

Minnesota Zen Meditation Center 2011 Annual Report

Introduction

The Board of Directors publishes an annual report to inform the community about the activities at the Center during the preceding year. This report provides useful information for members and helps us preserve MZMC's institutional memory.

2011 was a year of maturation and growth in which programmatic changes from 2010 were fully implemented. The new introductory program tripled the average attendance of previous years, and many students returned to complete the full series of introductory classes. Attendance at Sunday morning talks also increased, and there was good turn out for the new Tuesday Night Gathering. We have seen this energy translate into more participation in the fall and spring practice periods and in member numbers and involvement. The Board's ongoing challenge is to manage MZMC's resources and achieve sustainability.

Mission, Vision, and Values

- Mission:** Our mission is to help people experience a deep and quiet joy -- a joy that arises whenever we are fully engaged in the work or play of this moment.
- Vision:** We envision a world grounded in generosity, compassion and wisdom.
- Values:** These core principles define our mission and guide our community:
- Compassion:** We hold a deep and intuitive understanding of the emptiness and interconnectedness of all things. Knowing that nothing is separate from our self, we strive to be compassionate in all our activities.
 - Tradition:** We embrace the Buddhist and Soto Zen teachings and practices that have been handed down to us.
 - Practice:** We value and are open to new and different approaches to the practice of Zen Buddhism.
 - Community:** A spirit of cooperation guides our relationships with each other within the Zen Center community. We support and encourage one another on our spiritual paths and in our daily activities.
 - Engagement:** We are committed to being fully engaged in our day-to-day life, with family and friends, at work and play, and with the larger community, nation and world in which we live.
 - Excellence:** We are dedicated to providing high quality and relevant practice/learning opportunities and are committed to continual improvement by seeking and incorporating community feedback.

Membership

Membership remains our largest source of revenue, and the Board has focused on efforts to make membership meaningful to the community. In 2011 the membership sub-committee chaired by Lee Lewis continued the momentum started in the past year, when it first formed. This committee worked hard to great ends by putting to use information gathered in 2010 and organizing the most successful membership drive in MZMC history. The community substantially increased both the number of members (20% increase in the average number of members during year 2011) and the overall amount of pledges for 2012 (\$51, 000). The membership committee discussed how best to serve members and encourage community.

- There was a member-only event with Guest Teacher Tönen O'Connor on July 30, 2011.
- The new member *Dharma Journal* of creative work, short stories, essays, poems, sketches, and photos, was published three times.
- An archive of past Sunday talks continues to be available to members through the website.

Volunteers

Volunteers provide the structure necessary for practice and do many unseen tasks at MZMC. Along with the other temple officers, our volunteer coordinator Martin Lahn has organized the jobs and wonderful volunteers who keep MZMC running smoothly. A chart showing "who does what at MZMC" is posted on the bulletin board, illustrating how many individuals are routinely dedicated to the Center's operation. In August, MZMC hosted a thank-you evening to honor the hours that our many devoted volunteers contributed throughout the year.

Programming

In our continuing effort to meet the needs of our community and fulfill our mission of helping people to settle into a space of deep calmness, we introduced several programming changes in November 2011:

- Weekly Tuesday Night Gatherings that include a guided meditation, a brief talk, silent meditation, and discussion. These gatherings follow evening zazen, and are appreciated both by newcomers and experienced practitioners alike. People enjoy both the opportunity for increased interaction with others and the meditative elements provided.
- Revamped Saturday mornings, including guided meditation and twice-monthly traditional services.
- The adoption of a contemporary style for our evening zazen.

We are very happy that these changes are proving to be so successful. Our increased attendance at Sunday morning talks, which happened right after we made this transition, is especially impressive. Newcomers are also signing up in increasing numbers for one-to-one meetings with priests. This is coupled with the fact that practice period enrollment has increased significantly from previous years.

