

Spiritual Care Coordinator Course AVG, Saylorsburg

by Urmila Shivaram

Chaplaincy is a new concept to us Hindus. The practice of Hindu dharma in India is very different. Our religion is practiced in our homes, or at temples or private events- which are usually conducted by priests. Those who are interested in fulfilling their spiritual needs go to gurus and swamis. But here in the West, the society demands that our religious tradition be represented in the public forum- like health care institutions, public meetings, boys scouts meeting, events at schools and college campuses etc. Trained religious people- chaplains - from all the other major religions are frequently at the bedside of sick and dying patients , speaking at public meetings and blessing on social occasions. Chaplaincy is of two broad types. There is a two-year full time course during which one is trained in all religious traditions and then one can be employed as a chaplain in a health care facility or the military etc., and serves as a chaplain for all religious traditions. The second one is a Spiritual Care Coordinator -who is certified by a particular religious institution after a defined amount of training in that tradition, will then be available to volunteer their services to serve people in that tradition.

A Spiritual Care Coordinator course for Hindus was held in September 2011, at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam in Saylorsburg. It was the first of its kind in USA. It was a certificate course with 22 hours of credit,

held on the beautiful grounds of the gurukulam in Saylorsburg. The course was named Dayalu by Pujya Swamiji. The purpose was to empower people to provide caring to the public based on our scriptures and religious traditions. It is essential to communicate the depth of understanding of our dharma through compassion. The course was led by Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati. Sadhvi Chaitanya was the main teacher who taught about Hindu tradition. Sri Suddhatmaji , sister Annelle Fitzpatrick, Dr Prem Khilanani, Smt Anju Bhargava, Dr Urmila Shivaram, Smt Rathi Raja, Dr Abha Agrawal, and Dr Jaishtee Subramani were the faculty members.

Over fifty people attended the weekend retreat. Many worked in health care settings. Many people who attended the course were already doing some sort of seva and wanted to learn more and be formally certified to render their services. Many were there because they saw the need to connect without expecting anything in return.

The post conference review was very favorable. Most participants- in fact all the responders loved Sadhvi's talks and found them to be most helpful. They requested more information on anesthetic- the last ritual. They also loved the chanting sessions with Suddhatmaji and requested more chanting classes.