



BUDDHIST COUNCIL OF VICTORIA



**ANNUAL REPORT 2019 / MARCH 2020
NEWSLETTER**

President's report

The year 2019 is ending soon and the BCV is heading toward a more wish fulfilling year for the Buddhist community in Victoria. As the Buddhist Council of Victoria has proven its reliability, the Victorian government continues to seek the involvement of the BCV to communicate and inform the wider Buddhist community on issues of significance, of changes to the law and to seek input on matters of concern to the community.

There are many ongoing projects which require the prolonged commitment of everyone in the Executive Committee. A state government funded project on Domestic Violence project is now underway with the engagement of a part time project officer. This has seen the BCV moving to a higher level of challenge with more commitment of time and resources. Dinesh, Michael, Di, Kris and Laura are all involved in one way or another. The completion of this project will see an awareness of Victorian law translated into a Buddhist context for a more approachable and greater protection of every Buddhist resident, living in this state.

The provision of services to those in prison continues to be an important part of the work of the Council. More than 70 inmates took refuge in the Triple Gem and hundreds of Buddhist books were donated to the prisons. Buddhism studies is popular in some prisons, and demands that our staff often work beyond their allocated hours. Likewise spiritual health services to those in hospital are an important service and support, coordinated through the Council, that provides comfort to many.

BCV has maintained its good relationship with other religions, ranging from individual practitioners to institutions, with its consistent commitment to many interfaith activities: the FCCC annual conference, the Sikh conference and the Interfaith Humanity Walks at Swinburne University and Melbourne city respectively. Dr Diana Cousens regularly participates in the Multifaith Advisory Group, an important advisory group to the Victorian Premier. BCV continues its partnership with the Victorian United Nations Day of Vesak, focusing in particular on the celebration of interfaith at the Vesak Ceremony.

While the achievement in areas of interfaith and chaplaincy are on the bright side, the Buddhist Special Religious Instruction (BSRI) work is not, due to its circumstance. The Education Department has not changed their policy and the provision of religious instruction in schools continues to be challenging. I would like to

May Buddhism be part of every Buddhist's moment of life while being able to contribute more for the wellbeing of everyone in the society

thank the committee and the instructors who have persevered in the few remaining schools for their commitment. The BSRI needs to revise the constitution to bring the management board to a closer working arrangement with the BCV executive committee and will, in the New Year, engage in discussions over how the scope of the program may be broadened.

VEN. THICH PHUOC TAN

There are many people I would like to thank for their contribution, if not to say sacrificing their personal and family time for the benefit of other sentient beings. Last but not least, I would like to thank Laura and Dharma Drum Mountain for allowing BCV to solely utilise the whole Mitcham property to open more dharma activities and housing several new staff working for the new project.

May I take this opportunity to congratulate Michael Wells who has been elected as the Chair of the Federation of Australia Buddhist Councils. While helping BCV to stay in focus, his involvement will assist FABC in its work in the various Australian states. May the good health walk in parallel with its master to fulfil his vows.



Ven. Thich Phuoc Tan
President

May Buddhism be part of every Buddhist's moment of life while being able to contribute more for the wellbeing of everyone in the society.

A word from the Treasurer

A major source of BCV income, around \$95,000 was from the prison and healthcare chaplaincies and similarly the largest portion of outgoings, about \$88,000 has been in this area as well. Following ratification of the committee of an earlier decision a small percentage of income from these programs is retained by the BCV and directed toward our administration costs. Overall, for the year, BCV had a loss of approximately \$6,800.00.

The principal grant received in late June has been \$80,000 from the Department of Premier and Cabinet (Multicultural affairs) for a project in regard to family violence. This project has now commenced. Additional funding will be provided as the project advances. Many thanks to Dinesh Weerakkody for his extensive work on this matter which took quite some time from initial conception to grant fruition. DPC also contributed a further \$2,000 which was for the conclusion of an earlier project.

I would also like to acknowledge the generous donation of the Pure Land Learning Centre which is greatly appreciated. Income from memberships decreased slightly this year but a number of temples paid outstanding dues which assisted our overall budget situation. Combined with donations and miscellaneous income collected, it has helped contribute towards the running of the office and various projects including interfaith activities, temple tours, and support for volunteers.

