

## Profile of Rev. Darlene Nipper

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Promoting IMCW and its programs throughout the metropolitan area is a key priority for Reverend Darlene Nipper, our sangha's new Executive Director. Darlene also believes that increasing cultural diversity and strengthening IMCW's infrastructure will be critical to its ongoing viability. Reverend Nipper is an ordained interfaith minister who goes by "Darlene" in everyday conversation.

Darlene has been attending all of the ongoing IMCW sittings during her initial weeks as the new Executive Director. According to Darlene, it is important to allow community members to get to know her and for her to get to know the many generous-hearted people who make up our vibrant community. "This is the first step, learning, listening and sharing with others, which will assist me in identifying priorities and moving forward." Creating a space for compassionate communication throughout the organization is something that Darlene feels will go a long way toward helping IMCW continue to evolve as a community.

IMCW faces unique challenges along with its numerous opportunities as a spiritual community in Washington DC. Darlene characterizes DC as a hyper-busy and extremely intense metropolitan area with many, many residents who are experiencing enormous strife. "The good news is that people seem to be seeking practical tools for living happy, joyous and healthy lives. People are looking for freedom."

In Darlene's view, that's where IMCW enters. The Insight Meditation Community of Washington is uniquely positioned to extend the Buddha's teachings and practices to all those who are interested. So how does diversity fit in? The people in the DC area who might benefit are from various spiritually, culturally and/or ethnically diverse backgrounds. They are people from many different walks of life. "The question is ... how do we provide these teachings to such a diversity of people and when will we know we are succeeding?" Darlene says, "When we can see cultural diversity throughout all aspects of the organization from its leadership to the folks on the cushions we will know that we have begun to turn a corner."

Darlene cautions that having visible diversity in itself doesn't capture the true meaning of multicultural inclusion. IMCW must 1) offer programs responsive to the overall diversity of the Washington area, 2) ensure that the values implied by multicultural inclusion are reflected in the organization's mission and vision and that those values are demonstrated throughout IMCW's programs and initiatives. Over time, we hope to work towards meeting the needs of all of our community members, including those who traditionally have been marginalized.

While the issues of strengthening community, building infrastructure and increasing diversity may seem far apart to many, Darlene believes it all comes together when a vibrant and growing community like IMCW galvanizes its resources to joyfully meet its mission. "That's where we are headed and I am proud to be here during this transformational period."

Darlene has an extensive background in leading nonprofit organizations and helping them create policies and programs that result in increased diversity. She has worked as the Director of the Office of LGBT Affairs for DC Mayors Fenty and Williams, was the executive director of the BET Foundation, COO for The National Alliance on Mental Illness(NAMI), and has held a number of other leadership roles in local and national health organizations. Darlene has an undergraduate degree in Spanish from Howard University and a Masters Degree in Nonprofit Management from Trinity University in Washington, DC. In 2006 she received her ordination from One Spirit Interfaith Seminary in New York City where she had a chance to "study many of the world's wisdom traditions" and had the opportunity to "focus on the intersections of core beliefs across these traditions, while developing the ability to work with people across different belief systems."

At the suggestion of a friend, Darlene started attending IMCW's Wednesday night classes In 2003. "I anchored my own spiritual practice by attending the Wednesday night sessions and also have my own daily meditation practice which I combine with my 12-Step recovery of nearly 22 years."

She would love to have you come up and say hello next time you see her. It is a "pleasure and an honor to step in and galvanize the community and to explore what it means, what it looks like to be this community of diverse people who all respond to these teachings in a similar way. It's just a great time to be here, so I'm very excited."