Priest Activities

MZMC could not function without the many contributions of its priests. They serve in officer roles such as Tenzo (Cook) and Ino (Practice Coordinator), teach classes, lead retreats, meet individually with sangha members, and much, much more. In addition to all the “visible” service that priests provide at MZMC, they also study and train as a group and perform many services to the sangha and wider community. In 2011 these included conducting weddings and memorial services, leading retreats away from MZMC, and giving many talks to school and community groups.

Senior Teachers are Lee Lewis, Susan Nelson, Ted O’Toole and Rosemary Taylor; senior priests-in-training are Guy Gibbon and Bonnie Versboncoeur; priests-in-training are Ben Connelly, Chris Hafner, Wanda Isle, and Martin Lahn. Their biographies can be found at <http://mnzencenter.org/teachers.php>.

Associate Guiding Teacher

In March 2011, Rosemary Taylor became our first associate guiding teacher, providing backup when Tim is away as well as additional sangha support. Her term lasts through February 2012, when another of MZMC’s independent teachers will take this two-year position.

Dharma Transmissions

Two people received dharma transmission from Tim Burkett, becoming independent teachers: Susan Nelson in September 2011, and Ted O’Toole in February 2012. We congratulate them both on the successful completion of priest training and thank them for their many years’ wholehearted service to the sangha.

Zen Initiation and Upcoming Ordinations

Fifteen members, our largest group in recent memory, received Zen initiation from Tim Burkett in September. In this ceremony, participants affirmed their intention to live in accordance with the Buddhist Precepts and Bodhisattva Vows, and received dharma names along with the rakusus they had sewn during the summer.

Three people are currently sewing robes in preparation for ordination this fall: Stacy Lee King, Nancy Hafner, and Matt Larson.

Succession Planning

An important topic addressed by the Board in 2011 was succession planning. As guiding teacher, Tim Burkett is central to MZMC, and provides the energy and direction of MZMC. Though this is not something we like to think about, it is important that we have a plan for how we will handle issues of succession when the need arises. The Board has written a succession document that provides guiding principles when the need arises to choose a new guiding teacher. This plan will be reviewed annually.

Guest Teacher

Every year we bring in an out-of-town teacher whose work we particularly value and admire to teach, give a Sunday talk, and give our sangha more of a perspective on the wider world of dharma offerings. In July 2011 we were pleased to host Tonen O'Connor, resident priest at Milwaukee Zen Center, for a member event, dharma talk, and Sunday afternoon workshop, "*Dogen's Valley Sounds, Mountain Colors.*"

Community Offerings

MZMC continued to host the weekly meetings for *Buddhism and the Twelve Steps of Recovery*. We also celebrated the first full year of a well-received new program, *Dharma Family Sundays*, and began a fruitful partnership with the Joyce Food Shelf. Several other activities (see below) invited the wider community to become more familiar with the MZMC.

Dharma Family Sundays: Parents and children of all ages come together once a month to share the dharma with stories, meditation, songs, activities that highlight the ethical and relational aspects of the teaching, and food. Developed and led by Susan Nelson and a small group of volunteers, this valuable program meets the third Sunday of each month after Sunday Tea.

Partnership with Joyce Uptown Foodshelf

In summer 2011, we began a relationship with the Joyce Foodshelf, collecting food in the summer and backpacks and school supplies for local schoolchildren in the fall. After the great success of those drives, we are pleased to be collecting food and personal care items for families in need. Thanks to Board member Cindy Wetzell for creating this relationship and coordinating the program.

Other Community Activities 2011

- Volunteers and staff attended East Calhoun Community Organization (ECCO) meetings.
- Staff sent periodic updates to the city council about our community work.
- Members participated in the ECCO community June sale weekend with a poetry table, refreshments, and a successful open house. We had over 45 visitors take individualized tours that day.
- MZMC hosted *Music in the Garden*, a well-attended, free concert open to all in the Twin Cities area. Ben Connelly, Matt Larson, and Leo Hansen provided terrific music and refreshments were served. (This event was publicized in the Star Tribune.)

Building and Grounds

Our charming old building requires a good deal of maintenance and upkeep. The Board makes decisions about the building, overseeing and directing the tremendous amount of work done by volunteers and staff to take care of our home. In 2011 we maintained and improved the building and grounds in ways visible and invisible. Perhaps the most important thing we did to prepare for the future was to familiarize ourselves with the results of an asset management study described below.