It is also important to acknowledge the support by Laura Chan toward our premises in Mitcham without which we would not have a permanent base.

As noted in the last two years, the changes in government regulations for the Buddhist Religious Instructions in Schools program presented many challenges for our Education Program Sub-Committee. The program is much smaller in scope than previously but has managed to continue due to the generous donations of time by volunteers, and funds from a group of dedicated supporters. Unsurprisingly there is now only a small amount of donation income directed to the BSRI. If the program were to resume at any significant level BCV would need to look toward additional fund raising activities in this area.

At the last AGM, although our accounts were tendered and approved, a fully audited set of accounts was not yet complete. It was agreed that the audit would be undertaken and provided to members. A copy of that audit is available at the AGM for perusal and a hard copy will be provided on request to member temples.

Finally I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Josephine Chong without whose assistance I would have been unable to fulfil my role as treasurer.

Michael Wells
Hon. Treasurer

Buddhist Council of Victoria 2019-2020 Committee of Management

Cover photo: Back row (l to r): John Gair, Laura Chan, Dinesh Weerakkody, Diana Cousens, Michael Wells, Kris Elleperumaarachchi

Front row (l to r): Ven. Chi Kwang Sunim (convenor, library project), Ven. Thich Phuoc Tan President and Ven Hojun Futen (spiritual care programs)

Interfaith and Community Affairs

It has been very energising to rejoin the BCV and participate in many activities over this past year including rejoining the Multi-faith Advisory Group and addressing a multi-faith gathering at the Heart of St Oswald's church to endorse the Makarrata Commission and a First Nations Voice to Parliament.

I attended many meetings including a multifaith gathering with an Indigenous focus on the Uluru Statement from the Heart at St Oswald's church in Glen Iris in February and endorsed the aspiration to establish the Makarrata Commission and a First Nations Voice to Parliament.

I gave a talk for the Ahmaddiya Women's Group in Pakenham on religious harmony as a pathway to a peaceful society. I asked, what is harmony? I proposed that the foundation for religious harmony is understanding and respect and with those qualities we can find ourselves in tune with each other and together we will contribute to building a harmonious society. Dinesh Weerakkody later gave a talk to the same group.

Linda Marrett also contributed to our interfaith activities and participated in the interfaith lunch which forms a part of the UN Vesak celebrations. She also spoke at the Sikh Vaisakhi Day celebrations at Federation Square and assisted in organising the interfaith dinner at Manningham Council which I, Linda and Laura Chan attended on Harmony Day.

One of the biggest Buddhist events of the year was the International Conference for Buddhist Women, held in June in the Blue Mountains. I attended as an invited speaker and was pleased to participate with Buddhist women from every country in the world in which the Dharma is practised.

In October I attended a roundtable on religion and human rights organised by the Australian Human Rights Commission and the University of

Divinity. I gave a paper on one of the three aspects of the perfection of generosity, the generosity of giving freedom from fear, in relation to refugees in particular, and I noted Buddhist historical and iconographical evidence of giving freedom from fear and protection from unjust rulers. This paper is set to be published in an e-book of the day's talks published by the Australian Human Rights Commission.

In November I attended the Australian Catholic University Parliamentary Interfaith Breakfast along with Michael Wells. Speakers included the Deputy Premier, the Hon. James Merlino and the leader of the opposition, the Hon. Michael O'Brien.

Carey Rohrlach, the former chair of BSRI, has been a long time member of the Glen Eira Interfaith Network. Along with GIFEN he organised a successful interfaith event - Awakening Peace - to celebrate and acknowledge the United Nations Day of Peace. This was held at the Buddhist Society of Victoria on 28th September to celebrate the United Nations day of Peace. It was attended by around 60 people. I would like to thank the BSV who graciously provided refreshments and also CityZen who assisted with the organisation.

These were the main events. There were undoubtedly others attended by other members of the BCV and I think we have developed a strong reputation for participation and commitment to community harmony and understanding.

Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils

The FABC is comprised of members from the various state bodies, of which BCV is one. FABC acts as a peak body representing the interests of Buddhists to the Australian government. Meetings are held electronically with linkups six to eight times a year, or as needed. This year FABC has made representation to government on a range of issues, including visas for religious workers, DGR status for religious organisations and chaplaincy training.

