

NORTH CAROLINA ZEN CENTER



# Center Overview and Teacher Application





*The zendo on a sunny Fall day. The building on the right houses a kitchen, office, bath, and laundry.*

The community at the Brooks Branch Zendo of the North Carolina Zen Center (also known by its temple name, Sosen-ji) welcomes all, from the experienced student dedicated to the realization of the awakened mind to the beginning meditator seeking respite from stressful and demanding times. Our community includes a membership of twenty to thirty active students, a highly participatory, collaborative group that ranges in age and background. Some of our members have family roots in North Carolina that stretch back generations while others have only recently arrived to this dynamic and growing part of the country. Outside the Center, we work in education, healthcare, the arts, the building trades, and other endeavors. At the Center and elsewhere, we work to motivate and support one another in this shared practice.

Among our long-term members, some have studied principally at the Brooks Branch Zendo while others have affiliations with the Rinzei-ji sangha, the One Drop Zen Buddhist Community, the Rochester Zen Center, and others. We view lineage diversity as a strength that communicates to newcomers our confidence in the Buddhist heritage and allows our Center to offer multiple paths to students who are searching for connection as well as realization.

*Photos by Jason Dowdle, except where noted.*

## OUR HISTORY

In its current formation, the North Carolina Zen Center has roots in its founders' vision of a residential center with a community of supporting families nearby. Sandy and Susanna Stewart were students of Joshu Sasaki Roshi and, in 1995 the couple benefitted from the generosity of Sandy's student, Linda Campany, who secured sixteen acres of wooded land. As the Center's first Osho and Abbot, Sandy Stewart guided the Center's daily life and development for the next 20 years. Sandy oversaw construction of the Center's zendo, which was built by a group of skilled volunteer students. Additional buildings followed, and in 2007 Joshu Sasaki Roshi—who was then 99-years-old—traveled to the Center to offer a dedication ceremony. That is when the Center received its temple name of Sosen-ji.

After serving as the guiding force behind the North Carolina Zen Center community for more than 35 years, and making the Center his life's project, Sandy Stewart ended his role as Abbot and Teacher of the North Carolina Zen Center in April of 2015. Between the time of the Center's dedication and the end of his tenure at the Center, the Center's Board of Directors had formally broken ties with Joshu Sasaki Roshi. As a result, the Center now operates as an unaffiliated Rinzei zen center, unassociated with any particular lineage.

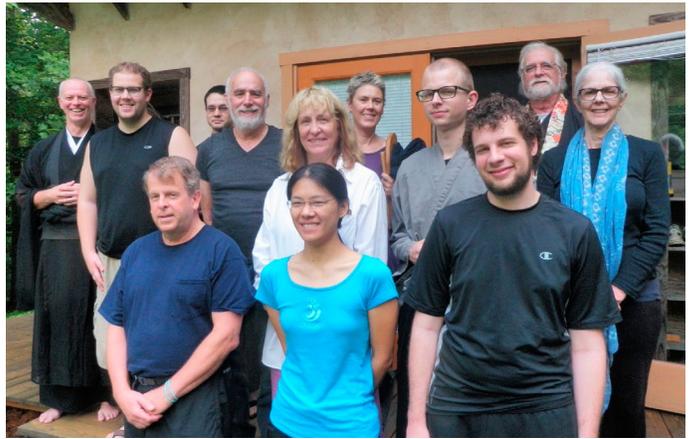


## OUR GOVERNING STRUCTURE

After a reorganization in 2015, the Center now includes a governing Board of Directors that oversees three volunteer committees drawn from the Center's membership. In this setting, we view a Teacher's role as that of cornerstone, anchoring and animating the larger community.

Unusual for many nonprofits, the North Carolina Zen Center is legally established as a membership organization. As a result, the Center has three classes of association. General Members include anyone who shows an interest in involvement with the Center. Fellowship Members include individuals who offer significant support to the Center but who, for whatever reason, cannot or choose not to participate in the Center's activities. Voting Membership is reserved for those willing to make a sustained commitment to the Center, such as through regular participation in Center events. The approximately twenty to thirty people who currently make up the Center's Voting Membership have the ability to elect candidates to the Board of Directors. The Center also turns to this group to fulfill various functions, including service on the committees that conduct the Center's day-to-day operations.

