

Ministry of the Solicitor General
and Correctional Services
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DIRECTIVE
Reference

Office of the Provincial Managers
Immediately
Operating Directorate
Correctional Services Division

Effective

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Subject: **Aboriginal Spirituality**

To: District Administrators
Superintendents
Area Managers

INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of the Solicitor General and Correctional Services recognizes the importance of addressing the ethno-cultural needs and traditions of Aboriginal offenders.

Aboriginal spiritual practices have been encouraged and supported by the ministry for a number of years. The present directive is designed to ensure consistent application of ministry policy on Aboriginal spiritual practices in provincial correctional facilities and should be read in conjunction with the Adult Institutions Policy and Procedures manual. It updates the text entitled "Native Spiritual Services".

POLICY

The ministry is committed to providing spiritual care to Aboriginal peoples in a manner that recognizes and encourages their religious traditions and accords Aboriginal spirituality and practices the same status and protections afforded to other religions.

AUTHORITY

Ministry of Correctional Services Act, section 5, ref. "Functions of Ministry," section 9, ref. "Volunteers," and section 25, ref. "Rehabilitation Programs"

Canadian Charts of Rights and Freedoms, section 1, ref. "Rights and Freedoms in Canada" and section 2, ref. "Fundamental Freedoms."

Ontario Human Rights Code part 1, ref. "Freedom from Discrimination."

DEFINITIONS

Smudging- a purification or cleansing ceremony using one or any combination of the four sacred medicines (e.g., sweetgrass, sage, cedar and tobacco).

Smudging ceremonies generally precede all spiritual activities, including prayer. Times of the ceremony usually coincide with sunrise and sunset.

Medicine bags or pouches- under the guidance of an Elder, a medicine bag is generally prescribed for a person seeking mercy, protection or guidance of the spirits. The pouch usually contains plant materials, such as roots or herbs, dried animal parts, and sometimes tiny pebbles. Ideally, a medicine pouch should remain with an individual at all times for the medicine to be most effective.

Elder, Healer, or Spiritual Leader- Distinguished man or woman well known in the Aboriginal community with the gift of wisdom, healing and/or spiritual leadership. These individuals are not always signified by age and do not always possess the same gifts.

PROCEDURES

The institutional chaplain, or in the absence of a chaplain, the regional coordinator of Chaplaincy services shall facilitate Aboriginal spiritual activities and observances in consultation with the institution's senior administration.

In addition to the general spiritual care provided by institutional chaplains, an Aboriginal inmate shall, on request be permitted access to an Aboriginal spiritual leader, Elder or Healer through visits. The visits shall be during reasonable hours and subject to the superintendent's normal control of visits to the institution.

Individual and group ceremonies both play an important role in Aboriginal spiritual practices. Opportunities to participate in traditional communal worship ceremonies shall be provided to Aboriginal inmates when an Aboriginal spiritual leader, Elder or Healer is available. Communal ceremonies may include sweat lodge ceremonies, healing circles, pipe ceremonies and the celebration of the seasons. Sweat lodges on ministry property will normally be regarded as temporary structures. In the absence of sweat lodges, superintendents shall

encourage alternative spiritual observances in consultation with an Aboriginal spiritual leader, Elder or Healer.

The four sacred plants used in individual and group ceremonies are sweetgrass, sage, cedar and tobacco (natural or commercial tobacco, or red willow shavings called kinni-kinnick). The burning of any one or combination of the four sacred plants (sweetgrass, sage, cedar or tobacco) is a daily practice for those involved in Aboriginal spirituality. Upon request or at the request of an Elder, an inmate shall be provided with at least one braid of sweet grass for daily devotional use. The time and location for burning of sacred items in an institution shall be determined by the superintendent in consultation with an Aboriginal spiritual leader, Elder or Healer.

Following clearance by the Chaplaincy department, and where necessary, the security manager, an individual may be provided with a medicine bag and other sacred items during visitation by an Aboriginal spiritual leader, Elder or Healer. The medicine bag shall be allowed to remain with the inmate at all times during incarceration. For security purposes, a medicine bag shall not be bound to a leather strand around the neck or fastened by sharp objects. With the exception of the medicine bag and sweetgrass, all Aboriginal spiritual items shall be held in an area designated by the Superintendent in consultation with an Elder when not being used. The medicine bag and sweetgrass shall remain with an inmate in his/her living unit.

A "Native Spirituality Information Kit" has been provided to all correctional facilities for reference and identification purposes for ministry staff.

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