

Still Mountain Community Meeting Minutes – 2016-07-10

Treasurer's Report by Hugh

There is sufficient money in the bank to handle regular bills and provide temporary funding for Retreat set-up such as facility deposits and travel expenses for guest teachers.

Board Report by David

- A Retreat Committee is being established. There are 3 volunteers, 2 of whom are on the Board (Judy, Lisa, Sandra). This committee will work with the Teachers Council to set dates for retreats, find retreat facilities, handle deposits, etc. This group will meet for the first time in the next month.
- Each retreat will also need volunteers to handle operations for that Retreat – Sarah is handling this for the next retreat.

Teacher's Council on Retreats by David

The Teacher's Council has responsibility for:

- What will be taught at each retreat (content). They will also be responsible for how it is conveyed to the community. For example, if a guest teacher is teaching from a non-Theravada perspective, the teachers will ensure that the message will be understood by Still Mountain Theravada practitioners.
- Identifying Guest Teachers with input from the Community
- Addressing any specific retreat location / facility needs required by the nature of the retreat or Guest Teachers.
- 2016-2017 Plan
 - October 13-17, 2016 – Guest Teacher
 - February – Still Mtn Teachers
 - May – Guest Teacher – Shaila Catherine
 - September/October – Still Mtn Teachers
 - Dates will be posted to the website soon
- October 13-17 Retreat
 - Guest Teacher: Shaila Catherine – see website for bio and retreat description. Retreat will be held at DeSales in Brooklyn <http://www.desales.org/lawrencelodgea.html> Retreat will have commuter option. David is the key contact with Shaila.
 - Registration by Still Mtn Community by July 28, registration open to public Aug. 1
 - Send David an email to register before July 28
 - David is looking into whether there are options for camping.

Ethical Issues Grievance & Reconciliation Process by David

- A note (see copy below) & draft was sent out to the Still Mtn Community. Some input was received. David will create and send out a final draft which will become a living document to be used and revised as necessary. David reviewed similar procedures used at Spirit Rock, the style in which Plum Village procedures are implemented, i.e. gentleness and write-ups of how other organizations handled situations when they occurred.
- The purpose for having a procedure is:
 - To head off bad behavior by those with power, such as Board members, Teachers, and those representing Still Mtn to people outside the Community (e.g. volunteer projects, written communications). We are not expecting anything in particular and things have happened in many other spiritual communities where people felt “that could never happen here”.
 - Help create a safe space within the Community

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- The Ethics Grievance & Resolution Council (EGRC) is proposed to be composed of 1 Board member, 1 Teacher, 3 Sangha members. Volunteers will be needed. There are no job descriptions or criteria for holding a position yet.
- Community Feedback:
 - Put the Ethics Grievance Process on the website.
 - Set a time period where the Ethics Grievance Process will be reviewed and changed if needed, e.g. every two years.
- Suggestions by the Community are still welcome by sending a note to David. David will review the final draft at the next Community Meeting.
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- Here is the note:

From: Still Mountain <stillmountainmeditation@gmail.com>

Subject: Ethics Grievance Process

Date: June 19, 2016 at 8:02:54 PM EDT

To: Still Mountain Announcements <StillMountain-announce@googlegroups.com>

Reply-To: stillmountainmeditation@gmail.com

Dear friends,

An ethics grievance process is an important element of any healthy organization. Unfortunately, we regularly hear of spiritual organizations in which power is abused in ways that are grossly antithetical to the expressed core values of the group. Any community member needs to know that she/he can bring a perceived serious ethical lapse to the attention of a group of people empowered to review such issues and take appropriate action when necessary.

The attached document is a rough draft of a grievance process that I hope may serve as a basis for our consideration. I have adapted it from a couple of sources (including primarily Spirit Rock). I would very much appreciate your thoughts and comments so that we may move toward finalizing such a process in the near future. Please send me your comments and suggestions to my email address at ldlawson@sbcglobal.net instead of using this google address.

I look forward to hearing from you and will attempt to consider and include your suggestions in a final document that I will bring to the next Community Meeting.

All the best, David

Draft Grievance Process is included at the end of this document.