Asset Management Study

In 2011 we received and reviewed the results of an outside, professional assessment of our building's needs. The resulting report addressed the issues facing our structure, which has accumulated a large amount of deferred maintenance. Along with the work that was recommended over the next three years, the report estimated the building's annual maintenance costs to be twice what would be expected for a building of its size (because of its age and unusual construction).

Along with these maintenance needs, our growing sangha will at some time in the not-so-distant future face the prospect of outgrowing our current space. With this in mind, the Board is beginning to investigate a number of ideas including taking out a loan to do repairs, doing a major fundraising drive, expanding the building to increase capacity, and the option of finding a newer, larger building. The Board is developing a plan to determine how to proceed with this important decision.

Zafu and Zabuton Replacement Project

We retired many of our tired, worn zafus and zabutons, replacing them with new ones. Wanda Isle coordinated this project, with sangha volunteers helping with the sewing and stuffing. The cushions in the zendo and Founder's Hall were replaced in 2010; those on third floor were replaced this past year.

New Fans and Lights

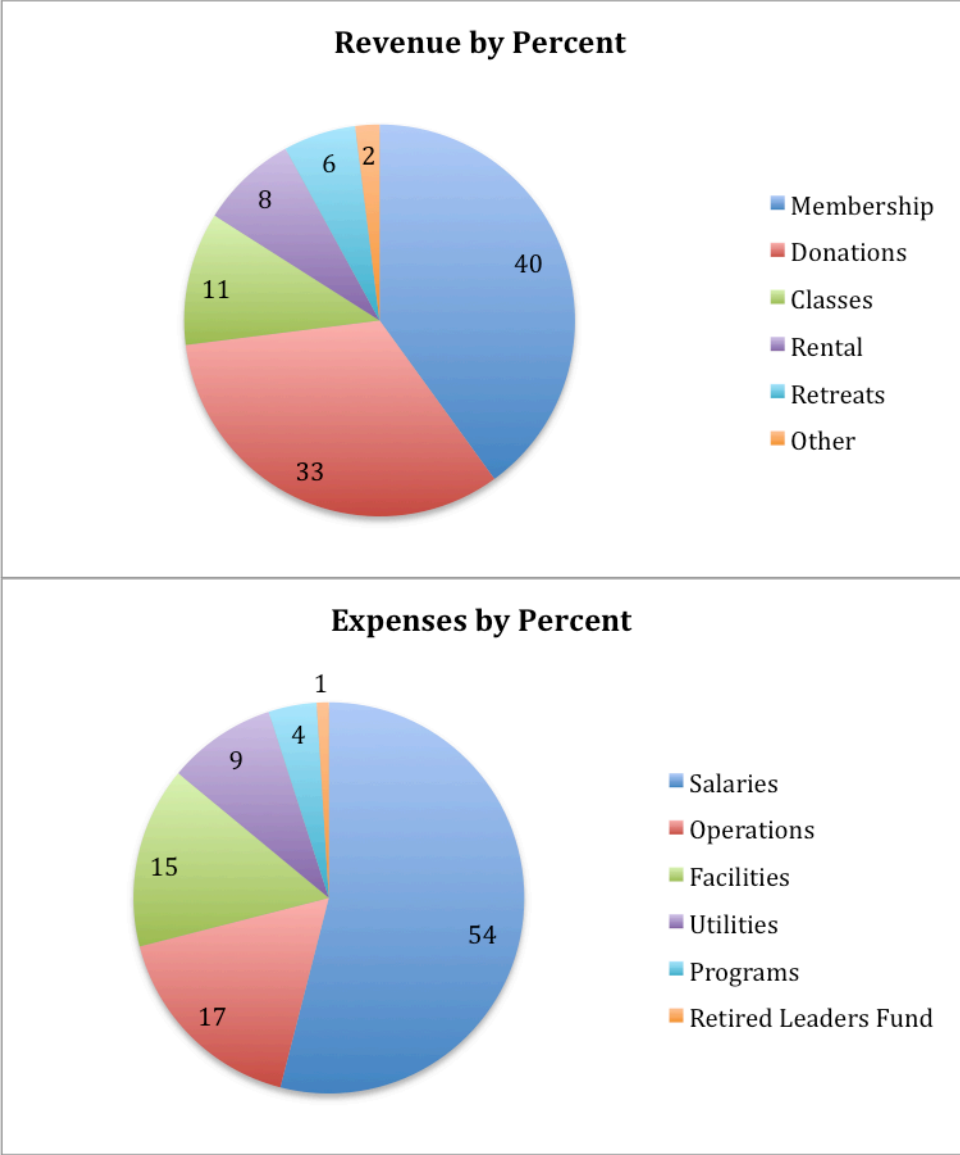
Thanks to a generous member gift, we were able to purchase attractive new ceiling fans for the zendo. The fans increase airflow and make the space more comfortable. New fixtures provide flexibility in lighting the zendo for meditation, lectures, classes, and sewing. Thank you for this gift.

