

Buddha's Gate Open in Lafayette

By Andrea A. Firth



Buddha Gate Monastery in Lafayette

Photos provided

Tucked away in the northeast corner of Lafayette on several acres of hilltop land is the Buddha Gate Monastery—a retreat for local Buddhists and those new to Buddhism. Many residents of Lamorinda are unaware of this religious community, but its location is no secret. A sign for the Buddha Gate Monastery is displayed prominently on Taylor Boulevard across from the turn at Withers Avenue, and additional signs lead one through the winding roads of a residential neighborhood to the entrance to Buddha Gate off Gloria Terrace.

In fact, the all female group of Buddhist Masters who reside at the Monastery are delighted to receive both the experienced and novice Buddhist. “The purpose [of the Monastery] is to provide a place for people to access and approach Buddhism easily,” states Master Jian-Sheng, the Abbess of Buddha Gate Monastery.

According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, approximately 0.7% of adult Americans identify themselves as Buddhists—a statistic

that includes several groups such as Zen, Tibetan, and others. Almost half of the Buddhists in the United States reside in the West, and the number of individuals affiliated with the Buddhist tradition in California approaches 2% of the adult population. The monthly ceremony held at Buddha Gate is attended by up to 120 people, and the regular membership consists of approximately 100 individuals.

Buddha Gate Monastery officially opened its doors in October of 2000. The area was first owned and developed by a Catholic Church over 50 years ago who then sold part of the land for residential development. The remainder served as the location of another Buddhist organization for about 10 years prior to the arrival of Buddha Gate.

Ten Buddhist nuns along with a few lay Buddhist women live and work at the Monastery. The nuns or Masters all originate from the Chung Tai Chan Monastery, the parent-monastery in Taiwan. Each has extensive training in the practice of Zen Buddhism promoted by the

Grand Master Wei Chueh.

The gates of the Monastery open at 8:30 each morning and members and guests are invited to participate in classes on Buddhism and meditation conducted in both English and Chinese. In addition to the Sunday morning ceremony held each month, the Buddha Gate holds half-day and full day Zen Retreats. “We hope to create an environment for reflection,” states Master Jian-Sheng, “and we hope that people can immerse themselves in the environment.”

For those interested to learn more about Buddhism and new to the practice, Master Jian Sheng suggests attending the Beginner Meditation classes currently held on Thursday evenings from 7:30 to 9:30 pm. There is even a Saturday morning meditation class for children who range in age from three to 15 years of age. Master Jian-Sheng smiles broadly and notes that meditation with a three-year old presents an interesting challenge. Call to inquire or register (925) 934-2411.