

Still Water Mindfulness Practice Center

Mindfulness Practice in the Tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh

July 30, 2013

Dear Still Water Friends,

Ten years ago, when Still Water was four years old, the Working Group spent over a year developing a vision for our community. We wanted to clarify our intention and specify our goals. We distributed the vision statement to members of the Still Water community and placed it on our website (in the Welcome to Still Water section).



Shepherd's Table Sunday brunch volunteers, July 2013

Earlier this summer the Working Group decided it would be useful to assess our current efforts in terms of the four goal areas we identified ten years ago: supporting practice, creating community, building an effective and resilient organization, and contributing to love, peace, and justice in the world.

We wanted to share our review with you as part of our semi-annual Working Group letter to the Still Water community. We hope you find the enclosed report of interest. If you have questions, please feel free to contact Still Water (info@StillWaterMPC.org) or any members of the Working Group.

As you know, Still Water is entirely supported by Dana -- freely given donations. Some financial support comes through our Dana baskets, and some comes through donations associated with specific events. The core of our funding, however, comes from our Monthly Donors who contribute \$40-\$250 per month. Please consider whether you can contribute to Still Water in this way, or whether you can increase your pledge if you are already a Monthly Donor. And if becoming a Monthly Donor does not seem appropriate, please consider making a one-time contribution.

Thank you for your practice and your support of the Still Water Mindfulness Practice Center. Without you, Still Water could not be.

In gratitude,

The Still Water MPC Working Group:

Abbie Chessler, David Martin-McCormick, Lori Perine, Lynd Morris, Lynda Martin-McCormick, Mitchell Ratner, Paul Flippin, Paul Wapner, Scott Schang, and Tim McCormack



Practice Retreat at Charter Hall, February 2013



Mindful Families Fun Day, Glen Echo Park, June 2013



Mindfulness Practice in the Tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh

Report to the Community, July 2013

These are the highlights of Still Water's efforts over the past year toward each of our goals: supporting practice, creating community, building an effective and resilient organization, and contributing to love, peace, and justice in the world.

Supporting Practice

Still Water endeavors to serve both new and experienced practitioners. We intend to be a place of inspiration, learning, and refuge for anyone interested in meditation and the daily practice of mindfulness. We now offer eleven **sitting and practice opportunities** each week spread across five locations:

- Morning sitting meditation in Silver Spring, Takoma Park, and Chevy Chase for a total of six mornings each week
- Two afternoon sitting groups, in Frederick and Sandy Spring
- Three evening sitting, practice and sharing groups, in Silver Spring, Columbia, and Gaithersburg

Altogether, about 125 participants sit at these weekly practice gatherings, with many practitioners attending two or more sittings per week.

Still Water also offers **classes, retreats, and special events**. During the past twelve months, we offered:

- Two silent practice retreats and two mindful family weekends at the Charter Hall Retreat Center on the Chesapeake Bay
- Ten-week and six-week "Introduction to Mindfulness Practice" classes in Silver Spring and Columbia, as well as several single-evening introductions to sitting and walking meditation.
- Five "Days of Practice" at the Blueberry Gardens retreat facility in Ashton, Maryland
- A six-session class for 24 experienced practitioners called "Science of the Buddha" using Thich Nhat Hanh's dharma talks.
- A three-session class for 14 practitioners called "Savoring Life."
- Transmission of the Five Mindfulness Trainings to practitioners wishing to formally commit themselves to mindfulness practice in the Plum Village tradition. As always, Still Water joined with other local mindfulness communities to offer the transmission.

Each week for ten years, the Still Water community has emailed **teachings** and **Dharma discussion questions** that anchor our Thursday evening discussions in Silver Spring and maintain a spiritual connection with those not able to attend regularly. The messages are now received by more than 1,100 practitioners in the Mid-Atlantic area and beyond. We are especially gratified they have often been reposted by other mindfulness communities and used in their programs, not only in North America, but also in distant countries such as Scotland, Germany, and Malaysia.

Finally, and fundamentally, the Still Water community supports practice by **living our commitment to mindfulness**. New practitioners are encouraged, and experienced practitioners are sustained, when there is a perceptible presence in our walking meditation, a kindness in our listening to each other, and honesty and insight in the words we use to express ourselves.

Creating Community

Friendships and mutual caring naturally develop among people who regularly practice together. Over the years, lives become intertwined. Often, it is other practitioners support us through difficulties or join us when we are celebrating accomplishments and milestones.

