

Episcopal priest quits after Druid embrace: William Melnyk repents and recants

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One member of an Episcopal clergy couple who came under fire for embracing pagan worship has recanted and resigned his Pennsylvania pulpit, while his wife also apologized but expects to keep her job.

William Melnyk, known in pagan circles as “OakWyse,” resigned as rector of St. James’ Church in Downingtown after begging “for the mercy of the church and of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The resignation was a “mutual decision” between Melnyk and parish leaders and was accepted November 6, said Jeffrey Brodeur, a spokesman for Bishop Charles Bennison of Philadelphia. In a letter to Bennison, Melnyk also resigned as a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids.

“I was wrong,” Melnyk wrote to Bennison. “I repent and recant without qualification anything and everything I may have said or done which is found to be in conflict with the baptismal covenant and the historical creeds of the church.”

Melnyk’s November 4 letter was publicized by the Institute on Religion and Democracy, a Washington-based conservative organization that criticized the couple for their ties to paganism. Brodeur verified the letter’s accuracy.

Melnyk’s wife, Glyn Ruppe-Melnyk, known in pagan circles as “Raven,” issued a similar apology but will continue serving as pastor of St. Francis-in-the-Fields Church in Malvern, Pennsylvania. Bennison issued a “pastoral direction” against her, which is similar to a “cease and desist” order.

“She’s not having the issues with her parish that he obviously ran into,” Brodeur said. “She continues to serve as rector.” He added that the bishop currently has no plans to ban her from the diocese.

Melnyk said he was hoping to help lapsed Christians reconnect with the church, pointing to the shared roots between Druid and Celtic religions and the “British heritage” found in the Anglican tradition. He thanked critics for “helping me to see the truth.”

The couple first came under fire for a “women’s Eucharist” written by Ruppe-Melnyk that was posted online by the church’s Women’s Ministries division. After the uproar, the office removed the liturgy, citing copyright concerns. Institute on Religion and Democracy officials said they were “grateful for his humble and direct letter. We hope that the leaders of the . . . Office of Women’s Ministries will likewise repent of that office’s promotion of neo- paganism.” *-Kevin Eckstrom, Religion News Service*