

The Dharma Teacher Order Newsletter

Volume Four

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January 2018

Annual December Retreat in Pearland, TX



With the expert advice of Thay and Brother Noble Silence, our Deborah McDonald selected a new bell and inkin at the Winter Retreat in Pearland. It received its inaugural use at our December 16 practice. Its tone is magnificent and truly a call to mindfulness.

**Submitted by
Craig Hannah
of the CT Sangha**

Brothers and Sisters:

The annual DTO winter retreat was held on December 1-3, 2017, in Pearland, Texas. Dharma Spring Temple and the Texas sangha were happy to welcome representatives from Miami, Connecticut, New York, and Virginia Beach. Our youngest group--Virginia Beach--sent five representatives, including two monks!

Traditionally, the Texas retreat has been a blending of work and practice, and this year was no exception.. In the morning, we practiced together in the Buddha Hall, in order to bring a sense of centeredness and peace to our afternoon sessions. After a mindful lunch, prepared with love by our own Phap Nghiem and her able helpers, we settled around the table for presentations and discussions.

On Friday, we heard from Alex Quiros about plans for the new DTO correspondence course. He led us through a guided meditation and an animated discussion about the initial steps to take to facilitate this process. Next, Cathy Hill discussed the structure and purpose of the Buddhist Correspondence Course (for inmates), and the onset of the gradual process of transferring the administration of the Course from Costa Rica to Dharma Spring Temple. Currently, there are over 100 inmates on the waiting list to take the Course, so we put out a call for mentors. If you are interested in becoming a mentor or in taking on additional students, please contact Rev. Adrienne Baksa at adrienne@mc.com.

In the evenings, we enjoyed another delicious meal as well as a variety of special activities. Our silent auction was a lot of fun, and we raised nearly \$350 for the Dharma Spring Restoration project. We are grateful to everyone for supporting the temple's recovery from the flooding caused by Hurricane Harvey. We also participated in a cooking class with Kyle Schiefen, and a Sound Bath with Terri Kuberski.

On Saturday, Fernando Comancho gave a talk entitled "Where We Are and Where We're Going," followed by another lively discussion. It is always good to reflect on the history of the DTO as well as how the organization got to where it is today. This is especially useful for our first year students and for our newest sangha, enthusiastic Virginia Beach! We were also very happy to hear from Deborah McDonald about our new and improved website. It is so exciting to see this coming to fruition after several years of incubation.

In addition to the planned activities, retreatants had some time to wander around the grounds and enjoy some of the recent additions to the temple. Particularly interesting (and noisy!) was the ongoing construction of the pond around the big outdoor Buddha statue. Many thanks to everyone who was able to attend the retreat, and we look forward to welcoming you back again next year.

Submitted by Cathy Hill





Group Photo in front of the Big Buddha



Brother Noble Silence attended the last DTO Retreat hosted by the Texas Sangha and he brought back these pictures among others. Between conversations, we pointed out how much the temple has changed, especially considering that Hurricane Harvey hit the area so recently. We have always credited out teacher Thich Tri Hoang with much vision; after all, he founded the DTO and helped the temple in Texas grow and he still holds a much larger vision in his eye's mind. He is also always pushing the Miami sangha to think big, acquire a property for our services and other visionary advice.

We also have considered impermanence within this context. At first, the Texas temple changed because of Hurricane Harvey, most would say in a negative way; however, upon looking deeply, we can see that such a change was inevitable; impermanence teaches us this. Now, looking through the eyes of Noble Silence as he attended the retreat, we can see the temple has changed again, but this time, most would say for the better. Thich Tri Hoang still wants to install a huge fountain (you can see him planning it in these pictures); he wants to install pagodas, cameras, in the voice of Noble Silence: "a whole Buddhist city." Upon looking deeply again, we can see that this change is also inevitable; impermanence teaches us this.

We often carry in our minds a steady image of what/how things are, but our mind does not automatically know how to account to the natural change and evolutions of things and people, and even ourselves. We have learned the cause for this is delusion and not being able to see reality as it is, we meditate to illuminate this truth and in the process of seeing the truth ameliorating our suffering by learning to accept things as they change.

-Submitted by Susette Cuoso



STATE OF THE DHARMA TEACHER ORDER 2017 WHERE WE ARE AND WHERE WE ARE GOING—FERNANDO CAMACHO

Before we begin to address the title of this talk, we need to review where we have been to better understand our evolution and progress.

