

## Book review

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### *The Arts of Contemplative Care: Pioneering Voices in Buddhist Chaplaincy and Pastoral Work*

Edited by Cheryl A. Giles and Willa B. Miller. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012, vii + 345 pages, ISBN 978-0-86171-664-7 (cloth), \$34.95.

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B o o k   R e v i e w

***The Arts of Contemplative Care: Pioneering Voices in Buddhist Chaplaincy and Pastoral Work.*** Edited by Cheryl A. Giles and Willa B. Miller. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012, vii + 345 pages, ISBN 978-0-86171-664-7 (cloth), \$34.95.

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This pioneering book makes important contributions to conversations about Buddhist ministry and chaplaincy taking shape in universities, divinity schools, Buddhist organizations and among Buddhist practitioners in the west. Cheryl Giles and Willa Miller, the editors, met in the summer of 2006 through shared work in Harvard University's growing Buddhist ministry program. They began to co-teach and work together around prison, hospice, chaplaincy and other kinds of pastoral work from a Buddhist perspective. This book is a reflection of their conversations with each other and leading Buddhist practitioners about what Buddhist ministry is, how Buddhists do chaplaincy work (and what the Buddhist equivalent of the word chaplaincy is), how to offer contemplative care, and what it means to be a vocational Buddhist in the West.

Beautifully conceived and written, I read *The Arts of Contemplative Care* slowly to digest and ponder all that its authors have to offer. This book "shares the work of courageous contemporary Buddhist practitioners in the West," as Judith Simmer-Brown writes in the Foreword, "who bring the depth of their meditation practice into direct service in their work as chaplains" (xiii). Drawing from personal practices of daily meditation, most act as a compassionate presence to those in need attending to them and sometimes teaching loving-kindness meditation. The editors conceive of contemplative care as "the art of providing spiritual, emotional, and pastoral support, in a way that is informed by a personal, consistent contemplative or meditation practice," (xvii) while acknowledging that not all authors use this concept to describe their own work.

The first set of essays focus on the roots of contemplative care and raise questions about it as a discipline. Jennifer Block offers her own approach to Buddhist chaplaincy while Daijaku Judith Kinst reflects on how to best train and support Buddhist chaplains and pastoral care providers. Additional chapters provide powerful examples of how Buddhist chaplains are doing their work—and responding to tensions they encounter in the process—and how training programs and teachers are preparing them to do it. In the second set of essays, authors describe their work as healthcare chaplains and how they bring meditation and care to technologically sophisticated modern hospitals. Authors connect their work to Buddhist teachings and traditions while showing how they approach the patients, staff, and families they serve, typically as interfaith chaplains.

The third and fourth sections of the book focus on prison, college/university, and military chaplaincy settings. Dean Sluyter writes thoughtfully about his relationship with Gary, an inmate he met while volunteering as a Buddhist chaplain at Northern State Prison. Other chapters offer similarly rich stories of human connections Buddhist chaplains have developed through prison and university work. Here and throughout the book, chaplains also reflect on what it means to be the first Buddhist members of their professional organizations and how they conceive of their work in interfaith settings. Thomas Dyer, the first Buddhist U.S. Army chaplain, shows how he put the Army Chaplain Corps motto, “Provide or Perform” into practice in Iraq and Afghanistan as a low density chaplain or one with few who share his faith tradition.

The final two sections of the volume focus on Buddhist care for the dying, a place Buddhist practitioners have often worked, and the pastoral role of the dharma teacher. Joan Halifax’s chapter reminds those working with the dying of the importance of community while numerous other chapters demonstrate this importance in story and reflection. The volume’s final chapters offer examples of how Buddhist communities provide pastoral support to their own.

The stories and insights woven through this volume touched me deeply as someone who has spent significant time as a researcher in Buddhist communities and with healthcare chaplains. I was struck early in my time with chaplains by how many were importing Buddhist practices but how few actual Buddhist chaplains there were. I hope this book enables those interested in Buddhist chaplaincy or pastoral care—in its many forms—to find insight, inspiration and teachers who can help them continue to develop the arts of compassionate care.