The Center's Practice Committee organizes



*Some of our community after a weekend retreat, August 2015. Photo by Nora Haenn.*

Sunday services, day-long and weekend retreats, and, generally addresses matters of form and ritual. The Center's Membership Committee monitors the Membership rolls while also assuring the effectiveness of the Center's email and other communications. The Finance and Facilities Committee handles questions of building and grounds maintenance along with day-to-day bookkeeping and budgeting.

In the future, the Center's Board of Directors may modify this governance to accommodate a growing sangha and the leadership style of the Center's Teacher. As the Board considers any changes to the Center's governance, it will likely continue to premise the representative role the Membership now plays in managing Center affairs.

## HOW WE PRACTICE

The Center currently offers a schedule of formal services two days a week on Thursday evenings and Sunday mornings. In recent months, attendance at our Thursday evening services has included just one or two people. Attendance at our Sunday morning services number roughly ten people. The Center has also been offering longer retreats of two to seven days at the rate of three to four times per year. Attendance at longer retreats has generally included fifteen people.

At present, our basic practice forms, such as zazen, kinhin (walking meditation), and chanting, are drawn from the Japanese Rinzai tradition. Nonetheless, we are open to modifying these forms under the guidance of a Teacher and with input from our sangha.

Given the Center's residential facilities, we view with optimism the prospect of invigorating the Center through the cultivation of a committed group of students who live on site.



*The Center's 16 acres include two, wooded meditation paths.*

## A TOUR OF OUR FACILITIES

The Center offers a secluded, peaceful environment for study and practice. Situated on sixteen acres of woodland, in an area dominated by forests and rolling hills, the Center is nestled into a grove of tall pines and hardwoods. The zendo building hugs the edge of a slight hillside overlooking a stream. The woods surrounding the Center offer an abundance of wildlife. The sounds of birds, frogs, and wind in the trees prevail. Owls call back and forth along the stream, and whitetail deer move quietly through the woods. During all seasons, the atmosphere is quiet and tranquil.

At the heart of the Center is a bright and airy hall for meditation and chanting. This zendo has clean lines which provide a simple atmosphere for practice. The zendo can accommodate 24 people in sitting meditation and is surrounded by a covered walkway for walking meditation.

The zendo and the buildings adjacent to it are all connected to one another by a single walkway. These adjacent buildings include a fully permitted, commercial-grade kitchen; a shower house with two

showers and two toilets each for men and women; and a dormitory building with six rooms. Each dormitory room can accommodate four guests. Altogether these facilities allow the Center to host overnight retreats of up to 24 participants. Ample room for additional camping is also available.

The Center offers additional housing. The dormitory building contains a two-room apartment that serves as private resident quarters. A self-sufficient 550 square-foot cabin sits some thirty yards from the main buildings.

