to the newsletter from [the landing page](#)). Readers can subscribe to your individual blog from the widget in your blog's right hand column, or for Agora columnists, the links at the bottom of your column. If your widget or link is missing, please let me know.

How and when is the landing page updated?

1. The whole site is updated around 11am and 6pm US MT every weekday, unless there is a backend problem (which there is occasionally, so sometimes the publish is delayed). Updating it at other times is somewhere between difficult and impossible, as it involves my getting admin help.
2. I update the front page entirely by hand, so if I am not available to update it at the right time, it doesn't get done that day. Lately I've been updating it most weekday mornings, but it can be time-consuming, so I try to make minimal changes most days and do a full overhaul once or twice a week.
3. Every active blog should be shown somewhere on the page. If you notice that I've accidentally dropped you, please send me an e-mail. (Not all Agora columns will appear at any given time.) To see a complete list of blogs or columns, look at the left-hand column of the landing page, choose Blogs or Columns, and then scroll down to the bottom to “View All Blogs” or “View All Columns.”

4. If you're planning an important post and you want it near the top of the page, let me know in advance (ideally 3 business days). Note that if you post over the weekend, I won't be able to update the landing page until Monday midday. If it's a post responding to breaking news and is by nature last-minute, I may or may not be able to update the page in a timely way, but I will be able to send it out via social media immediately.

Most of our traffic comes from social media and Google searches. The landing page gets some traffic, but it's not our main source, so my priority is usually the social media. You can best help yourselves by a) having your own social media accounts b) putting key terms related to your post in your title and c) using good tags.

I hear that titles and the “Tag” and “Excerpt” functions are really important! Why?

Titles and tags are how search engines find and categorize your posts (along with your post's title, which is even more important). The best kind of title is a descriptive one; while it's fun to use poetic titles, users who are searching for your topic are more likely to find your post if you call it something like “Best Summer Pagan Festivals” than if you call it “Acts of Love and Pleasure (In the Woods).”

Every post should have 5-8 tags, two of which are “Pagan” and “Paganism” (or, if you prefer other identifiers, use “Wicca” and “Wiccan,” “polytheist” and “polytheism,” etc.). So, tags: use ‘em.

The Excerpt function helps to make the Patheos Pagan landing page much prettier and more to the point. If you don't set an Excerpt, you'll end up with just the first few lines being excerpted, which usually isn't the most interesting part (and then I will have to take time to write your excerpt for you). So please – when you're done editing a post, grab some main idea sentences and pop them into the Excerpt window toward the bottom of the post editing page. If you don't see an Excerpt window, try the following:

1. Go to the tiny “Screen Options” tag at the top of the post editing page
2. Click the tab, then check the “Excerpt” box

The ideal Excerpt is about 30-35 words, give or take a bit. I reserve the right to edit Excerpts that are too long and are messing up the landing page's format.

Also of possible use is the “Content Meta Description” window. This description will appear as the post summary on social media. I often use the same text for both Excerpt and Content Meta Description, but you may want to craft them differently.

I also click “Save Draft” frequently while editing posts! I find the Excerpts sometimes disappear if I don't save immediately after I've written them. If you find your Excerpts disappearing, remember to click “Save” right away after composing.

Why should I set a Featured Image?

Images add a lot of interest to posts, especially when we link to them via social media.

Instructions for setting a featured image on a post are in the Patheos blogging manual (please let me know if you haven't received it). Your featured image will show on social media and on your blog's home page as a thumbnail for the post, so make sure to set it! (Agora columnists: just include an image and I will set it as featured before publication.)

Are there any additional editorial guidelines?

We advise that blog posts not be longer than 1000 words, as we observe that many readers simply do not read longer posts (they stop halfway through). Longer posts can be fruitfully divided into series. Putting main ideas or key sentences in bold can also help hurried readers (and cut down on annoyingly clueless comments).

Patheos generally asks us not to use words that are commonly considered profanity. Functionally, however, we only police the headlines and Excerpts. Within posts, especially avoid using profanity in a way that is abusive toward other people (such as in name-calling). Patheos acknowledges that what is “profanity” to some groups is normal English usage to others (have you read the Patheos Atheist channel?), so if your usage is appropriate to your audience and to the tone of your post, it won’t be a problem.

