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Inside:

Spiritual Health	2
Prison Chaplaincy	2
Buddhist Weddings	2
Healthy Relationships	
Project	3
Covid 19	4

Annual General Meeting - 24 October 2020

We invite all our members to attend the next Annual General Meeting from 2.00 to 4.00 pm on Saturday 24 October 2020. Attendance will be via Zoom and possibly at Mitcham. If you are a member you will be emailed a Zoom log in before the meeting.

In spite of lockdown this has been a busy year and we have achieved many things. One of the most significant is our new role in the State Government of Victoria's Faith Communities Supporting Healthy Family Relationships program. We have a project manager, Jessica Wilson, who is a social worker. She is developing a training package which will be rolled out to temples and is consulting widely in the community on culturally appropriate strategies. See article on page 3.

Based on funding received from the Victorian government for this purpose, we have recently made some modest grants available to member temples to upgrade their audio visual equipment so as to enable remote contact with members.

Congratulations to all those who applied and received grants. We also continue to participate in interfaith programs, prison and hospital chaplaincy, and have a voice with the state government through the Multifaith Advisory Group and with other faiths through the Faith Communities Council of Victoria (FCCV).

A Library for our Mitcham Office

We have received a large donation of Buddhist books from a benefactor, including material from all traditions, some rare and old books and a number of modern volumes. We have been refitting the Mitcham office to make it a really vibrant centre for the BCV and are redeveloping one room as a new Buddhist library. Volunteers are needed to assist with tasks such as cataloguing. After lockdown this will be a resource for the Buddhist community to enjoy.



BCV Committee 2020 back row: John Gair, Laura Chan, Dinesh Weerakkody, Dr Diana Cousens, Michael Wells, Kris Elleperumaarachchi, Front row: Ven. Thich Phuoc Tan OAM, President (centre). **Program Coordinators:** Ven. Chi Kwang Sunim (convenor, library project) (left), Ven. Hojun Futen (spiritual care programs) (right). Not pictured: Jessica Wilson (Healthy Relationships project), Josephine Chong (administrative assistant).



*Ven. Hojun Futen
Prison Chaplaincy
Coordinator*

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Spiritual Health Care by Ven. Hojun Futen

The provision of spiritual care in hospital has proved challenging during the Covid-19 pandemic. One chaplain, Angela Scherma, is currently continuing weekly visits at the Royal Melbourne Hospital but visits by other chaplains to other hospitals have now ceased. I remain on at-call for all other hospitals.

I've had a number of phone calls and emails from various hospitals for information on how to assist Buddhist patients during their inpatient stay.

Funding for the program is provided through Safer Care Victoria. Earlier in the year, it appeared this funding may come to an end, but it has now been agreed that it will continue for the present financial year, albeit with a review of expenditure in December.

We are limited in what we can do during the pandemic, but it is an appropriate time to review and update some of the documents already produced by the BCV. We have decided to:

- A review and re-print of our Buddhist healthcare guide to include a new section of infectious diseases.
- A review and re-print of our death and dying pamphlet and bringing it more in line with palliative care guidelines.

These activities fall under healthcare and as such we can use our funding from SHA to fund them as well as the resource that is our chaplains while they are not visiting. It may also be helpful to attract people with suitable skills to assist with these projects while I oversee and sign off on the work being done.

Prison Spiritual Care

The situation with prison has been somewhat fluid during the pandemic. All prisons apart from two regional prisons were serviced during the pandemic in the April – June quarter.

We then moved to a situation where all services in prisons were on-hold, but one-on-one visits with inmates were still permissible. These visits were held in a screened area without direct contact between the visiting chaplain and the prisoner (known as a box visit). However these visits have now also been ceased. Currently chaplains are using Zoom video calls to provide spiritual support and guidance to inmates in most of the State's prisons.

Buddhist Weddings

BCV Committee Member, Dr Diana Cousens, has recently been appointed as a marriage celebrant. She is keen to work with individuals and temples on developing Buddhist weddings. Contact her at sunyata@84000.co

Faith Communities Supporting Healthy Relationships by Jessica Wilson

Violence against women and family violence occur in all communities and settings, including within faith communities. Faith-based communities have great potential and capacity to prevent violence against women and family violence and support women and children who experience violence, however most faith leaders report that they do not feel they are equipped to respond to disclosures of family 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.