Budgeting

Budgeting is an important Board function. Together with staff, the Board plans for the fiscal year and makes good decisions about revenue projections and expenditures. A subcommittee chaired by Treasurer Dennis Farmer works with staff to produce a budget each year. This budget is then approved by the full Board. Currently, we have three main areas for revenue generation: membership, programming, and donations (including fundraising efforts).

Operating Budget

The staff and Board are committed to balancing revenues and expenses for the year, and carefully review financial reports at every Board meeting. An external audit is done every other year. We balanced the budget for the year 2011; our income exceeded our expenses by \$22,400. This excess was due to a generous pledge match in the fall of 2010. The charts below indicate areas of revenue and expense for 2011.



Assets

We are fortunate to own our building and property. They are a great asset to our organization. We also have some reserve cash.

Fund	December 31, 2010	December 31, 2011
Calvert Money Market	\$61,509	\$61,516
Endowment Fund	\$2,762	\$2,779
Non-designated cash	\$26,500	\$37,981
TOTAL	\$90,771	\$102,276

Fundraising

Each year the Board does some type of direct fundraising to supplement our main revenue streams. Fundraising events have often proven stressful and demanding for our small community. In 2011, the Board decided not to hold an event but to do a “special ask” of a number of members and friends to see if they could make an additional contribution, above and beyond their membership commitment, to help balance the budget. Even in these hard economic times, many made very generous contributions, and we are deeply grateful for their additional support.

2011 Board of Directors

MZMC’s members are also its owners. They elect representatives who serve three-year terms. The Board meets on the fourth Sunday of every month and oversees all aspects of the Center, including its staff, programming, facilities, and financial stability. The current members of the MZMC Board are:

President Dan Wagner

Vice President Lee Lewis

Treasurer Dennis Farmer

Secretary Matt Larson

Ben Connelly

Ted O’Toole

Gerry Ruch

Cindy Wetzell

Board Nominations and Election 2012

A process for a more inclusive Board nominations and elections was developed in 2011, to allow for greater transparency into the process and more involvement by the sangha. We are pleased to have three excellent candidates for election to the Board at our annual meeting: Monica Reede, Shaun Morrell, and Jen Racho. Outgoing Board members are Gerry Ruch and Board President Dan Wagner. We thank them wholeheartedly for their service!

Acknowledgements

The Board would like to end this report by thanking Tim Burkett for his inspiration, dedication, and leadership during the past year. The Board also thanks the priests and many volunteers who tirelessly work to make the programs at MZMC possible. On behalf of the community, we extend gratitude and appreciation to you, the myriad of bodhisattvas in our midst.

Conclusion

Thank you for reading this report. The MZMC Board is committed to representing and serving the members of this community. We are always interested in your input and feedback. Our meetings, on the fourth Sunday of each month at 11:30 a.m., are open to all; please feel free to attend. If you have questions about this report or would like more information, please contact the office or talk to one of the Board members.