The DTO started in the late 1990's with a small group of students at Hai An pagoda, a Vietnamese Buddhist Temple in Connecticut while Thay was the abbot there. The purpose of this class was to teach Buddhism to a lay western community with the possibility of starting a lay dharma teacher group. These early students began to lay the groundwork for the organization preparing a manual for the DTO. Venerable Noble Silence and Reverend Richard Baksa were two of these early students.

After being at Hai An for ten years, in 2005, Thay and the class moved to Chuang Yen Monastery in Kent, New York where the class flourished. Venerable Noble Silence became a monastic and moved to Miami where he started a class primarily for Spanish-speaking students. Thay began to ordain dharma teachers on a regular basis. The DTO consisted of the New York sangha and the evolving Miami sangha.

In 2009, a catastrophe happened for those of us in New York. Thay decided to move to Pearland, Texas to start his own temple. For awhile, we did not know whether the New York DTO would survive as we did not have many senior teachers available to guide us. We marched on using group wisdom to nourish us and counted on Thay's visits during the year to further encourage us. By 2012, however, the leadership at Chuang Yen Monastery did not want us to continue the class for many reasons, the major one being that we did not have a monastic presence and they had a hard time accepting lay dharma teachers. At that time, the New York class members moved to Graymoor Franciscan Seminary in Garrison, New York and the Connecticut students moved to a Catholic Retreat Center in West Hartford, Connecticut. These were difficult times for all those DTO members from New York and Connecticut. There were financial, structural, and marketing problems. Many students left because of these uncertainties. However, through all of these travails, we were able in 2013 to have the DTO become a 501(c) 3 religious corporation based in New York. We have a board of directors comprised of Janet Reale, Maeve-Eng Wong and Fernando Camacho. We are recognized in the State of Florida as a religious corporation as of 2017 and soon to include Connecticut. We currently have bank accounts in New York and Miami. In this period of transformation we have gone from two sanghas (New York and Florida) to four sanghas (Texas and Connecticut) and we have recently added a fifth sangha (Virginia). It was hard to imagine when we were going through all of the pains and disappointments from 2009 through 2013 that the DTO would flourish to this extent. "No mud, no lotus". The enthusiasm and zeal for the dharma of the new students and sangha members have energized the DTO. It is great to see the dharma through the eyes of a beginner.

Many of the seeds planted by Thay have come to bear fruit. Here is a partial list of their accomplishments:

- 1) Two students have become active monastic members in the DTO Zen tradition.
- 2) Two students have become active monastic members in the Korean Zen tradition.
- 3) Two students have been running the DTO-sponsored prison correspondence course for over 15 years.
- 4) One student has become a DTO-sponsored hospital chaplain.
- 5) Four students have been developing new sanghas.
- 6) Two students are running weekly meditation classes in their workplace with at times more than one hundred participants.
- 7) One student runs a monthly Children's Buddhist Sunday School
- 8) Two students have been very active in providing support and guidance to participants of recovery programs related to alcoholism and other addictions.

- 9) One student is regularly involved with a local interfaith group.
- 10) Three students are actively developing an interfaith dialogue program at the Mariandale Retreat Center.
- 11) One student has been elected to be a village trustee in her town.

Other significant accomplishments: a quarterly newsletter in which we share with each other all of our activities; a website which has been expanded, and a vibrant prison correspondence course.

We have also expanded the dharma study class, a four year course of study which can lead to a Certificate of Buddhist Studies for all of those who complete the course. We also are changing and developing the dharma training class which is reserved for those students who want to become dharma teachers.

SO WHAT IS OUR FUTURE? HOW CAN WE BETTER SPREAD THE DHARMA?

- 1) We need to define our primary and secondary roles now that the DTO has grown and has already many dharma teachers and priests. Our primary role as an organization should be to teach the dharma to a wider forum. We need to become more involved in providing spiritual guidance through teaching meditation classes, becoming politically active and by providing services to our communities.
- 2) Our secondary role should be to continue the dharma study and training classes. We need to understand that the students that come to those classes are like graduate students. Only a few are going to be interested in dedicating so much time when compared to the number of people who could be helped by learning more about the dharma.
- 3) We need to develop the website to help students who do not live near any of our sanghas. The online correspondence course will be very important.
- 4) We need to provide better spiritual nourishment to our sangha members, dharma teachers and priests.
- 5) We, as an organization, need to be more involved in providing service. We need to further strengthen the prison correspondence course, become more involved in feeding the hungry, supporting the sick and becoming spiritual beacons in our communities.

Annual Dharma Teacher Order Retreat
at Mariandale Conference and Retreat Center, Ossining, New York
Thursday, April 19 (extra day for dharma teachers and planning)
Friday, April 20—22 (3-day retreat)