VOLUNTEER MONTHLY

SAN FRANCISCO ZEN CENTER

***First clean, then zazen.* — Suzuki Roshi**

Thank you for your interest in volunteering at SFZC's City Center and/or Green Gulch Farm. We have a variety of volunteer opportunities available and are happy to find one that aligns with your interests, talents, ability, and availability.

Your first step is to fill out the short application form on our website. Once we receive your Volunteer Application, we will connect you with a staff member who will provide more information, answer any questions you may have, and help schedule your first volunteer shift.

Volunteering is a wonderful way to step more deeply into community life and discover more about yourself and your practice. SFZC treasures our volunteers, several who have been coming for years (even decades!) to help bring practice and the teachings of Suzuki Roshi to all who seek them.

Featured volunteer program: San Francisco County Jail Meditation

Contact: by email at hiro.ikushima@sfzc.org or by phone (415) 401-5658

What the volunteer work involves

Most participants are new to meditation. A typical session includes 15 to 30 minutes of guided meditation. I often begin with a simple body-awareness practice, inviting people to notice physical sensations and return their attention to the present moment. After the meditation, there is time for questions, sharing, and conversation. Sometimes participants simply want someone to listen. A full session usually lasts about 45 to 60 minutes.

This work has been very meaningful to me. Some participants have been incarcerated for long periods, and even a short meditation session can offer a chance to slow down, feel grounded, and have a supportive human connection.

Qualifications

Volunteers are required to have an established personal meditation practice and should feel comfortable guiding a simple meditation for a small group. Formal ordination, chaplaincy credentials, or previous work in a jail are not required. Just as important are patience, respectful listening, nonjudgment, and the ability to maintain appropriate boundaries; new volunteers can shadow existing sessions before leading on their own.

Locations, schedules, and group size

SFCJ #2 - 17th & Bryant Streets (city jail): Mondays, weekly or every other week, 5:15-6:30 p.m. Attendance varies from week to week. Sometimes only one person comes; other weeks there may be five, eight, or even around ten. Because many people are held there for shorter periods, there are often new participants each week. At the same time, a few people remain longer and attend regularly.

SFCJ #3 - San Bruno: Monday, Tuesday, or Friday afternoons, weekly or every other week, 1:00 -2:15 p.m. The housing unit I currently work with is made up primarily of veterans. Usually about three to five people attend. People there tend to be held for longer periods, so the group is more consistent. Over the past six months, at least two or three of the same participants have attended regularly.

Women are welcome to volunteer

At the moment, I am working only with male incarcerated people. However, there are also women's housing units where meditation could be offered. Women who are interested in volunteering are very welcome, and it would be wonderful to expand the program so that more incarcerated women can also have access to meditation.

Getting started

The jail clearance process generally takes one to two months. Interested volunteers are welcome to contact me directly. I would be happy to answer questions and arrange opportunities to shadow a session before taking on a group independently.

Socks for Our Neighbors

Saturday, November 14 from 2:00–4:00pm

Join the SFZC Outreach Team in distributing socks and other helpful items during Socks for Our Neighbors. Socks will be unpacked and organized into care kits. We will sit together and set our intention, followed by tea and cookies. Those who choose to do so will be paired with a buddy and head out to offer the socks and warm engagement to unhoused folks in the neighborhood.

New pairs of adult-size socks may be brought to this event, or dropped at the SFZC offices at 300 Page Street on weekdays between 9:30 am and 4:30 pm, or when attending any City Center event. Donated socks should be new and preferably white. Socks and Hot Hands can also be sent via Amazon; please choose items from this selection of bulk socks and hot hands.

Send to:
SFZC
City Center Attn: Ellen
300 Page St
San Francisco, CA 94102

Open Sangha Monday November 16

Monday November 16, 4:00–5:00 pm
Contact: outreach@sfzc.org

Food and Meditation for Our Unhoused Neighbors

Food Preparation: 4:00–5:00 pm City Center (Conference Center at 308 Page St.)
Buddhist Service and Food Distribution: 6:00–6:45 pm Civic Center (Leavenworth at McAllister)

Open Sangha is a non-denominational outdoor Buddhist service, held monthly. Everyone is welcome. After service, there is fellowship and a meal. We invite people to participate at any level of comfort. People come as they are, in whatever state they find themselves.