However, the most significant issue at present is representation on the proposed Religious Discrimination Act. In August 2019 Cecilia Mitra, the then president, met with PM Morrison and a number of other senior religious leaders and in October Gawain Powell-Davies, vice-president, met with Anthony Albanese, leader of the opposition on the same issue. FABC provided a response to the second exposure draft at the end of January 2020. FABC will continue to provide input. Any submissions on the position which should be taken by FABC are welcome.

Michael Wells

Faith communities supporting healthy family relationships



The Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016) recognised that faith community leaders can play a significant role in preventing and responding to family violence. Violence against women and family violence occur in all communities and settings, including within faith communities. Faith is central in people's lives. We look to faith and faith leaders for social, moral and ethical guidance and support. Through faith we can also form strong social networks based on shared beliefs and respect. Faith-based communities have great potential and capacity to prevent violence against women and family violence and support women and children who experience violence.

The Victorian Government's Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion Division (MASC) is working with the Multifaith Advisory Group (MAG) to deliver a pilot project to understand how faith community leaders can be supported to prevent and respond to family violence. The Buddhist Council of Victoria was chosen to deliver this project to selected Buddhist temples in Victoria. To assist, the BCV have employed a Project Officer, Jessica Wilson. Jessica is a qualified social worker and has experience working for Specialist Family Violence services responding to women and children experiencing family violence, as well as experience working on projects aimed at preventing violence against women. In the coming months, the BCV will be working with training organisations to deliver training to faith leaders and outreach workers in the community to build capacity to prevent and respond to family violence.

If you have any questions or comments about this project, please get in touch with Jessica at projectofficer.bcv.org.au, she would love to hear from you!

Community Programs

Buddhist Special Religious Instruction (BSRI) in Victorian Primary Schools Program

Due to decisions by the Victorian government, which has severely impacted the ability to deliver religious instruction in primary schools the BSRI program has continued to function in a very diminished status. As was noted last year, the program has been effectively taking rest since 2016 with the exception of 2 continuing schools and 4 dedicated Instructors. In addition, after a little over 18 months as the Chair, Carey Rohrlach stepped down on 26 September (although he continued to cover for a volunteer until 24 October). Carey has now headed off overseas to develop his own practice further.

In addition to delivering what classes were possible, the program arranged for the reprinting of the Discovering Buddha resource manuals. Carey has also revised the manual although these revisions are still sitting with the Education department awaiting approval. Carey also arranged for the manual to be allocated an ISBN number and for a copy to be held in the national library (part of the registration process). Finally, a number of training sessions were held for volunteers to keep the flame alight.

The future of the program remains somewhat unclear. A revised constitution will be proposed at the AGM and discussions will be held with the ATO in the forthcoming year. BCV is seeking to enhance the DGR status of the program which would allow Buddhist education programs to be delivered more widely. This process will most likely take some time.

We do need a new committee and these positions will be canvassed at the AGM.

In the meantime, I would like to thank all those who have been involved over the past year. Special thanks of course go to Carey Rohrlach and Andrea Furness, but of course much gratitude also to Gontug Rinpoche, Albert Chang, Prema Kodikaraje, Geeta Miththapala, Punya Paddukkage and Atsuko McQuire.

My apologies should I have inadvertently missed anyone, but in Carey's absence I cannot be sure I have covered everything.

Michael Wells

Spiritual Care

The Buddhist Council of Victoria provides spiritual care within the [health](#) care system and within the [prison](#) system. Spiritual health care was started in 2013 by Ven. Bon Hyom Sunim and has a close association with the Spiritual Health Association, providing pastoral support to persons in hospitals and aged care facilities, either pre- or post-surgery and even palliative care. The prison program has been running for more than 15 years. Spiritual services such as meditation and pastoral counselling for those requiring support are provided to both men and women in prisons across Victoria.

Health

This year we have continued to have a presence at the following health centres: Royal Melbourne Hospital, Eastern Health (Box Hill and Maroondah Hospitals), Caulfield Hospital and Monash Health – Clayton.

Currently we require volunteers for the following health centres: Western Health – Footscray and Sunshine Hospitals, Northern Health – Epping Hospital, Monash Health – Dandenong and Casey Hospitals.