## OUR FINANCES

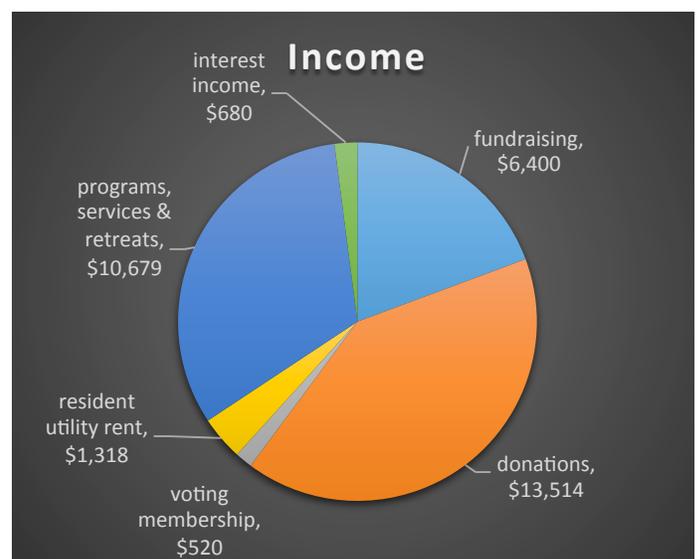
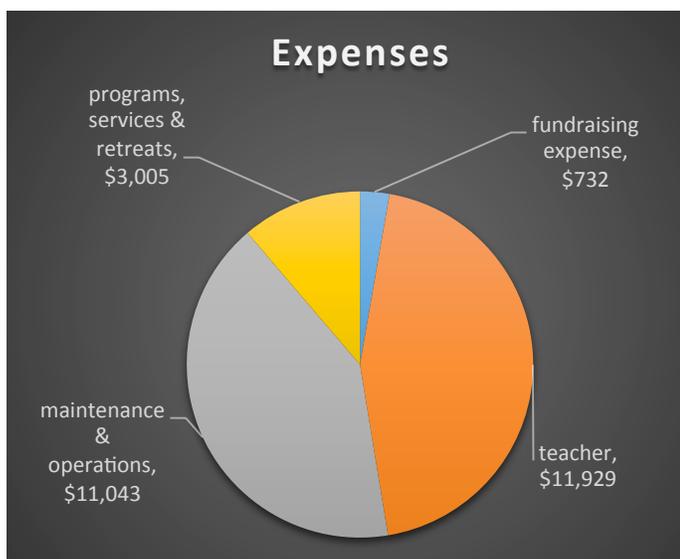
The North Carolina Zen Center is incorporated as a 501(c)(3) non-profit. The Center's land and buildings are owned outright. The Center has no outstanding debt.

As the following charts illustrate, the Center exists largely on donations and fundraising with additional income from hosting in-house as well as outside groups who rent the Center for retreat. We have hosted retreats for many different organizations, both spiritual and secular.

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## NCZC FINANCIALS

NCZC is incorporated as a 501(c)(3) non-profit. The land and buildings are owned outright without debt.



During the past seven years, income from donations, fundraising, and rental groups has averaged \$33,110. Annual expenses for this time period have averaged \$26,700. Of this amount, maintenance and operations expenses account for \$11,043 and teacher compensation \$12,000 per year. While these figures suggest a surplus in net income, more typically, the Center balances its budget each year.

## PITTSBORO AND SURROUNDS

The North Carolina Zen Center sits four miles northwest of the charming town of Pittsboro, population 3,700 and the seat of government for Chatham County. Although at the moment Chatham County is largely a rural place of 63,000 people, the region is increasingly tied to the cities that form North Carolina's "Research Triangle." The Center sits 20-minutes south of Chapel Hill, 45-minutes south of Durham, and 45-minutes west of Raleigh. The larger Triangle is home to premier arts institutions and universities, an active local food movement, and a Buddhist community that includes zen, several Tibetan Buddhist centers, a Korean Buddhist temple, and a Vietnamese Buddhist temple. Pittsboro and the various cities located in the Triangle each have their own particular southern flair. Each is also inflected by the ideals and customs brought to the area by the significant number of



*Jay Garfield and other visitors have attracted students from throughout the region.*

people relocating to the region to take advantage of its high quality of life.

Located just on the edge of this dynamism—but on-schedule to be absorbed into it through suburban development—Chatham County has a racial makeup of 76% White, 13% Black or African American, and 7% from other



races according to the 2010 census. Hispanics and Latinos represent the fastest growing proportion of the County's population, and the census lists 13% of county residents as Latino. The census also indicates that at \$56,000 Chatham County's median household income is \$4,000 above average for the United States. This amount can obscure significant financial disparities. The same census shows 12% of Chatham County's population lived below the poverty line in 2010. The food bank located in Pittsboro reports that 3,500 families sought emergency food services in the year 2009.