The Covid-19 pandemic has increased women's vulnerability to all forms of gender-based violence. Stay at home orders and restrictions on movement has seen an escalation in the risk and severity of family violence globally. The faith communities supporting healthy family relationship project developed Family violence help cards with information about family violence and support services. So far the cards are available in English, Chinese (simplified and traditional) and Vietnamese. Go to <https://bcv.org.au/buddhist-family-violence-pilot-project/> to view the cards.

While there have been some activities delayed by COVID-19 there are some important activities that are proceeding, such as the development of resources in community languages and the establishment of a Buddhist female leadership focus group.

If you would like to know more about the project, contact Project Officer Jessica Wilson at projectofficer@bcv.org.au.



Jessica Wilson
BCV Project Officer
Healthy Relationships Project

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Apply to join as a member of BCV or - if your temple's membership has lapsed - renew at:

<https://bcv.org.au/membership/>





Ven. Thich Phuoc Tan
BCV President
Abbot of Quang Minh Temple
in Braybrook

Victorian Coronavirus Hotline: 1800 675 398

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>

Coronavirus Mental Health Support 1800 512 348

<https://coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au/>

Family Violence Support 1800 015 188

<https://www.safesteps.org.au/about-us/contact-us/>

For places of worship

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/religion-and-ceremony-metropolitan-melbourne-covid-19>

A Buddhist Response to the Covid 19 Pandemic

Message from BCV President, Ven. Thich Phuoc Tan.

This is a challenging time for everyone. I am writing from Melbourne, Australia, which is in Stage 4 lockdown and this has meant that only essential shopping or medical appointments are allowed. Meanwhile we have a daily death toll of about 20 or more people and a daily infection rate of about a hundred. In almost every other country, things are much worse. This is a terrible plague and I cannot imagine the suffering that is going on at the moment at a global level.

To understand the current crisis I think we need to see it in the context of a number of other emergencies. Covid 19 has come at the same time as dramatic increases in global warming and large scale climate emergencies such as catastrophic bushfires and hurricanes. No serious scientist disputes that global warming has been increased by the human contribution that comes from industrialization. The whole planet is affected by Covid 19 and the whole planet is affected by global warming. We can no longer imagine ourselves as able to build some kind of national or domestic 'gated community'. These crises point to our interdependence with everyone and everything else. An almost invisible virus overseas shifted from the animal world to the human world and is now everyone's concern. While acknowledging the terrible human cost, I am hoping that this pandemic provides the opportunity to genuinely contemplate our interdependence, and in Sanskrit the word for that is *pratityasamutpada*. This is a central concern in Buddhism. We say that ignorance is the failure to understand the connectedness of everything.

For too long modern nation states have acted as though they could somehow succeed independently of the rest of the world, and we can see that playing out with some countries wanting to own any successful vaccine for Covid 19. This is the point of view of ignorance. If Covid 19, or smallpox, or polio, or TB, is anywhere, then it is a potential danger to everyone, and it is in everyone's interest to work for the common good and see it eradicated. We share one world, one air, one breath. Similarly, we need to learn from this pandemic that healthcare must be universally accessible. The provision of healthcare is one of the most important and basic functions of any government and letting any group of people fall through the cracks is not only unfair and unjust, it also creates vectors of contagion. It is in everyone's interest to provide healthcare to all.

There have been some positive experiences during this pandemic. In Melbourne, the homeless have been given housing and in Australia the unemployment benefit was lifted to a liveable income. These have been, in many ways, major achievements, because previously governments have treated homelessness and the provision of a liveable income as impossibilities. From the point of view of action on climate change, with all the air travel stopped for some months, there has been a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. This has also shown that the impossible is possible. The experience of the pandemic has shown that we can act at a global level and we can address global problems. We can work together for a vaccine and share it when it becomes available. These are all positives. Also, the transmission of the virus from wild animals to humans has highlighted the exploitation of wild animals and has brought that greater scrutiny. It is to be hoped that this exploitation can be stopped. The pandemic provides the whole world with the opportunity to reflect on our connectedness with each other. It demonstrates that we are not separate from nature and countries have only arbitrary borders. I hope that we can own this sense of connectedness and find ways to work for the common good.

Translated resources on coronavirus from the State Government of Victoria

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/translated-resources-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>