Although materials on sexuality or sex education are welcomed, materials that are intended to arouse (such as narrative descriptions of sexual acts) are probably not appropriate for Patheos. If you wish to post something on sexuality or any other sensitive topic and you are not sure if it is appropriate, please check in with me about it first.

Controversial posts are welcomed, but if you are deliberately poking any bears, I appreciate a heads up about it first. Please especially check with me if you have any doubts about a post’s appropriateness for the venue; I can make sure that my supervisor and I have your back before you put it up. I am also happy to help you edit for tone or cut out unnecessarily inflammatory statements that might distract from your main point.

When answering comments, remain professional and keep your temper. I advise against answering comments while angry – wait, and freeze the comment thread if necessary. Although we encourage you to engage with readers whose views are different from your own, feel free to block or blacklist commenters who are harassing, especially if they engage in name-calling, profanity, or other clearly abusive behavior. You may also reach out to me for advice at any time or to adjust the moderation options on your blog. (We can, for example, put particular users on permanent moderation, or put all comments on moderation.)

What neat optional features for my blog are available? What would you recommend?

We can:

1. Make your headshot and bio appear at the bottom of every one of your posts (this is especially good for group blogs). You’ll need to upload a headshot to Gravatar in order to set this up, and then I can have the tech turn that feature on for your Wordpress user account. You can edit your own bio in your Wordpress profile.
2. Advertise your books in a tab or widget
3. Add drop-down menus that sort your posts by Categories
4. Change your blog colors or set a background graphic
5. Make your blog’s home page show Excerpts for each post rather than the first few lines
6. Add pages to your blog that host your Amazon store, FAQs, calls for contributors, etc.
7. Set a “sticky” post that always stays at the top of your home page

And much more. If you want a feature but don’t know if it’s possible, ask me – I’ll find out if I don’t know.

Why does it sometimes take so long to get technical problems addressed?

For those of you who haven’t had any problems: yay! For those of you who have, I’m sorry that some problems take time to solve. Here’s the skinny:

I am admin on all the Pagan blogs, which run on Wordpress. I can fix a lot of things, but if the fix requires a super-admin, I need the help of a tech person who literally maintains every blog on the site. She’s a busy lady.

I can also edit the landing page, which runs on a CMS (content management system). The CMS is pretty complicated to use, so I have very limited privileges. (Some author pages and columns also run on it.) If

something on it goes wrong, I have to put in a ticket to the other tech person, who maintains every CMS page on the site and also does all the graphic design.

So, basically, fixes are slow because the tech team is ridiculously small. Religion writing is not that lucrative a business! So if you have technical issues or need updates, please be patient – things I can fix can often be addressed quickly, but if I have to get help, there's usually a long line in front of me.

My blog is catastrophically broken! What do I do?

Since I'm very part-time as Managing Editor, if you ever have an emergency technical issue with Wordpress, please feel free to write directly about it to blogops@patheos.com and CC me.

Non-emergency issues can come to me directly (I may be able to fix them without involving our overloaded techs).

What other resources are available to me to help me as a contributor?

1. Private Facebook group for Patheos Pagan Writers (announcements and discussion)
2. Private Facebook group for Patheos Writers (announcements only, low traffic – good for being alerted to site-wide series)
3. Patheos Contributor's e-mails (you should all receive these monthly – let me know if you don't)

Please let me know if you'd like to join either FB group.

What can I do to help the Pagan channel thrive?

- Write regularly! Write regularly! Write regularly! (Remember, not every post has to be substantial – a link with commentary, a Top Ten List, or an image with comments can all make good posts)
- Encourage readers to subscribe to your blog's newsletter or the Pagan newsletter (subscribe from [the landing page](#) or from the widget just to the right of your blog header)
- Publicize posts on social media and mailing lists (your own and others that interest you)
- Share posts from the Patheos Pagan FB page or Google+ page, or comment or like a post (in particular, comments cause FB to show the post to more readers)
- Publicize other Patheos Pagan bloggers' calls for contributors when they happen
- Check out the Entertainment Channel and Book Club and let me know if you write something related to the topic of the month
- Participate in site-wide topics when they're announced
- Read each other's posts and respond in your own blogs (or read and respond to writers on the rest of the site)