



Buddhist Sangha of Bucks County

Meeting at the Yardley Friends Meeting, 65 North Main Street, Yardley, PA, 7pm Mondays

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ANNUAL REPORT 2016

The Mission of the Buddhist Sangha of Bucks County is: *To Present, Teach and Practice Buddhism, and to Provide Meditation Instruction and Community Service in a Manner Consistent with the Teaching of the Buddha.*

Our Sangha represents a safe space for us to investigate these teachings, and come to our own understanding and acceptance of what is true, letting that understanding guide our process of continuous transformation.

Working together, we support the desire to awaken our deepest understanding of life through meditation practice, dharma discussions, and opportunities for compassionate service.

This has been a year of growth and loss for our Sangha. We welcomed the addition of twenty new members. While three of those twenty have already left Pennsylvania, we hear from them that they have found new sources of practice, and appreciate even more the special environment we have created here that nurtured their growth.

We have lost two people revered in different ways for their contributions. Gil Howard, a past president and longtime board member passed away at the end of September. His wife, Terry Engleman, also served as a board member for several years, and the memorial service that we assisted her in preparing was a time of generous, heartfelt celebration for someone who contributed in many ways to the history and growth of the Sangha. Gil designed the order of service booklet that we use every week, and his spirit is rekindled every time we read from it. The picture shows Gil leading walking meditation on one of Lama Gursam's retreats a couple years ago.

I am pleased to announce that the board has voted to establish the *Gil Howard Retreat Assistance Memorial Award* to honor Gil's contribution to the development and leadership of the BSBC over the course of many years. The assistance will be awarded annually by the Board in the amount of up to \$300 to a BSBC member who requests help in covering the cost of a retreat with a recognized Buddhist teacher.



The Ven. Bhikshuni Karma Trime Lhamo, known to us simply as Ani Trime, died on October 31, Halloween, a coincidence she would have made a hearty joke about given her warm sense of humor. A Tibetan Buddhist nun for 40 years, she founded and led the Princeton Buddhist Meditation Group, which formed a sort of beach head for Buddhist study and practice in the Mercer-Bucks area. Many BSBC members sat and learned from Ani Trime over the years, and she was an invited guest teacher several times. This photo is of Ani Trime leading a day of mindfulness for us in 2011, with help from her student and friend, Beverly Sanford.



Three standing committees were created by the BSBC board as part of the bylaws revision last year, and they have become fully functioning this year. The activities of our members and friends are not confined by the committees, but organized and stimulated by them.

Communications Committee: (Co-chairs: Susan Harrison, Eugene Pevzner & Joe Beck). The committee continued to increase the BSBC's visibility on digital platforms. Contributions by several members and friends appeared regularly on our website and Facebook page, and a new Twitter account was established. Special events received special treatment through traditional means as well, through advertising in local news outlets, and the creation and posting of flyers. The results of these efforts are visible, as it has become common for two or three newcomers to appear on Monday nights, many having learned of us through social media. Susan Harrison has structured and been the primary author of the BSBC weekly e-newsletter, our primary communications vehicle to members, for many years, and as she steps down from this role to more fully enjoy retirement life with her husband, she has left a model that the committee leadership will continue to use into the future.

Program Committee: (Co-chairs Janet Weathers & Edna Telep, assisted by Dave Mermelstein and myself). We have studied the Buddha's teachings and related practices and traditions through visiting teachers, the book group hosted by board member Edna Telep, and weekly discussions. We sought to bring greater coherence to our weekly discussions of the dharma by focusing on a specific theme each month. The monthly themes included: Natural Awareness and Training the Mind, Gratitude and Mindful Living, Aspects of Mindfulness, The Meaning of Taking Refuge, Lojong (Tibetan 7-Point Mind Training), Bringing the Dharma into Everyday Life, Gaining Freedom through Buddhist Teachings and Practice, and Influential Buddhist Teachers. We also completed our exploration of Shantideva's poem "A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life" with the able assistance of Lama Gursam's senior student, John Wenz, who comes six times a year to lead our discussions. In addition to the Program Committee members, Sangha members David Clark and Joe Beck ably assisted in leading discussions.

