

The following guidelines are offered to assist facilities in accommodating those who wish to practice the Native American Traditional Ways (NATW). The authority for these guidelines is Policy Directive 05.03.150 "Religious Beliefs and Practices of Prisoners." Appreciation is extended to Native Americans in the community who serve the MDOC as consultants and advisors in this area.

Information is arranged topically for clarity.

1. FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS:

Generally, sweats are scheduled intermittently. They may be scheduled according to cycles in nature and season changes. Sometimes sweats are scheduled in relationship to personal reasons for celebrations. A Sweat lodge ceremony may last one and one-half or two hours. This time is in addition to sweat lodge preparation time which may take up to two hours. Not more than two prisoners are needed to prepare for the sweat.

Pipe ceremonies, drum ceremonies and talking circles may be scheduled regularly. NATW prisoners should be scheduled to have the same amount of meeting time that other groups have. However, because of the length of time required for a sweat (up to two hours), their hours may not be scheduled the same each week or each month.

2. PIPE CEREMONIES, DRUM CEREMONIES AND TALKING CIRCLES

A. Pipe Ceremonies and Drum Ceremonies should be led only by qualified community volunteers who have completed the facility volunteer orientation training. Pipe Ceremonies must be led by a Pipe Carrier, Elder, or Medicine Man or Medicine Woman. These ceremonies include smudging and the use of medicine plants. The act of smudging and the use of a ceremonial pipe is a religious rite. It should be allowed in space that is appropriate for religious services.

B. In facilities which allow prisoners to lead services under the supervision of the chaplain, it is appropriate to schedule Talking Circle meetings without a volunteer presence. A Talking Circle may include personal testimony, a personal story, a discussion group where Native American Spiritual understandings are taught, shared, and/or discussed. Literature, cassette and video tapes may be used in a Talking Circle.

Smudging will be allowed for a talking circle. Any of the four allowed medicine herbs may be used for smudging the meeting place. These medicine herbs should be stored in a secure place.

Appropriate amounts of medicine herbs for each service should be dispensed by the chaplain or chaplain's staff designee. If an eagle feather has been given to the group, it should be made available for group services. Individual prisoners do not possess an eagle feather. It is not expected that all groups/sites will have an eagle feather. The eagle feather is sacred. Between services, it should be stored in a cedar box in a secure place (locker or cabinet). The chaplain should have a key. The only additional key to the storage area for sacred items should be kept under seal.

C. A prisoner may dance alone to teach or demonstrate Native American Dancing in a Talking Circle. Group dancing should not be allowed for a talking circle. Native American Dancing is allowed for ceremonies when a drummer and drum are available.

D. During a Talking Circle, it is permitted to pray over tobacco, followed by the scattering of the tobacco in the Sweat Lodge area, if the facility has a sweat lodge.

3. SWEAT LODGE CEREMONIES

A. Sweat Lodges will be permitted only in Level I, II and III facilities and for Level I, II and III custody levels in multilevel facilities.

B. A Sweat Lodge Ceremony will only be conducted by an authorized religious volunteers who has been through the facility volunteer orientation program.

C. Only male volunteers will be allowed to conduct a sweat in a male facility. Only female volunteers will be allowed to conduct a sweat in a female facility.

D. Because fasting is a part of a Native American Sweat Lodge Ceremony, no special meal accommodations will be made for those prisoners participating in a Sweat Lodge Ceremony.

E. A Sweat Lodge storage area should be provided. Items to be kept in the Sweat Lodge Storage area to be used only for sweat lodge ceremonies include the following:

Towels

Rug

Rocks (Approximately 12 6"-8" rocks are needed. A secure site should be provided to store extra rocks.) If smaller rocks are used more will be needed.

Old Blankets

Bucket and Dipper

Kindling Wood

Cedar Wood

Shovel to handle hot rocks

Flint and Striker

Wooden Staff (not more than one inch in diameter and not more than 6 ft. long)

Lodge Poles

Tarp or Blankets to cover lodge

Colored Ribbon steamers (not more than one inch by six inches to decorate pole.)

Medicine Plants: tobacco, sage, sweet grass and cedar

Lodge Poles

4. COMMUNITY PIPE:

The Community Pipe, also called a Ceremonial pipe, usually measures approximately 12 to 14 inches long. It is an ornate and is used only in Religious Ceremonies such as Pipe Ceremonies and Sweat Lodge Ceremonies. A community Pipe belongs to the people and therefore no one may own one. The outside Native American Community authorizes a person to carry a Community or Ceremonial Pipe. Therefore, a volunteer will carry the pipe into the facility for an NATW ceremony. Because prisoners are not allowed to serve as clergy even if qualified to do so (Policy Directive 05.03.150. Section T), a prisoner cannot be a Pipe Carrier and cannot possess a Community Pipe. A community pipe will not stored at the facility. It will be brought by the volunteer each time it is to be used.

Furthermore, prisoners are not allowed to possess a "personal pipe." Possession of a personal pipe is not required for Native American Traditional Worship.

5. MEDICINE HERBS:

The four allowed medicine plants are sage, cedar, sweet grass and tobacco. Only Sweetgrass may be burned outside the NATW group meeting or the immediate Sweat Lodge area. Group owned medicine plants will be stored in the group's storage area. They will be dispensed by the chaplain or the chaplain's staff designee during normal group meeting hours. Only sufficient medicine plants for group smudging should be issued. Group medicine plants may also be dispensed equally to all detailed members who are present, and in amounts small enough to fit in the individual prisoner's medicine bag.

