

LAUGHING RIVERS SANGHA ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES

12/6/15

Present: Tony (facilitator), Martha (bellmaster), Laura, Patrick, Kate, Mike, Jonathan, Natalie, George, Marti, Cheryl, Dawn, Deborah, Michael

1. The meeting began with a period of sitting meditation. Mindful meeting guidelines were read. Tony reminded the group that the purpose of our annual meeting is to decide as a sangha on directions, initiatives and practices we would like to see the sangha engage in during the year to come. The general structure of the meeting is to listen to proposals/agenda items from sangha members, discuss them briefly, ensure there are no significant objections, and determine whether anyone present is interested in heading or participating on a committee to nourish the initiative and bring it into the realm of action.
2. George proposed that we organize a working meditation weekend for sangha members at Blue Cliff. He has done this in the past with other sanghas and has further researched how this would work for us. He pointed out the value of spending time with our monastic community. Elements of the weekend would include:
 - Renting a van, wheelchair accessible as needed
 - Arriving Friday evening and leaving Sunday afternoon
 - Men staying and eating with the monks and women with the nuns
 - Saturday morning meditation with the larger sangha, afternoon working meditation and possibly dharma discussion in the evening
 - Sharing a community DOM (Day of Mindfulness) on Sunday
 - Longer stays are possible if desired by individual sangha members
 - A donation of \$30-\$50 per person a night is usually requested by Blue Cliff to cover their costs
 - A weekend in March or early April is the most likely timeframeGeorge will organize this with Michael to assist, and will poll the sangha to see who is interested.
3. Cheryl is offering her family's cottage in Pymatuning for a longer (overnight or weekend-long) summer social. There is some indoor space available and plenty of room for camping. The property is close to a lake, and outdoor activities could include boating and kayaking, hiking, biking, yoga. The property is 2 hours north of here. Martha and Laura will work with her to organize, and she will poll the sangha for interest and availability for weekends in July or August.
4. Mike has been in touch with the Dzogchen sangha about another inter-tradition exchange between our sanghas. He will coordinate this. Mike, Pat and George are interested in working on and exploring other interfaith/intertradition events, including the Vesak ceremony and possible future climate events.
5. Days of Mindfulness. Martha and George are interested in organizing a DOM around the theme of holding/caring for the Earth. This could possibly be part of our spring retreat time at Shambala. Resources are available from the Earth Holder meta-sangha that could be used to develop a DOM on this theme. There was interest on the part of several members in having more DOMs for the sangha, possibly around some of the talks and/or in sangha members' homes. Cheryl, Marti, George and Pat are interested in working on this.
6. Search for a new site. There was much discussion about this item, with some members stating a wish for a more aesthetically pleasing space and others expressing gratitude and satisfaction for the space and amenities we have. Searches are labor and time intensive, and in the past, initially promising spaces have had unexpected drawbacks on closer inspection. It was agreed that any

space would need to supply at least what we already have: a friendly host, easy access to buses, wheelchair accessibility. Some comments were made about our space not always feeling clean (carpet, bathroom). One member pointed out that the sangha might need to increase our dana significantly if we want a nicer and more permanent “home”. We could also explore using the sanctuary part of the synagogue rather than the space we are in. There was also some discussion of organizing a sitting on a second evening, which would fit with the search for another location if a space was open some time other than a Tuesday evening. Rebecca had added this item to the agenda and will be asked if she is interested in organizing an effort to search for another location. Marti is willing to help. There were no volunteers to research organization of a second sitting time during the week.

7. Tony proposed that a committee be formed to:
 - review the finances of the retreats, and the overall financial health of the sangha funds
 - generate recommendations as needed for cost-cutting or generation of revenueHe will organize the committee. Marti volunteered to participate, and Kate and George can give input as needed.
8. George suggested that the sangha look for opportunities to celebrate LRS’s 25th anniversary. This could manifest in sangha socials, days of mindfulness, retreats, and/or Tuesday night facilitations. **It was determined that 2016 will not be our 25th anniversary year, so no further action on this item is needed.**
9. Marti is interested in developing programming for children. This was also suggested in 2015, but there was insufficient energy in the sangha to manifest anything. Tony pointed out that there are other groups in Pittsburgh working on teaching mindfulness to kids, including a group at Pitt, and possibly the Buddhist Society of Pittsburgh. Pat and Tony offered to check on what other groups are doing and pass that information along to Marti.

In addition to the groups and committees forming to address these new proposals, these committees continue to function:

Retreat committee: Tony, Martha, Deborah, Laura, Michael. Denys and Fiona are leaving and there may be a need for more people to work on organizing future retreats.

Member care: Laura, Natalie, Cheryl.

Continuing Care Council: Marti, Mike, possibly Bill Markey. Looking for another “senior” sangha member

Opening/Closing: Pat continues to open and, Bill, Dawn, Laura to close. A request was made for another person to be available to help with closing, in particular as a back-up if neither Bill, Dawn nor Laura are present.

Finance: Kate and Martha, possibly with help from Michael to deposit funds

Library: Dan. He will need to let us know if he needs any assistance

Website: George. He will let us know if he needs any assistance.

Orientations: Michael is our contact person, and coordinates new contacts with Dawn, Jen, Denys, Natalie who do the orientations. Pat and Michael have also occasionally stepped in when

a new person showed up early unexpectedly. Dawn has been organizing/coordinating and would like to pass that piece on to someone else if possible.

There was a final concern expressed by one member that we do not retain enough of the people who come to an initial one or two sittings. This member believed that newcomers do not always clearly understand the value of the practice and its relevance to their lives. This was not an actionable item but informal discussion ensued after the meeting with members of the orientation team.

-Respectfully submitted, with apologies for any inaccuracies

Deborah