Once again we held a New Year's Eve meditation event led by Jeanne Reis, wife of the BSBC founder James Reis, who graced us with her leadership and teaching again in June for a one day retreat. We were blessed to have three visits this year in February, July, and November from our Tibetan teacher, and special

friend, Yoga Acharya Lama Gursam, which included both dharma talks and one-day retreats. We deepened our relationship with the Princeton Buddhist Meditation Group. Several Sangha members attended a five-day retreat organized by the Princeton group and led by their well-known teacher in the Tibetan tradition, Anam Thubten, the spiritual director of the Dharmata Foundation.



Other special events included a return visit by John Orr who teaches in the Theravadan tradition for a weekend retreat in May, and new teachers who presented dharma talks and guided meditation at our Monday night services: Andre Doshin Halaw head of the Original Mind Zen Sangha in Princeton, and Dr. Rebecca Li, a teacher in the Chan tradition who is associated with the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in upstate New York.

Our meditation period was strengthened by new members leading the service, and energized by additional Pali chants led by vice-president, Dave Mermelstein, and David Clark, who were happy to share their hearty voices and love of chanting brought back from their participation in retreats at the Insight Meditation Society.

Outreach and Service Committee: (Co-chairs David Clark & Rika Barrett, assisted by Marilyn Picciotti and K.C. Focht). We have continued our outreach and service activities through contributions to the Bucks County Emergency Homeless Shelter, and through an initiative suggested by board member Marilyn Picciotti this year we gifted 303 pairs of socks, more than 200 pairs of gloves, and several dozen hats to the shelter. Marilyn also channeled special direct assistance to homeless persons on the street in nearby communities.

The BSBC joined with 21 other local congregations when the Family Promise program opened its doors to help homeless and low-income families in lower Bucks County to achieve sustainable independence. We serve as a support group to this program, and David Clark and K.C. Focht provided the leadership in establishing a positive, responsive working relationship with our assigned host congregation, the Lutheran Church of God's Love in Newtown. They also organized our on-site support activities when families stay for a week at the church. Additional participating BSBC members and friends were: Edna Telep, Diana Collinelli, Yvonne Matienko, Vanessa Persicketti, Rachel Anne Lawrence, Janet Weathers, and myself.

We continued our decade long tradition of participating in Pennsylvania's road clean-up program, collecting trash along our designated highway in Levittown, in the fall and spring, organized by Rika Barrett. The committee also made others aware of our presence in the community by having tables at two community events, the annual Yardley Friends arts and crafts market and at the Peace Fair sponsored by the Buckingham Friends Meeting. David Clark, Rika Barrett, K.C. Focht, and Eugene Pevzner all represented us at the events.



We also continued to bring awareness of Buddhist teachings through four invited columns in the Bucks County Courier Times, *From a Faith Perspective*, written by board member and Treasurer, Edna Telep, and myself.

Louise Wile, our librarian, has updated our lending library that provides many Buddhist books, periodicals, DVDs, tapes, and audio books. An initiative led by Dave Mermelstein has begun to expand the library by purchasing multiple copies of key books on Buddhism recommended by board members.

Financially, we ended the year with a balance of approximately \$4,464 as seen in Figure 1. These expenses included \$4,950 for our rent for the year based on \$90 per Monday evening and special events at the Yardley and Makefield Friends Meeting Houses. Thanks to our treasurer, Edna Telep, for handling the expenses and records with both caution and a spirit of generosity.

Figure 1 - BSBC FY 2016 Financial Statement

BSBC FISCAL YEAR 2016 (Nov 1 to Oct 31) FINANCIAL REPORT OF INCOME / EXPENSES	
Balance from FY 2015	\$ 4,607
Income	\$ 7,379
Expenses	Rent: \$ 4,950
	Retreats: 869
	Insurance 250
	Donations 250
	Purchases 388
	Other 245
	TOTAL \$ 7,522
Approximate Balance in Account (pending outstanding deposits & expenses)	\$ 4,464

We look to the coming year to continue the growth of our Sangha, welcoming teachers to deepen our understanding of Buddhist teachings while expanding practice and service opportunities for our members and friends. All are truly welcome.

I am grateful for the opportunity to be of service to the Buddhist Sangha of Bucks County, and greatly appreciate the ready and willing assistance from so many who have made this past year so valuable as we travel this path together.

-- Phil Brown, President