In addition, Still Water offers yearly social events. Our New Year's Brunch has been going on for 11 years now. Our July Lotus Viewing at Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens is popular, as are our special exhibit tours at the Sackler and Freer Galleries. The intention is to create enjoyable events that bring together practitioners from the different parts of Still Water so that new relationships can form and existing relationships can deepen.

Our online Yahoo Group, Community Catalyst, offers an easy channel for communication among regular practitioners. Transitions and special moments are announced. Invitations are offered. Reflections are shared.

Still Water recognizes that we are all working to improve our capacity to be with others in a supportive and loving way. Many of our after-meditation readings and programs focus on relationship skills such as being more fully present with others, letting go of resentments, and transforming anger into clarity of intention and caring actions. Later this year, Still Water will offer a Fearless Compassion class focused on being with ourselves and others through old age, sickness, dying, and loss.

Building an Effective and Resilient Organization

The Buddha was once talking to the monk Sona about the right amount of self-discipline and effort advisable for someone practicing mindfulness. Sona had been a musician, so the Buddha compared right effort to the tightness of a lute string. If it is too loose it does not produce a pleasant sound. If it is too tight, the sound is also not pleasant and it is more likely to break. What is needed is a string that is not too tight and not too loose.

Similarly, over its 14 years of existence, Still Water has been developing an organizational structure that is intended to be neither top-heavy and restrictive, nor so loose and fragmented that collective decisions cannot be made in a timely manner. There are four main components:

- **Local Still Water groups**, such as on-going sitting and practice groups and the Mindful Family group, manage their own affairs in terms of times, topics, facilitators, and special events just for that group.
- **The Working Group** meets monthly and is responsible for the smooth functioning of Still Water as an organization. The Working Group also supports the Senior Teacher to envision, plan, implement, and evaluate Still Water activities, classes, and special events.
- **The Still Water Board** meets several times a year and ensures that the Still Water MPC is meeting all of its financial and legal responsibilities.
- **The Senior Teacher** works with the Working Group, Board, and the community to develop a shared vision for the community; offers teachings and classes that support practice; meets individually with community members; and is responsible for many organizational tasks, such as maintaining the web site.

The financial decisions of the Still Water MPC are guided by an ancient Buddhist principle known as Dana or Generosity. Most of our activities and programs have no fee. People who come to activities, or simply appreciate what is done, make donations so that the teaching can continue. Donations of financial resources, time, and expertise make it possible for Still Water to continue.

In 2012 Still Water's total income was \$55,900. Our primary source of income was from monthly pledges, followed by donations to local Still Water groups and donations for classes, retreats, and workshops. Our primary expense was remuneration for the Senior Teacher, who works full-time leading sittings, teaching classes, and organizing events. The other major expenses are: rent for spaces we use, class materials and other program expenses, scholarships, website and other administrative expenses, and a donation to Plum Village.

Contributing To Love, Peace and Justice in the World

Several years ago the Working Group designed a t-shirt with "Still Water Mindfulness Practice Center" on the back, and on the front a calligraphy by Thich Nhat Hanh of "Peace in Oneself, Peace in the World." In creating peace in ourselves, reconciling the war within, we are creating an essential condition for authentic and lasting peace in our families, communities, and among nations.

In some ways, it's that simple: when we wholeheartedly practice, when we cultivate a welcoming community, when we share our practice with others, we are creating a better world.

And, also, there is work to be done in the world. Many who come to Still Water activities have already committed their lives to healing others and our planet. Some work as teachers, therapists, social activists, and environmentalists. Others volunteer their time to non-profits and beneficial causes. Still Water offers these engaged practitioners ways of calming their minds and nourishing their hearts, so that they may lovingly and joyfully continue to serve.

Still Water also contributes as a community. For the past five years, practitioners have assisted at The Shepherd's Table, a resource center primarily for people without homes. Practitioners gather each third Wednesday morning to help staff the Clothing Closet, which offers Shepherd's Table's clients fresh clothes, showers, and household goods. Practitioners also prepare and serve brunch to clients on each fourth Sunday morning.

From the perspective of a Bodhisattva, an enlightened being, the boundaries between us, our communities, and the larger world are illusory. There is just suffering, not "my suffering," or "your suffering," or "their suffering." Whenever any bit of suffering is transformed, it is transformed for everyone.

