



## Frequently Asked Questions

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## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is the history of your organization?**

A Sacred Passing (ASP) is a 501C-3 nonprofit founded as an educational resource for those seeking to learn more about death, grief, and dying-- as well as a space to build skills for those who choose to become death professionals, such as a doula or midwife. This organization was created in 2013 by Ashley Benem. Ashley was an EMT who wanted to shift the ways that we met death. Ashley used her experience as an EMT, massage therapist and a witch, to create the first written doula curriculum in the United States. In Bellingham, ASP also cultivated a collective of doula's who worked alongside the organization and provided death care to clients for a fee; this program was stopped in July 2019 after Ashley left the organization. Since then, the organization has shifted in a variety of significant ways.

A Sacred Passing transitioned from Bellingham to creating a base in Seattle in January 2019 and the nonprofit has blossomed alongside many other death professionals, caretakers, and educators. The Une Bonne Mort conference further elevated our work in Seattle and has opened many doors for the future of the nonprofit, including fundraising, NODA volunteer training, and advocacy. Our programs have expanded in the past two years to include the South Seattle No One Dies Alone (NODA) program, Listening Line, A Place to Die, and our growing selection of introductory and continuing education courses.

ASP has trained over 500 people in death care, doula skills, and support skills. This is in part a result of the small and large individual donations and volunteer labor contributions of the board of directors, and a variety of incredible educators, providers, community organizers, and helpers. As we continue to deepen our commitments to community-centered death education, ASP will continue to pursue funding in order to keep our courses accessible, including working toward sustainable low-cost options and scholarships for low-income Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), and centering queer and trans people of color (QTPOC).

### **Where is A Sacred Passing (ASP) located?**

A Sacred Passing serves the Pacific Northwest and those throughout the country that participate in educational offerings through online opportunities, social media, and video teleconferences. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we held-in person death-care education classes in Washington (Seattle and Bellingham), and provided services in homes, recovery centers, senior centers, schools, tent cities, shelters, parks, and coffee shops.

ASP's core volunteer team currently lives in what has come to be known as Seattle, WA. This land is the stolen ancestral home of the Duwamish and Coast Salish Peoples, in a country built with the stolen labor of Africans and with the integral contributions of many immigrant communities. We recognize the ways the United States settler-government continues to



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contribute to this violence through investments in war, policing, and massive displacement of low-income residents and businesses.

We name history and present patterns, not out of political correctness, but as a way to make visible an origin story that still greatly impacts the communities we serve and the wounds that exist between us. This violence must end for death care to truly be safe, autonomous, and good. It's past time to work together toward change. We are committed to working toward a more liberative and collaborative future together. We are grateful to have you join us today.

### **What makes ASP unique from other death care education organizations and programs?**

A Sacred Passing's curriculum is created to center the values of choice and accessibility. Each course available taught death care through storytelling, multimedia art, hands-on skills, and relationship building. ASP's training programs provide a comprehensive understanding of death and dying, while also helping death companions to understand consent, accountability, and intersectional, community centered care work. These courses benefit both experienced death care workers (doulas, companions, death midwives, etc.) and those who are just beginning.

We have found that small groups create imaginative spaces where we can build relationships, collaborate in care work, grow community, and learn from each other. Our courses are facilitated by skilled doulas and educators, and students learn within a small group setting to promote students' ability to process and remember the materials, as well as a chance to learn through self-reflection and identity building.

Our curricula provide an opportunity to develop relationships within your cohort, as well as the broader community, including resources for continuing education and opportunities that prepare doulas to engage in death work in a variety of environments. ASP courses include hands-on training, course work, self-study, reading, experiential training, and opportunities for professional mentorship for a range of students who aim to support their communities directly, volunteer with a non-profit, or build careers.

### **What values guide your approach to education?**

A Sacred Passing's mission is to guide and assist people towards a more conscious dying experience while honoring their individual autonomy. We work to create and sustain inclusivity in our classrooms and resources by building anti-racist and gender-inclusive environments, educational materials, and community partnerships. We work actively in communities to dismantle systems of power and oppression as they present in dying and death by providing relevant, factual, and accessible education, both non-medical care and advocacy, and ensuring the inclusion of all. We need educational systems to change.



