

# 2013 Annual Meeting of Laughing Rivers Sangha

November 16, 2013 at the home of Tony & Michael

## Attendees

Denys (Facilitator), Tony, Michael S, Mike M, Martha, Marti, Laura, Stephanie, Aaron, Kate, Dawn, Red, George, Pat (meeting Minutes), Deborah, Bonnie, Dennis & Deb G.

## Welcome & Introduction (Denys)

- LRS is a Sangha in the Tradition of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, open to all, and following the teachings of TNH. Wisdom of other teachers – Pema Chodren, etc – is welcome. Our primary commitment is to follow the path of mindfulness as taught by Thich Nhat Hanh. Our monastic community resides in Blue Cliff Monastery, NY.
- Mindful Meeting is itself a “practice” – deep listening & loving speech. All were asked to support this practice for the day.

Agenda Items – as shown below. No others were added at the meeting.

## Financial Sustainability

- George provided a review of Income & Expenses comparing 2011, 2012 & 2013
- Year-end Checking Balance has been dropping over last 3 years from \$3828 (actual) in 2011 to \$1936 in 2013 (est). Net loss (Expenses exceeding Income) for 2012 = \$1426; for 2013 Net Loss will be ~ \$425.
- Bulk of Income (78%), and of Expense (92%), is related to retreats, and specifically to costs for Dharma teacher travel and dana. Tuesday night room rent is next largest expense, at \$100/month = ~ 7-8% of budget.
- Marti asked if a greater % of budget could support Tuesday night gatherings and/or other dharma sharing efforts outside of retreats (DOMs?). So noted, but specific discussion was not taken on this point.
- Finance Committee was requested to make such detailed data available in the Members Section of the LRS website, and to send out (perhaps Quarterly) information to the LRS Members about where & how to locate that on the website. *George will get this done.*

## Dana

- Average donations per person has been declining over last few years; loss of some large donors and sagging economy main reasons. Tuesday night dana used to be ~ \$3-4/attendee; now down to ~\$2.00.
- Increasing donations is most basic solution to improving financial health. Proposed approach coming out of the A.M. discussion is 3-fold:

- Annual Pledge Request – seeking members who can commit to a monthly gift pledge (e.g. equal to say \$10 week) either through a mailed monthly check or checking account deduction, or a 1-time annual donation. **Tony stated that he would take this on.** George noted that Bill Meoni can facilitate such automatic monthly deductions.

*It was noted by Deb G and also Marti that we should facilitate gift-giving at several levels so those on fixed income are included without any sense of pressure. Tony gave an example - \$10/week; with 10 folks at \$10/week we'd assure almost \$5000 for the Sangha. However the opportunity will be offered for regulars to pledge in any amount.*

- Dana "Announcement" on Tuesday nights. Much discussion ensued about the pro's and con's of having the Tuesday night Facilitator mentioning a "suggested donation", e.g. \$5.00. *Note: The consensus was that verbally stating a "suggested amount" could make attendees uncomfortable, particularly new attendees and would be distracting.*

*Red proposed that one solution could be a permanent, clear statement about the Practice of Dana (one of the Six Paramitas) – mounted perhaps in a plexiglass frame near the dana basket – which could clarify that "nothing is required, and everything appreciated", and about how such financial gifts support the Sangha. A note about our expense categories, etc. **Red offered to prepare such a document.***

- *Tuesday night Facilitators were sent recommended Dana "ask" statements, in June, to use at the "Announcements" time. **George will reroute those to Red.***
- Announced Availability of Financial Reports
  - *On the LRS website – see last note above under the Financial Sustainability agenda item.*
  - *And occasionally, in paper form, at a Tuesday night Sangha; perhaps 1-2 times/year. **Finance Committee to provide.***

## Retreats

- Issues discussed: Retreat Committee Structure/Challenges; Themes for 2014 retreats; Dharma teacher consistency to promoted retreat themes; possibility of other Dharma teachers; and financial sustainability.
- Structure – Tony discussed difficulties experienced by Retreat Chair persons over the last 3 years in effectively staffing the Ad Hoc Retreat Committees (with much work dropping onto the Chair), and proposed a "standing" Retreat Team, where specific tasks would be "owned" by individuals as follows:
  - *A decision was made to pull together very shortly an **Ad Hoc Team** to help detail the Standing Team roles and to help recruit a Standing Retreat Team.*
- Themes – Tony proposed that 2014 retreat themes might speak to both LRS members and others from differing faith traditions consistent with TNH's recommendation that our practice can "touch and nourish our spiritual roots" including Christianity or other. Deborah and others have been supporting this idea. *General consensus was favorable – Themes to be further discussed by Retreat Team.*