In Gratitude

We value your involvement in the Still Water community. If you have any questions about this report, or concerns or suggestions about our community, please feel free to contact any member of the Still Water Working Group.

A lotus for you, a Buddha to be.

The Still Water MPC Working Group

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STILL WATER MINDFULNESS PRACTICE CENTER

Frequently Asked Questions About Dana

What do you mean by Dana?

Dana means generosity. It is one of the pillars of all mindfulness communities. It is a gift of the heart that brings joy and benefit to both the giver and the receiver.

What are my contributions used for?

The continued vitality of the community depends on those who participate and share our vision. Dana pays for room charges and other community expenses; supports our Senior Teacher, whose work is to offer the teachings and to organize the community; allows us to make most Still Water events open to everyone regardless of ability to pay; and helps us make contributions to Plum Village and other institutions that spiritually support us.

Who sets and manages Still Water's budget?

Still Water is overseen by a Board of Directors (currently Annie Mahon, Mitchell Ratner, Tim McCormack, and Sandy Schmidt) that has legal responsibility for Still Water's finances. A Working Group (see our attached letter) has chief responsibility for implementing Still Water's day-to-day operations. Together, these groups set Still Water's budget based on what we can raise and our expenses. Our largest expense, the stipend for Still Water's Senior Teacher, is benchmarked against the minimum Fair Compensation guideline for Unitarian Universalist churches with congregations of fewer than 150 members. Still Water has not yet been able to meet this benchmark.

Are my contributions tax deductible?

Yes, Still Water MPC is a 501 (c)(3) corporation under federal tax law. Dana donations to Still Water fully qualify as charitable contributions. If you donate \$100 or more per year, Still Water will send you an acknowledgement letter each February, verifying the total tax-deductible contributions received the previous year.

Why are yearly or monthly pledges so important?

Practitioners who commit to yearly or monthly contributions are the mainstay of Still Water's financial support. These pledges help us make our annual budget. Because the vast majority of our budget comes from pledges, these pledges help us decide how much we can spend on supplies, programs and the stipend to our Senior Teacher.

How large a contribution is appropriate?

Every Dana contribution is a personal decision influenced by many factors. A traditional answer to the question “How much?” is “Give until your heart is full.” Please know that every gift is appreciated and every practitioner is treasured. However, to provide guidelines for donors, we have established three suggested donor levels:

- ☺ up to \$50 per month
- ☺ \$51 to \$100 per month
- ☺ \$101 or more per month

What are my options to pledge?

- Online Bill Pay: You can set up regular payments to Still Water MPC through your bank on a monthly basis. (Cost to you: zero. Cost to us: zero.)
- Paper Check: You can send a check each month or quarter. (Cost to you: stamps, time and memory strain. Cost to us: zero.)
- Online Credit Card Payment: You can make a one-time or recurring credit card payment through PayPal (Cost to you: zero. Cost to us: a transaction fee of about three percent.)

Questions? Email info@StillWaterMPC.org or call 301 270-8353.

Dear Still Water MPC:

- I would like to become a Monthly Donor. I wish to pledge \$ _____ per month to support Still Water programs.
- I am already a Monthly Donor. I wish to maintain my pledge of \$ _____ per month, or increase my pledge to \$ _____ per month
- I enclose a one time contribution of \$ _____.
- I would like to contribute \$ _____ to the Scholarship Fund, which makes it possible for Still Water practitioners of limited means to attend our retreats and other retreats offered in the Plum Village tradition.
- I would like to donate appreciated stock – please contact me.
- I would like to offer my skills, insights, and efforts in the following way:

Name: _____
Street _____
City/ZIP _____
Phone number(s): _____
Email address: _____

Please send this form and your donation to:
Still Water MPC, P.O. Box 11360, Takoma Park, MD 20913.

Thank you!

All contributions are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

Electronic Payment Made Easy

Automatic electronic bill paying: If you already use online banking, you can set up regular payments to Still Water Mindfulness Practice Center. Just tell your bank the amount, how often, and to send payment to Still Water MPC, P.O. Box 11360, Takoma Park, MD 20913.

Paying online: Still Water MPC can receive one-time or recurring credit card payments through PayPal. Please go to www.stillwatermpc.org/donate.htm

If you have questions, please call (301) 270-8353 or send an email to Info@stillwatermpc.org.