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A Sacred Passing centers Black and Ingenious voices, the voices of LGBTQIA+ humans, and identities that have been systemically and historically oppressed. We want to ensure affordability and increase access to quality, accessible, inclusive educational opportunities for these historically underserved communities. Those that receive training from A Sacred Passing seek community in systems that have not been designed to see them and to serve them well. Collectively we want all humans to have access to quality death care, no one to die without care, and to support the people who love and help care for the dying.

### **What is included in your training for death doulas and companions?**

A Sacred Passing's training programs provide a comprehensive experience that benefit both those who are experienced death-care workers (doulas, companions, death midwives, etc.) and those who are just beginning.

Our curricula provide an opportunity to develop relationships within your cohort, as well as the broader community, including resources for continuing education and opportunities that prepare death workers in the capacity that they see fit. ASP courses include hands-on training, course work, self-study, reading, experiential training, and opportunities for professional mentorship for a range of students who aim to support their communities directly, volunteer with a non-profit, or build full-time careers.

### **How can I become a death doula?**

You might already be! A Sacred Passing understands that death companions work in a variety of settings and with a variety of clients. Currently, there is no federal regulation of the doula profession and no universally accepted competencies.

Whether you seek to learn about death care for the first time or to grow your skills, A Sacred Passing's curriculum might interest you. Descriptions of courses are listed on [our website education page](#). If you are interested in continuing education and community conversation spaces, see [our event calendar](#) and [eventbrite page](#).

Other organizations teach death doulas from their own curricular models. A Sacred Passing is a nonprofit organization based in traditional Duwamish land (Seattle, Washington). [Learn more about us here](#). Other organizations' curricula differ from one another in a wide variety of ways, so compare ours with others to find the best fit for your interests, and please reach out to us if you have more questions.



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### What thoughts do you have about doula certification?

Certification is a *choice*. Currently, there is no federal regulation of the doula profession and no universally accepted competencies. All death-care workers should know that at this time, all certifying organizations and programs are offering a *program-based* standard, which is not the same as a professional credential. Though many programs offer certifications to demonstrate completion, no one is legally required to be certified to practice as a death doula (doula, end-of-life doula, death companion) in the United States.

A Sacred Passing understands that death companions work in a variety of settings and with a variety of clients. Certification is not for everyone and, for some, creates barriers to practice. Our board of directors values the importance of naming certification for what it is, a tool to legitimize ancestral work in the eyes of the state. Some state legislation proposes regulations regarding doula certification that aims to increase access to families who could not otherwise afford services, but implementation often means reproducing a system of [gatekeeping](#). It is our belief that certification doesn't necessarily reduce harm, but [accountability](#) and authenticity in the community can do that.

### Can I hire a doula or find employment with ASP?

ASP does not have any employees or doulas on staff. Instead, we have limited project-based contracts and opportunities for collaboration. After nine years as a completely volunteer-run non-profit organization, we are working to grow our fundraising, programming, resources, volunteer training, and more, in order to increase access to our death-doula programs, translate content to other languages, pay our curriculum creators a living wage, and continue to provide educational opportunities, resources, and death support to the public for low/no cost.

A Sacred Passing also doesn't currently maintain a registry of the community members who have completed our death care education program. ASP can also support people in getting connected with a resource for finding death care professionals, please email [info@asacredpassing.org](mailto:info@asacredpassing.org) for resources. Our organization often partners with [Pearl Collective](#) doulas for educational events. We recommend interviewing multiple people before choosing a person that best fits your needs.

### In what ways can I collaborate or volunteer with ASP?

A Sacred Passing is a 501(c)(3) organization. Volunteers within ASP do a variety of things, including serving on the board of directors, building curriculum, sharing resources, or supporting our programs such as Listening Line, A Place to Die, and No One Dies Alone. If you would like to share your resources, skills, collaborate on an event/project, or get involved please introduce yourself to us by emailing [info@asacredpassing.org](mailto:info@asacredpassing.org).



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### **Who are ASP's community partners?**

Our Board of Directors comprises a variety of backgrounds and draws upon connections to organizations and partnerships within their lives. This includes members who are experienced and/or educated in supporting end-of-life care, death/dying, children and youth, birth and postpartum care, racial justice advocacy, writing, artwork, and spiritual and/or faith-based work. In addition to sharing their perspectives, our board often shares resources, skills, and advocacy to create a symbiotic relationship between volunteer work with ASP and other communities.