Attendance at meditation is not required to receive a meal or private conversation. City Center Outreach hosts the meals and jointly facilitates the service with SF Night Ministry.

Clara House family shelter support

Contact: outreach@sfzc.org or irenedonner@gmail.com

Our longstanding relationship with Clara House has expanded to offer after school tutoring and homework assistance.

We continue to accept gift cards for families in transition. Volunteers are also welcome to assist at holiday events held several times a year.

Purchase holiday gift cards for Clara House Families:
https://www.thegiftcardshop.com/catalog

Please request the card be sent to:
SFZC
Attn: Outreach
300 Page Street

San Francisco, CA 94102

Doan Ryo

Weekdays at 5:30 pm and Saturdays at 8:50 am
Contact Michael at ccino@sfzc.org

The Doan Ryo is a collection of people who work closely with the Ino to take care of the meditation hall and help with service. They play the timing instruments, clean the altar, assist the priests, and lead the chanting. Dates and times depend on availability. All are welcome, especially people new to practice. No experience necessary!

Kitchen

Monday–Friday, 9:30 am and/or 4:00 pm
Contact Michael at cctenzo@sfzc.org

We need help in the kitchen! Join the kitchen crew for meal prep and dish washing. Volunteers are welcome to drop in or reach out by email.

Gardening

Saturdays, November 14 and November 28, 11:30 am–3:30 pm.
Contact Heiko Lake, San Francisco Zen Center Garden Manager, at ccgarden@sfzc.org

We will be feeling the shift of the seasons—milder days, cooler evenings, and the gradual return of rain. The shortening of the days is upon us. In the courtyard, the redbud and Japanese maple have begun to shed their leaves, and the scent of California autumn is in the air.

This month we'll continue to revive existing plantings in front of 300 Page and and we'll aerate and amend the ground throughout the garden. We'll be adding new plantings in the courtyard and perhaps in front of 300. We hope to complete the patio and landscaping work in front of the conference center as well as aeration and adding/moving a few plants there.

You are invited to come and go as fits your schedule. We start at the Garden Shed in the Rear Courtyard for our bow-in and orientation.

Thank you for your care and intention in the garden. Each small act of tending supports the larger rhythm of the practice and the atmosphere that sustains it. Come join us getting the garden set for winter!

Saturday Lunch

Dates: Saturdays, November 13 and November 20
Volunteer in the kitchen at 9:30 am or 12 pm
Contact Bryan at bryan.clark@sfzc.org

Assist temple staff with lunch prep for the sangha after the Saturday program.

Green Gulch Farm

Kitchen

Wednesday–Sunday, 9:15 am–12:30 pm and 4–6 pm

Contact: ggftenzo@sfzc.org

Help out in the Green Gulch kitchen! For more info, please reach out.

Farm & Garden

Contact: Sara Tashker, farm@sfzc.org or Carolyn Cavinaugh, garden@sfzc.org

The farm is taking volunteers through November and we'd love to have your help. Learn more about volunteering on the farm and sign up for a shift.

Outreach Opportunities

Prison Pen Pal

Contact: sheilaSFZC@gmail.com

Would you like to be a prison pen pal? The Prison Correspondence Team is looking for volunteers with a meditation practice who would like to be pen pals with a person who is incarcerated. All correspondence is anonymous for safety.

Teacher Quote:

“There are, strictly speaking, no enlightened people, there is only enlightened activity.”
—Shunryu Suzuki Roshi

For deeper and more intensive service experiences, you are welcome to apply to our residential Apprenticeship Programs such as:

- **City Center Kitchen Apprenticeship**
- **Green Gulch Farm Kitchen Apprenticeship**
- **Green Gulch Farm & Land Steward Apprenticeship**
- **City Center Temple Care Crew**

Or apply to volunteer at a Tassajara Work Period, held in April and September, for specialists in carpentry, plumbing, electrical, gardening, painting, and general maintenance.

Thank you for your interest in volunteering!

Last update: November 2026