Once again this year the BCV has had representation on Spiritual Health Association's (previously Spiritual Health Victoria) education committee and professional development steering committee.

Many thanks to our Health Spiritual Carers:

- Ani Zangmo McDermott
- Annie Whitlocke
- Christine Maingard,
- Mike Welton
- Anthony Foster
- Angela Scherma,
- Sue Talbot
- Adjunta Judd
- Michelle Tay
- Jim Lavranos
- Kevin Treloar.

Best wishes to Shanaka Gamage who has left us to undertake Bhikkhu ordination in Sri Lanka.

Prisons

A small and dedicated team of spiritual carers continue to visit inmates at all prison and correctional centres across the state. With another correctional centre being built there will soon be a need for more Buddhist chaplains in Victoria's prisons.

The BCV again continues to have representation on both the Chaplaincy Advisory Committee, which looks after the day to day issues of spiritual care in prisons and meets with Corrections Victoria (CV) every three months, and the Leadership Group of Prison Chaplaincy, that looks after contractual arrangements and meets with CV three times a year.

Many thanks to our Prison Spiritual Carers: Anh Nguyen, Libby Mowlam, Chanh Nguyen and Arunamalin

Best wishes to Andrew Williams who has left us to look after family and other commitments.

If I have forgotten to thank any health or prison spiritual carer by name for any work they have done for the BCV please accept my sincerest apologies. Everyone's contribution is always greatly appreciated.

Ven. Hojun Futen

Projects in Development

The Buddhist Council of Victoria is currently looking to make more effective use of its premises in Mitcham. Current projects in development are:

A Buddhist library - BCV has recently received a donation of a sizeable number of Dharma books. We have allocated a space at Mitcham with the intent of developing a Buddhist library. We do not underestimate the work this may involve and are looking for persons who may wish to assist us in setting this up. If interested, contact BCV through administrator@bcv.org.au.

BCV hopes to commence running **introductory meditation classes** from late March. BCV is also able to offer the use of its space for compatible Buddhist groups looking for a space for Dharma practice. If interested, contact BCV through administrator@bcv.org.au.

Victoria Police Multi-faith Council, and Victoria Police Multi-Faith Youth Council

In late October I joined the Victoria Police Multi-Faith Council. Although BCV has had a representative on the multi-faith council for many years, a restructure in early 2019 determined that positions should be held by ordained and clerical members of faith communities. At the request of the Buddhist Council I agreed to take up the role. At the same time, Arosha Perera joined as the youth representative on the youth Council.

Both councils meet twice a year to discuss matters relating to such topics as:

- police involvement in faith community events; e.g. traffic control at U.N. Vesak celebrations
- police response to national and international events that may adversely effect faith communities in Victoria; e.g. community backlash to terrorism
- community education and differing faith group awareness
- access to faith based chaplaincy for Victoria Police members

Ven. Hōjun Futen and Arosha Perera

The Annual General Meeting in October incorporated presentations from Victoria Police, various multi-faith leaders as well as a Q&A panel. Arosha reflected that:

“ ..the AGM was a momentous and thoroughly invigorating experience. The Council, comprised of religious leaders from over 10 different faiths, provided detailed reports of the state of their communities as well as concerns that communities hold in light of international incidents. The sharing of stories, both tragic and blissful brought about an appreciation of the difficulties that multifaith groups undergo in their attempt to thrive in the Victorian community and provided a glimpse of the potential Victoria provides to all cultures and religions.”

Ensuring effective communication between the BCV and Victoria Police will be done via the Multifaith Council as well as the Multifaith Youth Council. Furthermore, BCV organised events and other events on the Buddhist calendar will receive additional support from the Victoria Police in order to ensure safety and security for all members present.

WE ARE LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS

We are looking for new volunteers to join us in providing much needed spiritual care to the Victorian Buddhist community. Prospective carers are required to meet the following conditions:

- Able to offer 1 day/week between Monday – Friday, 9am -5pm
- Provide a reference from a Buddhist teacher who has known the applicant for more than 5 years and certifies that the applicant understands the Dharma well enough to assist others in acute stressful situations.
- Provide a police check that is no more than 3 months old
- Undergo spiritual care training for one day per week for a month.

Anyone who would like further information or would like to join our team of special carers, please contact the coordinator via the BCV website.