



Becoming a Buddhist Prison Chaplain

The Buddhist Council of NSW (BCNSW) appoints and provides support to its Buddhist chaplains who visit NSW correctional facilities on a periodic basis. Buddhist chaplains who visit correctional facilities provide pastoral care to inmates, including not only those who are already Buddhists but also those who are inquiring or just beginning to explore an interest in Buddhism.

Chaplains can run individual and group instruction in the theory and practice of Buddhism, as well as provide guidance with reading matter and free literature on Dharma and meditation. Prison chaplains make a valuable contribution to the people they see and can help inmates transform their lives and take a more positive direction.

Many of those helped by prison chaplains have had difficult lives and an upbringing that may have limited their opportunities to find a spiritual path. A prison chaplain provides encouragement and can teach simple forms of meditation that inmates can use to bring calmness and clarity to their minds. Due to the lack of Buddhist chaplains in some correctional facilities, the Buddhist Council is looking to appoint more Buddhist chaplains.

Prison Chaplaincy Selection Guidelines

Introduction

These guidelines have been developed to provide a set of standards for the selection of chaplains practicing within prisons. The Buddhist Council of New South Wales (BCNSW) is responsible for appointing chaplains in accordance with the agreements and guidelines in place between the Civil Chaplaincies Advisory Committee (CCAC) and the relevant government authorities.

As the recognised body for Buddhist chaplaincy within NSW, the Council has a duty of care and responsibility to ensure that Buddhist chaplains entering prisons under the



guidance and support of the BCNSW have been adequately selected and provided with the necessary support.

Correctional centres are unique environments and chaplains need to be adequately trained. To ensure candidates are of a suitable character and temperament and possess an adequate knowledge of Buddhism, the BCNSW will evaluate them against the following criteria:

- Completion of the 40h Introduction to Clinical Pastoral Education course
- Mandatory letter of reference verifying continuous Buddhist practice of 3 years under a recognised teacher
- Mandatory minimum age: 30 adult correctional centre, 20 for juvenile correctional centre
- The ability to convey Buddhist teachings in a practical manner that can be understood by prisoners

Strongly recommended:

- Undertaken a course of meditation and regularly practicing meditation
- Trustworthy, patient, empathic and supportive of inmates in their rehabilitation

Additional possible qualification:

- Direct experience relevant to spiritual/pastoral care, e.g. counselling, advising, coaching, teaching

The process of appointment to a correctional centre includes the following steps:

1. Verification of the need for Buddhist chaplaincy at a corrective services facility
2. Interview by the Council Chaplaincy Coordinator
3. Letter of appointment from the Council
4. Criminal record check
5. Security Awareness Course
6. Orientation at corrective services facility with local chaplaincy team



In addition to ensuring the above selection criteria are met the BCNSW will ensure that new chaplains are supported with adequate material and offered guidance from more experienced chaplains. As part of this support new chaplains should accompany an existing prison chaplain (chaplain mentor) for a minimum of four visits prior to undertaking their own placement. This gives the opportunity for the proposed chaplain to gain guidance and raise any questions on how to work within the prison, as well as the mentor to give feedback to how they are progressing.

After appointment to a chaplaincy position the Council will continue to monitor the chaplain's progress to ensure they are adequately supported and provided with the opportunity to request any further advice or materials they may need to complete their duties.

In addition there is an expectation of intent on the chaplain's part of:

- Working in harmony within a multi-faith chaplaincy team
- Acceptance of strict procedures and protocols of Corrective Services Chaplaincy (the administrators of chaplaincy within Corrective Services)
- Willingness to provide spiritual and pastoral care for Buddhists of all traditions and cultures
- Avoidance of proselytising and pressure to convert
- Willingness to develop own chaplaincy capabilities through in-service sessions arranged by the Council and Corrective Services Chaplaincy

The BCNSW as an organisation is responsible to support all appointed chaplains by:

- Ensuring they have adequate training and material to meet the responsibilities of their position
- Representing them to the CCAC in any requests they may have
- Allocating a fair stipend as made available through the CCAC to support their expenses in carrying out their duties