Proposal to Reduce Community Meeting to Every Other Month by Yair

Proposal

- Appreciate the work of the Community Meeting facilitators and everyone's participation.
- Question: Is the meeting serving the Community or the Community Serving the meeting? Sometimes it seems like we are looking for content to keep the meeting going.
- Is the meeting a tool for socializing?
- Maybe the meeting would be more exciting and unique if held every other month.
- Parts of the sangha meet at other times such as: Sunday Sitting and Sharing, Classes & Retreats have sharing time so this is possibly not needed in so frequent a Community Meeting.
- Committee meetings also provide time for discussion. Some of the discussion at the Community Meeting could occur during Committee meetings.
- The Sunday sharing is really important to me and the Community Meeting eliminates the opportunity to do this 1 of the 4 weeks in the month. For example, I would have found it particularly supportive today after a week in which there has been so many violent events in the U.S. and world.

Sharing (going around the circle)

- A part of the heart of Still Mtn is having Community involved in governance. It is extremely important to gather all together to discuss. It is a gift to practice patience and support discussion. Perhaps meeting every 6 weeks would work.
- The Community meeting is an opportunity to get to know people more. I feel blessed and a lot of gratitude to participate.
- There is value in the after Sitting sharing.
- Board could ask for extra meetings on off-month.
- About 6 people supported every other month meeting by this point in the circle.
- Focus on quality versus quantity.
- Add flexibility to the schedule. Could meet every other month with option by Board and Teachers to call a Community meeting.
- That works, except when it doesn't. In the past have often cut off passionate discussion and deferred to a later meeting due to time limits. In these situations, waiting another 2 months to finish the discussion is not helpful.
- I like having governance more widely distributed like we are doing. I prefer that we meet every month with the option to cancel. We could go to every other month when all the processes we are establishing as a new organization are in place, e.g. Ethics, Calendar of Events.
- The Board and Teachers are not always ready to present what they said they would at the Community meeting. If meet every other month, this gives them more time. Is this good or bad? Don't know.
- Still want to have regular time for sitting, sharing and socializing and opportunity to discuss "Great Ideas" that we may come up with.
- Presenters that are not ready can just say so and the topic can be deferred and meeting cancelled if not enough content. This has happened.
- Really appreciate Still Mtn sense of governance. It is "of the heart". The structured conversations help with the Still Mtn maturing process. They help us flesh out the nitty gritty. The need for many of them, related to process and learning who we are as an organization will reduce over time. I think we should still meet every month for now and cancel as needed

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- There will come a time when meeting every two months will be okay, when we are settled as an organization and with the appropriate structure in place. Don't know if we are there yet. Could try every two months with Board and Teachers calling extra meetings if necessary.
- We may be ready for every two months, if we could all agree to participate regularly in online discussions. Some people avoid this kind of interaction. I am willing to change and be more active online.
- It is great that any Community Member can bring an item to the Community meeting. Cons for 2 months: It would be more difficult for me to remember which month the Community meeting was occurring if it was every other month. Meetings could be longer. May need to schedule more time for discussions.
- If use more online discussions or email discussions, it is my experience that these tend to be more analytical and less from the heart than when meeting in person. It seems that Issue/Idea exploration is better in person. It is easier to understand with body language, etc.
- I find listening practice, at these meetings, to be very rich. I have no opinion on their frequency.
- Right now, I think we should meet monthly. I feel it is very important. It allows us time to develop Sangha, to hear and experience each other. We are a brand new organization. I see a difference in Sangha interaction from when we started until now. We have built a Sangha.
- I feel that Community meetings are helpful for new people. You get to meet the Sangha, get to know the Still Mtn processes and character. Meeting monthly offered me the opportunity to find out how I fit in and what I can offer. If we go to every other month, how will we welcome new people?
- I feel this meeting gives us the opportunity to manifest our practice. It feels to me that this Community has a particular heart for going out into the world. So, while we all need opportunities for Sitting, Heart Sharing, formal learning and silence, this meeting is a safe space for us to bring our heart and minds together and into the world. It is a place where we can learn how our unbounded open hearts can work with our minds and personalities to create processes, relationships, projects, etc., that so manifest our hearts and values that people outside of Still Mtn that we interact with begin to know what we are about without us directly saying anything. This would apply to chaplaincy projects, being volunteers, etc. I think we should keep the monthly meetings.
- I have no opinion. I value everything that has been said. The meeting does give us opportunity for heart practice and being efficient as well.
- During meetings, I notice my impatience and that people are never impatient when they are the one speaking.
- As a facilitator, the most positive feedback I get is when the meetings are short. If we meet less, likely the meetings will need to be longer. Or we could do more pre-meeting planning so that more information is provided ahead of time and can be presented clearly and completely as possible. This may reduce the amount of discussion needed to make a decision. I am open to try meeting every 2 months.
- What a training to hear everyone. I had a strong opinion at the beginning. I am passionate about the Community meeting. This is where we make decisions. They are very important to me. I value the interaction and learning from each other and doing it in person. I think we should be practical about how often to meet. It is more difficult to remember when to attend when meetings are every other month. I travel a lot. If I miss one meeting on an every other month schedule, it will be 4 months since the last time I attended. This seems too long. I prefer every month and cancel as needed.