- Dharma Teacher staying on theme – Mike M raised the issue of the relationship of retreat theme and the Dharma Talk. Many points of view were expressed. Discussion followed on the role of a Dharma Teacher on retreat and in relation to supporting the Sangha's practice. We convened an ad-hoc committee to meet twice to deepen our understanding of the role of a DT in Thay's tradition and to explore the evolution of the LRS/DT relationship. This idea tied into the next agenda item concerning possible other teachers. **Denys** will convene the ad-hoc committee.
- Potential for Other Dharma Teachers – Mike M proposed that LRS consider bringing in different Dharma teachers for some future retreats as a means for attracting some new attendees and offering a new perspective; perhaps a female teacher. This decision was added to the ad hoc committee discussing the DT/LRS relationship.
- Financial Sustainability of Retreats – George has looked at approaches from some other Sanghas that seem to be breaking even, or at least have a much lower net loss on retreats. *Decision was made for **George to share** that with the standing Retreat Team once that is assembled.*

### Days of Mindfulness

- Red noted that Dawn had recently hosted a DOM for LRS, which was well received. Another member also hosted a successful DOM at their home in June. The discussion did not address how many/where DOM's would be for LRS in 2014, but **Dawn** did state that she would be glad to advise anyone what is involved as a "host".
- Denys asked if Dawn could consider preparing a write-up for what's involved and put it onto the LRS website. **Dawn will give this suggestion careful consideration.**

### Committee Reports

- No questions existed about the Committee Reports generated and sent out prior to the Annual Meeting. Volunteers are needed specifically for the Continuing Care Committee (CCC), and to assist and back-up the Tuesday Night Set-up & Closing Team.
- See notes at the end concerning other Committees.

## 2014 Visit by BCM Monastics

- The Abbott of the BlueCliff Monastery (LRS' related monastery in NY State) contacted George in August, and asked if LRS could host about 8 monastics in late August 2014 as part of their 6-week Mid-West Tour. The CCC discussed this at some length since August, but did not feel that it could commit anything as this item was not yet discussed before the entire Sangha (at an Annual Meeting).
- Attendees asked George to clarify expectations (costs, housing needs, hosting or events with the monastics). Some work had been done, prior to the A.M. in an attempt to answer this, but all that is known is that about 3 or 4 days would be involved, with some rest, sightseeing and possible Day of Mindfulness. *George committed to find our more and bring this again to the CCC.*

## Engaged Buddhism

- Mike M had asked for this agenda item. Deb G also spoke to this and asked for the issue to be considered. Three questions are implied: What does "engaged Buddhism" mean in the Plum Village tradition? How can our Sangha embody engaged Buddhism? What is the relationship between our practice and social action?
- Time did not allow for a discussion of any substance, but a decision was made to have an Ad Hoc group discuss this and form a proposal that could be brought to the CCC.
- *See Group at end of this report.*

## Announcements

- The November etalk will take place on Saturday, Nov 23<sup>rd</sup>, and will be hosted at Tony & Michael's house at 819 N Highland Avenue, Pittsburgh. An OI meeting, also at Tony & Michael's, will be finishing ahead of this so attendees for the eTalk are asked to arrive after 11:30 a.m. but before our Sign-In at 11:45. Br. Chan Huy's talk is from 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.
- **Tony & Michael** will also be pleased to share a meal on Thanksgiving at their home with those who are not celebrating elsewhere. Please bring something yummy to share. If you will attend, please let Michael or Tony know.

## Committees/Teams to Accomplish Annual Meeting Tasks

- Dharma Teacher & LRS Relationship. **Denys C will** coordinate; plan is for 2 meetings total. Those who agreed to take part: **Martha, Deborah, Deb G, Mike M, Red, Marti & Dawn.**
- Dana Action – (Including Pledge Effort & Tuesday night). **Tony** will pull together. Those who agreed to take part: **Red & George**
- Ad Hoc group to Detail Retreat Team Structure— **Tony** will coordinate. Those who agreed to take part: **Laura, Deborah, Martha, Pat, Mike M. Kate** volunteered to be part of a Retreat Team not for the Structuring Group.
- Tuesday Night Set-up & Close – Volunteers need to provide back-up. Agreed to support: **Stephanie**. **N.B. One additional volunteer is still needed to help Pat with Set-up.**

- Continuing Care (CCC) – **George** is only remaining member, and will Chair. Agreeing to be on CCC for 2014: **Aaron, and Mike M.** **N.B. Two additional volunteers will be sought.**
- Finance Committee – **Bill Meoni** is remaining as Chair, and **Laura** will stay on Committee. George will drop off. **N.B. One new member is still needed.**
- Library – **Mike M** has been interim Librarian since David B left, and is seeking a new replacement. **Marti** agreed to be part of this.
- Communications & Outreach – A new committee. **George** proposed to start and Chair this. Purpose is to refresh LRS website, increase publicity connections and/or other means by which folks hear about LRS, and also to support internal LRS communications needs. **Red** has agreed to take part. **N.B. One additional volunteer will be sought, particularly someone with internet and tech skills.**
- Winter Social – The Member Care Committee still exists. This effort is focused specifically on creating a Winter Social. **Martha** is taking this on.
- Engaged Buddhism Conversation – Those who agreed to take this on: **Deb G, Mike M, Pat, Marti and Kate.**