

Still Water Mindfulness Practice Center



December 1, 2021

Dear Still Water Friend,

Thich Nhat Hanh writes in *Creating True Peace*:

The Sangha River is a community of friends who practice the way of harmony, awareness, and compassion. In the sangha we practice mindful walking and breathing. The sangha radiates a collective energy that can support us and make us strong. The sangha is a boat that transports us and prevents us from sinking into the ocean of suffering. This is why it is so important that we take refuge in the sangha. Allow your community to hold you, to transport you. When you do, you will feel more solid and stable and will not risk drowning in your suffering. Taking refuge in a sangha is not a matter of belief. “I take refuge in the Sangha” is not a statement of faith; it is a practice. As a river, all the individual drops of water arrive together at the ocean.

We are writing to you because we feel you are part of our community. Perhaps you participated in some of the almost 1000 online meditation and Dharma sharing meetings Still Water offered in the past year. Perhaps you are one of the more than forty Still Water practitioners who regularly facilitate our online groups. Or perhaps you receive the weekly announcement or follow us on social media.

In order for Still Water to continue and to thrive, we need your support.

The Still Water Mindfulness Practice Center is a Sangha, a spiritual community, in the Plum Village Tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh. We are based in suburban Maryland, near Washington, DC. Prior to the covid pandemic, we were primarily a network of in-person groups that came together weekly, or more often, for meditation, exploration of the mindfulness teachings and practices, and sharing of our experiences. In March of 2020, to support our practitioners and protect their health, the community began offering our Sangha gatherings online. In addition, four new online groups were formed. Very quickly our mindfulness gatherings became more geographically diverse, with former Still Water practitioners Zooming in from other states and countries, and with many new practitioners, from Maryland and beyond, able to join us.

This past year, even as we have continued to offer online Sangha gatherings, classes, social events, and retreats, the Still Water community has given attention to how we, as individuals and as a mindfulness practice center, can compassionately respond to the social issues of our time, especially racism, social and gender inequalities, and climate change. The Still Water Working Group (consisting of members from most of our ongoing groups) has implemented these initiatives:

- creating a study group to explore together the origins and consequences of racism
- holding a workshop for facilitators on creating Sangha gatherings that are inclusive and welcoming to all
- developing more inclusive Dharma sharing guidelines
- creating an “inclusive mindfulness community” resource list

Additionally, the Still Water Working Group and Board are working on the transition to a more open and shared approach to providing the administrative, financial, and technical support that Still Water relies on. Concretely, this means moving critical information from one person’s head and computer to a three-person executive committee that uses secure online tools.

As has been true since its inception, Still Water is guided in financial matters by the tradition of Dana, or generosity — a gift from the heart that brings joy and benefit to both the giver and the receiver. Dana enables Still Water to offer without charge our ongoing meditation and Dharma sharing groups, community events (such as our New Year’s Brunch – which will be an outdoor walk this year), and many special events (such as our Five Mindfulness Trainings Transmission Preparatory Classes).

Dana enables our community to meet its many expenses, including paying for website and social media development; maintaining online data bases of participants, events, and financial information; purchasing community supplies; contributing to other non-profits (such as Plum Village, Shepherd’s Table, and The Equal Justice Initiative); offering remuneration for guest teachers; and providing a modest stipend for our full-time senior teacher, Mitchell Ratner.

Because of the covid pandemic, the past two years have been financially difficult for Still Water, as they have been for many nonprofits. We invite you to begin, or continue, to support Still Water by sending a year-end donation or becoming a monthly donor. If you have been donating the same amount for many years, please consider supporting Still Water with an increased donation.

All contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. We also welcome Dana in non-monetary forms, including help with planning, organizing, and staffing events, as well as with building and maintaining our online and social media presence. Please see the attached page for more information on how to donate and how your contribution will be used.

Thank you for supporting Still Water and for being part of our community. We know you are there, and we are very happy.

May all beings be safe. May all beings be happy. May we have strength to meet whatever arises. May our days unfold with ease.

The Still Water Working Group

Barbra Esher, Carlos Munoz, Connie Anderson, Eliza King, Jonathan Neeley, Lori Perine, Mitchell Ratner, and Rachel Phillips-Anderson

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Frequently Asked Questions About Dana

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. (More information about Still Water's income and expenses is available on [Our Organic Organization page](#).)

Who sets and manages Still Water's budget? Still Water is overseen by a Board of Directors (currently Abbie Chessler, Mitchell Ratner, Rachel Phillips-Anderson, and Scott Schang) that has legal responsibility for Still Water's finances. The Working Group 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 median Fair Compensation Guideline for Unitarian Universalist churches with congregations of fewer than 150 members. Currently, our Senior Teacher's compensation is about thirty-eight percent of that benchmark.

Are my contributions tax-deductible? Yes. Still Water MPC is a 501 (c)(3) religious corporation under Federal tax law, and donations qualify as charitable contributions. If you contribute \$100 or more in attributable donations in a year, Still Water will send you an acknowledgement letter the following February, verifying the total tax-deductible contributions received in the previous year.

How can I make a one-time donation or become a monthly donor? You can make a donation or become a monthly donor on the [Donation Page of the Still Water website](#).

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. The suggested donation to the Dana basket at one of our evening sittings is \$10 or more. For convenience, regular attendees often enroll as monthly donors at \$50 or \$60 per month. Recognizing the many contributions Still Water makes to their lives and the wider world, many Still Water practitioners give more. Currently, the range of our monthly donations is from \$20 to \$350.

In what ways can I make a one time, monthly, or regular donations?

- **Online bill pay:** You can set up one time or regular payments to Still Water MPC through your bank's bill pay service. (Cost to you: zero. Cost to us: zero.) Just tell your bank the amount, how often, and to send payment to Still Water MPC, P.O. Box 11360, Takoma Park, MD 20913.
- **Direct Deposit from your checking account through ACH bank Transfer:** Similar to online bill payment, but it is done electronically without an actual check. (Cost to you: zero. Cost to us: one percent. However, the bookkeeping is much easier than with checks.) You can set up recurring direct deposits on our [Still Water Donation Page](#).
- **Handwritten checks to the Still Water MPC:** Of course you can write checks to the Still Water MPC. Each month (or quarter, half-year, or year) you can mail a check to Still Water (P.O. Box 11360, Takoma Park, MD 20913), or (when we are gathering again in person) you can drop a check in the Dana Basket at any Still Water MPC event. Please indicate in the note section that the contribution is part of a monthly pledge. (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 donation on our [Still Water Donation Page](#). (Cost to you: zero. Cost to us: a transaction fee of about three percent.)
- **Donation of appreciated stock or transfers from retirement accounts:** For some people the donation of appreciated stock or transfers from a retirement account are the most tax efficient way to make a contribution to Still Water. If you would like to explore this possibility, please contact Still Water MPC

How can I offer my skills, insights, and efforts to Still Water?

[Send Still Water an email](#) detailing how you would like to contribute.

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

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