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- Options: Could find ways to socialize besides at the Community meeting. Could have after Sitting sharing, no socialization and then Community meeting sometimes.

Decision

- **There is no decision making process yet.**
- **One person stated a proposal that seemed to reflect the feeling in the room:**
 - **Meet every month until the end of 2016**
 - **Cancel meetings if no urgent business**
 - **In December, 2016 discuss at Community Meeting whether to shift to an every 2 months schedule – if so address concerns brought up today, such as how to welcome & involve new-comers, have time for Sangha building socialization**

The Community agreed to this proposal. No one could not live with it.

Next Page: Still Mountain Ethical Issues Grievance and Reconciliation Process

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Still Mountain Ethical Issues Grievance and Reconciliation Process

Purpose

The purpose of a grievance process for the reconciliation of ethical issues is to confirm the importance of the sincere practice of lay precepts within our community. These are minimum behavioral standards that we may reasonably expect of each other. Taken broadly and within the full range of their meaning, the precepts provide the foundation for a healthy sangha.

Even under the best of circumstances, however, ethical lapses and misunderstandings will sometimes occur. None of us is perfect. The health of our community will not be measured so much by the presence or absence of ethical conflict as by our willingness to address issues as they arise, always within the context of a commitment to compassion and respect for each other. Serious ethical breaches are especially problematic when committed by a person of designated power within the sangha, such as a teacher or Board member.

Establishment of an Ethics Grievance Review and Resolution Council

Still Mountain will establish an Ethics Grievance and Resolution Council (EGRC) composed of at least five members of the sangha including one board member, one teacher, and at least three other sangha members. The primary role of the Council will be to provide confidential consultation to anyone who brings forth ethical concerns regarding the behavior of another sangha member. Generally, the Council will either help facilitate deeper personal reflection and clarification on the part of the petitioner or in some cases will agree to serve as facilitator for a discussion between the parties involved.

The Council will also in some cases and at its discretion, oversee the implementation of a formal grievance procedure, as described below. The Council may elect to bring in outside expert resources as needed.

More specific procedures governing the above responsibilities will be decided and specified within the EGRC, as deemed appropriate and in consultation with the Board and Teachers Council.

Formal Grievance Process

Any person may bring forth an ethical concern to the EGRC by simply making contact with a member of the council. The EGRC will work with the person bringing the complaint in a way that is judged to be most appropriate to the circumstances and which provides the best possible means for resolution. If a formal grievance process is requested, a brief statement by the person bringing the complaint will include:

- A clear statement that a formal grievance process is requested
- The name of the person(s) whose behavior the complaint concerns
- A description of the alleged behavior sufficient to allow the EGR to decide whether the complaint is appropriate for initiating a formal grievance procedure.
- A history of the attempts, if any, to resolve the complaint through other means.
- A general statement about the resolution desired
- Signature of the person bringing the complaint

Once the EGRC has accepted such request, it will convey its acceptance within two weeks to both the party filing the complaint and the party named in the complaint. As part of this notification, the EGR

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will state its understanding of the issue under inquiry and will distribute a copy of the original grievance process request to the party named in the complaint.

EGR Investigation and Delivery of Findings

The EGRC will conduct an investigation of the issues brought forth in the complaint and will issue findings and render a decision regarding its proper resolution. If the complaint involves serious ethical lapse by a teacher, the decision regarding resolution (up to and including suspension of the teacher), will be made through consensus with the Teachers Council. Likewise, in the case of involvement of a Board member, the resolution decision will be made through consensus with the Board. If the complaint involves any other person acting as an agent of Still Mountain, such as a sangha member providing outreach services in the community, the EGR will render a resolution decision as appropriate, with or without consultation with the Teachers Council or Board.

All parties will have an opportunity to respond to all information gathered by the EGRC, as well as to all allegations and findings. The investigation and discussions among the involved parties will be held confidentially. Within two weeks of arriving at a decision regarding resolution, all involved parties will reconvene at which time the EGRC will distribute copies of its written findings and read them aloud. This will constitute the final disposition of the matter at hand.