

Voting Membership meeting

Date: July 13, 2016

Meeting start: 7:00 pm

Attendance: Jason Dowdle; Christian Fisher, Leigh Hall, Scott Durso, Matt Young, Kim Young, Joe Kenlan, Sam Needleman, Brad Page, Kathleen Jardine, Daniel Gunnell, Luis Melodelgado, Meriel Goodwin, Roxanne Henderson, Ken Simon, Richard McGough, Tim Holmes

Opening

The meeting opened with a moment of silent reflection. Jason thanked everyone for attending and provided a brief overview of the evening's agenda and meeting guidelines.

Leigh Hall was asked to speak regarding the end of Nora Haenn's tenure on the Board. Leigh acknowledged Nora's efforts and years of service to the Center and the board. Jason clarified that this meeting was not the appropriate time or place to discuss the particulars of Nora's decision to step down from the Board. The board will look for another opportunity to make a public expression of appreciation of Nora's contributions.

Old Business

There were no topics.

New Business

Jason indicated that the purpose of this meeting was to seek feedback from voting membership on how to refine the vision of the NCZC, and with the refined vision, build a document describing the Sangha and the Center for prospective teachers consisting of:

- Teacher position description
- Financial plan
- Long range strategic plan
- References to governance and policy documents

Teacher search process: Matt Young

- Matt described the brochure created by the Search Committee to advertise the Center
- The team has attempted to contact 20-30 people inside and outside of Rinzai-Ji, seeking guidance on how to conduct the search
- Tenku Ruff was described as both a resource and potential teacher candidate
- The committee obtained a teacher search manual from the SF Zen Center
 - According to this document, the main questions the Sangha should be able to answer prior to searching for a teacher are:
 - Who are you as a Sangha?
 - What does the Sangha want most in a teacher?
- It was noted that we should not expect to attract a Roshi-level teacher in the short to medium-term, given our size, mission, and location.
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- Jason then led a discussion of questions listed in a questionnaire sent to the voting membership prior to the meeting. These questions are reproduced below, and include consolidated feedback from the meeting.
- 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?
 - We wish to enable people's ability to encounter the Dharma
 - We want to be open and welcoming to all; never turning anyone away
 - We want connections to the outside community

- o Some feel that we should soften our adherence to the Rinzai lineage which might help to attract a broader membership; others want to stay committed to Rinzai, but not necessarily Rinzai-Ji. Some noted that being in a lineage provides the opportunity to send students for more advanced training
- o We want a warm, inviting place and teacher - with a feeling of inclusivity.
- o We want teaching on multiple levels; possibly a more intensive teaching one day per week.
- What do we offer as a Zen Center
 - o First and foremost, a place to practice and study Zen. We are a community, offering lay involvement with Zen practice. The Center is a gateway, an introduction to Zen. Coming here, people encounter a community of people who are committed to the Dharma. Places exist for stringent, high-level practice— NCZC is not currently such a place. That said, we wish to offer the highest level of teaching that we can attract and support.
 - o NCZC has a beautiful setting and facility; a calming, sane, health-invoking environment
 - o NCZC is small enough to have a personal touch
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- What qualities and skills are you personally looking for in a teacher? What would best meet our Sangha and Center's needs?
- Some felts koan practice is core; a non-Rinzai center may not have koan practice.
- It was questioned whether there can be a student - teacher relationship without the power struggle and abuse of power in such a hierarchy
 - o One person suggested: Different teachers use koan practice in different ways; the teacher's experience and practice determines how they use koans; it does not have to be master-slave relationship;
 - o Jason reiterated that a teacher will have to fit in the structure we delineate, including performance review and subject to a grievance system
- Teacher must have connections externally so that advanced students can have access to advanced teaching
- General agreement that certain students want access to a more intensive practice; they want the Center to be both accessible/welcoming and provide opportunities for intensive practice
- There was some openness to blended traditions, but it was not unanimous.
- It was suggested that, going forward, the term "hiring", when referring to a teacher should probably not be used, as it is possibly an insult. A teacher's relationship to a Center is more of a marriage. This work is their vocation, a gift to the community that we cannot compensate adequately through monetary means alone.
- We want teaching on multiple levels; possibly a more intensive teaching one day per week.
- We want a continuity of teaching; a constant presence of a teacher
- The teacher needs to be warm, comfortable with people, articulate, patient, open-hearted, and willing to share their experience with people.
 - o Maybe all of us have had Teachers who have taught us Zen from the heart, regardless of their title.
- Some of us have not experienced a teacher
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- What are member's teaching tradition preferences?
- It was offered that "People's attachment to form is not useful, especially in the US".
- NCZC has an appreciation for the Rinzai form, but we are not limiting teacher possibilities

- Warmth, comfort with people, articulate, open hearted, sharing; these character attributes are all more important than tradition
- It was mentioned that we were warned by Tenku not to seek a teacher who spoon feeds without asking the student to step-up. Also, “However they (the teacher/sangha) practice there, that is the correct way.” Therefore, a particular lineage is less important than an established, experienced Teacher. We should be able to know it when we see it
- A Teacher who is confident in what they teach matters more than the differences between Rinzai and Soto
- We should play to our strengths—be who we are, unless and until a Teacher motivates us to make a change. Let us not lose the thread that ties us, becoming diffuse, or losing continuity
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- What ongoing programs would people most want to see?
- Sanga-building is important for attracting and maintaining a teacher
 - Should we ask what would bring old members back?
 - Retention of new attendees is less than 10%, but this is common
- Some wish to bring in occasional "big-gun" guest teachers
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- What goals and objectives do we, as a sangha, hope to achieve in the next two to five years?
- Financial sustainability through membership support
- Increased membership to support
- Increase BOD numbers
- Teacher invested in the Center
- Healed relationship with Sandy; running the center with his blessing.
 - Some feel that we need to extend a hand to Sandy to heal.
 - It was offered that “Until we heal the heart of the North Carolina Zen Center, and achieve some forgiveness and healing, we will not proceed well. Sandy, and many people, deserve that. It was suggested if the air was clear, we could attract more people”.
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- How would you describe our Center’s current strengths and key challenges?
- We need to become more self-reliant, drawing on the experience of elders in the Sanga
- It was offered that “NCZC will always be at the edge of Buddhism in the U.S.—a dynamic tension. Lots of newcomers. It will prevent us from having high-level Roshi, due to our being a community practice center.”
- It was offered that “I envision that in 5 years, there would be no ill-will between Sandy and the Center. We could confidently claim him as our founder, who created the Center with others. He was a Teacher who was so meaningful to so many. And perhaps in time Sandy could utilize the Center as a place of occasional teaching. I envision a sureness of our purpose, a confidence such that we can reach out--if that cloud could be dispelled. We must start with individual healing”.
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- 9 PM Meeting closes