

Membership Meeting July 13, 2016
Executive Summary

On July 13, 2016, the Board of Directors of the North Carolina Zen Center convened a meeting on the closely-engaged membership of the Center. The goal of this meeting was to arrive at a “sense of the sangha” concerning the question of bringing a teacher to the Center on a full-time basis at some point in the future. Because the relationship between sangha and teacher goes to the very heart of what a Zen center is about, and is likewise critical to forming good teacher-student relationships, the Board felt it was essential to know, as clearly as possible, the hopes, wishes, preferences and expectations of the local membership.

The full minutes of that meeting are available on the Center’s website. What follows here is a summary of the main points. The meeting proceeded through the use of several questions which were circulated before the meeting and formed the basis for discussion. The summarized responses to those questions are given below, and represent the Board’s understanding of the expressed wishes of the membership. For more details please review the full minutes.

1. What priorities do we, as individuals, most want from our participation, or in return for, support of the Center? What do we want as a Sangha?

As we understand it, the preference of the membership is to stay within the Rinzai Zen world, although not necessarily within the specific Rinzai-ji lineage of Sasaki Roshi. Rinzai is the thread that runs through the community and through the Center’s history, and the general consensus is that thread should continue. However, many were open to the possibility of a broad interpretation of Rinzai teaching. All agreed that it is more important to have a skilled, talented teacher than to blindly insist on adherence to a particular form of practice.

2. What qualities and skills are you personally looking for in a teacher? What would best meet our Sangha and Center’s needs?

Members clearly expressed the need for a new teacher to be skilled at teaching Zen, but also must be kind, compassionate, articulate and patient. The teacher should have good people skills and be able to reach out to the community at large. The teacher should be comfortable teaching beginners as well as more advanced students. Many members expressed the hope that a new teacher would be able to teach koan practice. However most indicated that it was at least as important that the teacher not be authoritarian in attitude or approach, and be welcoming to all.

3. What are member’s teaching tradition preferences?

As mentioned above, members expressed the understanding that a teacher will teach in the manner in which they were trained and which works for that teacher. As prospective students, it is incumbent upon us to be willing to be guided by the teacher without setting up a lot of preconditions. More important is the character of the teacher than the form of the teaching.

Beyond these three main questions, further discussion was had concerning the mission of the Center, its strengths and weaknesses, and how people see its future. To sum it up in brief, most feel that two preeminent challenges face the Center - growing the sangha and bringing in a

teacher. Both are inter-related, and both will contribute to the future growth and health of the Center and the community.

Finally, the wish and hope was expressed by several members that there be healing of the relationship between Sandy Stewart, the Centers co-founder and long-term teacher, and the Center's membership. How or when this might be achieved was not discussed, merely the hope that it will someday be realized. In this the Board fully concurs.

Jason Dowdle
President, Board of Directors