

Buddhist Ministry Working Group Meeting
March 23-26, 2017, Upaya Zen Center, Santa Fe NM
By Elaine Yuen, PhD

In March 2017, the Buddhist Ministry Working Group convened at Upaya Zen Center, in Santa Fe, NM for three days of conversation, collaboration, and contemplative practice. This meeting was part of a series of meetings hosted by Harvard Divinity School – as a conference at Harvard in 2015, a meeting at Naropa in 2016, and in 2017 as a residential retreat at Upaya. This year we met at Upaya Zen Center, and enjoyed time to dine, practice, and converse together. Next year Harvard Divinity School will be convening a larger conference on April 26-28, 2018.

The common theme for these gatherings has been the training Buddhist ministers, or chaplains. As Buddhist ministry or chaplaincy is relatively new in the west, our conversations have centered around topics such as paths of Buddhist training and how they might (or might not) appropriately meet the professional standards for service which are often rooted in Western paradigms.

Over our three days together, we contemplated and dialogued around questions such as:

- What is right livelihood?
- What are our Buddhist theological foundations?
- Is there a particular Buddhist epistemology – or way of knowing?
- What are our different paths as Buddhists, and how are they articulated?
- What is the common ground we share as institutions and faculty?

As a follow-on to this meeting, Elaine Yuen has been working with Daijaku Kinst, Jitsujo Gauthier, and Leigh Miller to author a white paper on endorsement for Buddhist chaplain candidates and students. Buddhist students and caregivers who aspire to become interfaith chaplains and employed in medical settings increasingly consider board certification through a professional organizations such as the Association of Professional Chaplains (APC). Part of this process with APC involves endorsement of the chaplain by their faith group (this is true for all chaplains who seek board certification not just Buddhists.) This white paper discusses issues regarding endorsement of Buddhist chaplains (link to article).

As the gathering drew to a close, we agreed that for the next year there would be four primary directions: 1) advocating for and developing partnerships for Buddhist chaplaincy with professional chaplaincy accrediting bodies such as APC; 2) developing a clearinghouse (potentially web-based) among participating Buddhist institutions that would provide information and sample syllabi / activities; 3) hosting a larger conference at Harvard Divinity School in April, 2017 that would invite participation from a larger group of faculty and students; 4) continuing to seek funding that would support longer-term goals and activities.

Participants included faculty from
Harvard Divinity School (Cheryl Giles, Julie Gillette, Chris Berlin, Emily Click)
Naropa University (Elaine Yuen, Judith Simmer-Brown, Phil Stanley)
University of the West (Jitsujo Gauthier, Victor Gabriel, Monica Sanford)

Institute of Buddhist Studies (Daijaku Kinst)
Maitripa College (Namdrol Adams, Leigh Miller)
University of Toronto (Ciulan Liu, Pam McCarroll)
Rigpa Spiritual Care Program (Kirsten DeLeo)
Upaya Zen Center (Joshin Byrnes)
Won Institute of Graduate Studies (Gloria Nouel)