While the Center's day-to-day activities tend to focus on Pittsboro and the immediate area, it is important to note the Center also serves a wide geographic area that spans communities across central North Carolina. Practitioners at our Sunday services routinely travel from the cities of Greensboro, Asheboro, Fayetteville, and Charlotte.

## MOVING FORWARD

As we envision our future, we look forward to a center that is organized around the leadership of a Teacher who will work with us to tap into the region's dynamism and grow a strong community. As individual practitioners, we want a Teacher who can work in partnership to challenge us in beneficial ways, a Teacher who offers a rigorous practice while affirming the right of every individual to be treated with dignity and respect. As a sangha, we want to reach out to our fellow North Carolina Buddhists, religious contemplatives, as well as anyone seeking spiritual inspiration and guidance.



*The view from the zendo porch of the kitchen (left) and dormitory building (right).*

As we consider how to grow our sangha, we imagine programs for all age groups, including youth and children. We also imagine serving as a regional retreat center that draws students from near and far, a place that hosts visiting teachers and students who invigorate our learning. These newcomers would be attracted to the North Carolina Zen Center by our reputation as a welcoming community where one may carry out studies as a novice and apprentice or through intensive, long-term investigation.

Key to this reputation is the presence of a respected and knowledgeable Teacher whose personal practice and well-being will serve as a model for the larger sangha. We envision a Teacher actively engaged in his or her own program of inquiry with a Teacher outside the Center, undertaking the kind of intensive training to which the Center's students might aspire. Our next Teacher will have thought carefully about how to translate zen Buddhism to this new and unique setting that is the United States of America. He or she will be familiar with a variety of practice sites—from the monastery to the home to the workplace—and have considered the obstacles and promises that each place holds for students. In this way, our next Teacher will serve as an adept leader to the variety of people we hope the Center will engage and nurture.



*Our present form, which we may modify, is Rinzai Zen.*



## CANDIDATE APPLICATION

We recognize any relationship between our community and a prospective teacher is one that will require mutual exploration and a gradual building of connection, a process that takes time. We also recognize the details of a teacher's duties will require conversations that take into account a prospective teacher's personal situation, as well as the Center's needs. As a result, we envision a multi-step application process that allows the Center and candidates to become familiar with each other through on-line and in-person communication. This includes inviting a prospective candidate to lead a retreat at our Center as part of a period of getting to know one another.

To guide these interactions, we request anyone interested in being considered for the position of Teacher at the North Carolina Zen Center to submit a portfolio of application materials (see below). The Center welcomes and encourages communication from prospective applicants who wish to get to know our community better or who may have questions prior to the submission of application materials.

All inquiries and application materials should be sent to: [applicant-search@nczencenter.org](mailto:applicant-search@nczencenter.org).

Applications materials include:

1. A letter of interest, current résumé or CV, and contact information for three people who can recommend you to the position.
2. Answers to these questions:
  - What attracts you to the North Carolina Zen Center?
  - How would you describe your style of leadership? Please give at least one real-life example that shows how your leadership style contributed to a successful outcome.
  - Tell us about a time when things did not go well in your leadership of a group and how you handled it.
  - Describe how you nurture your practice life and that of those for whom you are a role model.
  - What have you enjoyed most and least about your practice in community?
  - Any additional information about yourself and your practice history you feel would be helpful in aiding us to get to know you better.

Finally, if you have one, please send a copy or a video/audio link to one of your talks that holds special meaning to you—and tell us why it does.

In order to advance the search in a timely way, we request that prospective applicants signal their interest in the position by February 28, 2017, preferably through submission of the application materials listed above. Review of materials will continue until the position is filled. Please email materials to the NCZC Search Committee at [applicant-search@nczencenter.org](mailto:applicant-search@nczencenter.org).

The Center's website offers a more complete overview. Prospective applicants are encouraged to visit: [www.nczencenter.org](http://www.nczencenter.org), and the [Applicant Web Portal](#) for up-to-date information.



The North Carolina Zen Center