A Sacred Passing hosts a regular community education and debriefing space with representatives from other death-care organizations, including National Home Funeral Alliance (NHFA), End-of-Life Washington (EOLWA), People's Memorial Association (PMA), and Radical Death Studies (RDS). We intentionally uplift each other's work, communicating across organizations and creating opportunities for organizations with shared values to check in and hear about each other's respective educational goals. For example, we recently collaborated with facilitators from the Compassionate Listening Project to develop and implement volunteer training for the Listening Line.

A Sacred Passing also provides death and dying education to community programs, associations, and medical organizations such as Bailey Boushay House, Public & VA Hospitals, Recovery Cafe, Sex Worker Outreach Program, and within our Community Death-Care Education programs. We are humbled to be a part of the following associations: Pearl Collective, National End of Life Doula Alliance, National Home Funeral Alliance, WA State Health Advocacy Association, and C-TAC (the Coalition to Transform Advanced Care).

### **Does your organization collaborate with medical professionals?**

A Sacred Passing offers accessible death and dying education to individuals, community associations, and medical organizations. We educate, collaborate, and share ways to be supportive educational companions for those studying to be death doulas, those who are dying, and those who are caring for them.

Our long-term goal is to deepen partnerships with medical practitioners to provide care to dying people that speaks to what they want, elevating a return to whole-person, community-supported care that more fully holds both dying persons and the people supporting them, care that is accessible, consensual, mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual. We would like to see changes in the health system to promote greater collaboration between medical and nonmedical care. We know that full care -- care that is consensual, mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual -- has the greatest benefit. It's time to start doing more of that.



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### **How is death related to choice?**

Freedom of choice within all aspects of holistic care, including death care, is a human right. Every person has the right to decide what to do with their own body, without restriction by any authority, be it individual, organizational, or governmental. Each person is responsible for self-accountability. In the context of death care and companionship, valuing choice means believing that every person has the basic human right to decide when and in which way they would like to engage in or reject any care option. A provider or companion who values choice can help a person create an action plan to fulfill their objectives and, if needed, find a supportive care team.

### **Does ASP support the study of psilocybin in end-of-life care?**

A Sacred Passing offers accessible death and dying education to individuals, community associations, and medical organizations. The ASP mission is to educate, collaborate, and support those studying to be death companions and/or death doulas, those who are dying, and those caring for them. We offer education both online and in-person, and our crew is primarily located in Duwamish tribal land (Seattle, WA). A Sacred Passing's mission is to guide and assist people towards a more conscious dying experience, while honoring their individual autonomy.

A Sacred Passing advocates, alongside End-of-Life Washington (EoLWA) et al., for terminally ill patients to have access to psilocybin-assisted therapy. We work in communities to dismantle systems of power and oppression as they present in dying and death by providing relevant, factual, and accessible education; non-medical care and advocacy; and inclusion of peoples from historically and/or systematically marginalized communities. Our long-term goal is to deepen partnerships with medical practitioners to provide care to dying people that speaks to what they want, elevating a return to whole-person, community-supported care.

For all of these reasons, we advocate on behalf of an individual's "Right to Try," as codified in both federal and state law. (See 21 U.S.C.A. § 360bbb, et seq.; RCW 69.77, et seq.) In 2017, the Washington State legislature enacted "Right to Try" legislation and correctly noted that terminally ill patients "should be permitted to pursue the preservation of their own lives by accessing available investigational drugs," and that decisions about the use of available investigational drugs should be made by each individual with consultation from their health care provider(s).



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### **How has ASP changed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Our deepest concern is for the community members that were/are unable to access in-person death care. The pandemic has highlighted the need for medical providers to have community support in caring for and supporting the dying and their loved ones.

A Sacred Passing responded quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic by redesigning our curriculum for an online space. This included gathering and structuring software/programs and creating materials in multimedia formats (video, audio, written, etc.). We found it possible to build enrollment, create warmth and connection in virtual courses and volunteer training, and gather feedback to adapt, improve, and update these experiences regularly. Our geographic reach has expanded, and we have more people attending our training than before. Our organization will never be the same, and for that, we are thankful.