The traditional way that medicine plants are received is through a gift. The volunteer may bring the plants as a gift. Medicine plants purchased by individual members must be purchased from an approved vendor. Sweetgrass may be possessed in a sufficient quantity for individual smudging. An individual must purchase other medicine plants in quantities that will fit in the individual's medicine bag unless the facility arranges to store excess plants in the chaplain's area.

If a prisoner desires to smudge in his or her cell, only Sweetgrass may be used.

6. MEDICINE BAGS

A Medicine Bag may be possessed by a prisoner. It may be worn or carried at all times. It is a sacred object that is necessary for prayer. The medicine bag may be kept by a prisoner on segregation status. It may be taken on a visit and will be shaken down following the visit. A medicine bag is small, measuring not more than three by five inches when lying flat. In addition, it may have a drawstring or cord to keep it closed.

Each NATW prisoner may make or purchase a Medicine Bag for personal possession. If one is purchased, it must be purchased from an approved vendor. If one is to be made, it should be done in one of the following two ways:

A. The prisoner may purchase the leather and bag contents from an approved vendor. The NATW volunteer may conduct a class in which the volunteer oversees the process of assembling the bag and contents.

B. The prisoner may make a medicine bag as an approved Hobbycraft project at those facilities where Hobbycraft leatherwork is approved. Materials (leather, beads, fur, etc.) must be purchased from approved Hobbycraft vendors. A prisoner may make only his own medicine bag in hobbycraft.

Contents of the bag may include small quantities of any of the medicine plants (sage, sweetgrass, tobacco, and cedar). It might also include protection medicine such as a small pebble or piece of vegetation (twig, leaf, etc.) if those items have special significance to the prisoner.

7. SHAKEDOWN OF PRISONER'S MEDICINE BAG:

The medicine bag and its contents are considered sacred. A shakedown of a medicine bag must be done with respect. Whenever a staff member shakes down a medicine bag, (s)he should not touch the medicine. (S)he should require the prisoner to take each item out of the bag and display it separately, so that (s)he does not touch any of the contents of the bag. (S)he must assure that all items are removed from the medicine bag. (S)he must assure that nothing is being concealed in the bag. Because the medicine bag is sacred, it should be treated respectfully.

8. DRUMMING/DANCING:

Drumming and dancing are considered to be spiritual practices. They will be allowed only during NATW scheduled services. No prisoner may own a personal drum. If a drum is to be used for ceremony, it will be brought into the facility by the volunteer, or stored by the facility in a secure area. The drum must be constructed so that it may be easily searched.

9. SHAKEDOWN OF VOLUNTEER AND BUNDLE:

Male volunteers will be shaken down by male officers and female volunteers will be shaken down by female officers. Volunteers may bring their bundle into the facility. The bundle may include the following items:

Ceremonial Pipe
Tamp (bone awl) to clean pipe
Medicine Plants (tobacco, sage, sweet grass, cedar)
Matches or flint and striker
Eagle Feathers
Leather Pouch
Animal furs, animals bones, talon
Bundle of small stones
Punk wood
Towel for sweat lodge
Wooden bowl
Rattles
Tobacco ties
Vegetable compounds
Eagle bore whistle
Abalone or Clam Shell

These items should be manifested into and out of the facility. For a male volunteer, these items should be shaken down only by a male officer. For a female volunteer, these items should be shaken down only by a female officer. During a shakedown of the bundle, if an item in the bundle is in question, the volunteer will be allowed to take the item to their locker or vehicle and secure it. Items in the bundle are sacred. While conducting the shakedown, care must be taken to respect all items. The proper procedure is to not handle items, but to allow the volunteer to pick up each item so that it can be visually examined.

10. OTHER ITEMS:

A. A Clam Shell or Abalone Shell is used for smudging for group activities. A shell may be stored at the facility and made available for group activities. When not in use it must be stored in a secure place.

B. Beads and necklaces are not spiritual items and are not used for spiritual purposes. They are most often used by Native Americans as an identification item. While they are nice, and Native Americans wear them, they are not religious property.

C. Flags are not a part of spiritual practice. However, short ribbon streamers may be attached to a pole as noted above in the list of items allowed for a sweat ceremony.

D. Flutes are not a part of spiritual practice. Rattles are used by some Native American Groups. If a rattle is allowed, it should be used only for ceremonies. Between ceremonies it should be stored in a secure area.

E. Blankets are not a part of spiritual practice, other than for use for warmth or for sitting upon in a sweat lodge. No special blankets are needed.

F. Animal parts such as fox tails and raccoon tails are not spiritual items and are not allowed for prisoner possession for use.

11. VOLUNTEERS:

It is important that volunteers who lead spiritual ceremonies be recognized as qualified to do so by community Native American spiritual leaders. The Special Activities Coordinator, Office of Program Services is expected to maintain contact with those community leaders. S/he should be contacted so that spiritual leadership credentials can be verified.

12. VENDORS:

Each facility should approve a vendor for the purchase of Native American medicine plants and other items. Religious items should be purchased only from the approved vendor. Suggested vendors include the following:

Noc Bay Trading Company
P.O. Box 295
1133 Washington Avenue
Escanaba, MI 49829

Little Wing Trading Co.
P.O. Box 271
1104 Niles Avenue
St. Joseph, MI 49085

DB:naguidelines