

Guidelines for SnowFlower Sangha Tuesday Night Leaders

Coming into Trinity United Methodist Church

Obtain the bag with the key from the previous week's leader.

Bring flowers or use the dried flowers in a box in the closet.

Arrive at Trinity no later than 6:30 to open the door and set up the space.

Turn on the outside lights, the lights in the hall and in the Wesley room (the upstairs room where we meet). Place paper arrows to lead the way from the west doors to the Wesley room. Until you have a greeter in place, keep checking to see if anyone has arrived yet. (The doors lock automatically, so people won't be able to get in on their own.)

As soon as possible, ask someone to serve as a greeter. This person will stay downstairs until 7:15 to let people in, and to greet and direct newcomers. At 7:15 the greeter will quietly enter the meditation room and sit in a chair by the door that has been reserved for him/her.

If there is more than one leader, decide who will do what during the evening and how the dharma talk will flow.

If you need help with any of the tasks, ask Sangha members ahead of time, or as they arrive. In addition to assigning a greeter, you might ask for help with setup, reading, inviting the bell or anything else that will assist you.

Room Setup:

Get the rug from the closet and unroll it in a central place in the meditation area. Roll in chairs from around the large table to surround the rug. Those who wish to sit on cushions can form two rows facing each other on the rug. This allows for 6-8 floor sitters and creates a pleasant effect in front of the circle of chairs.

Altar Setup:

Take wooden table from near the closet and place it where you'll want the altar.

From the shelf in the closet, take out the plastic bin containing statues, cloths, and pictures, and the small cardboard box containing the bells. Place these on the large, rectangular table near the windows.

Cover the altar with one of the cloths. Place a statue of Quan Yin or the Buddha along with one of Thay's photos on the altar. Place the flowers on the altar.

Place one or more candleholders with tea candles in them on the altar.

Light the candles when people begin to arrive.

Set-up of your sitting space:

Set up your sitting space in the front or side of the room, to one side of the altar.

Place the large bell and the small bell close by, if possible on one of the low wooden chairs, out of respect.

Place any papers or books you will be using for the evening within easy reach.

Make sure you can see the wall clock or have a watch to keep track of the time.

Documents setup:

Documents are found in the dark blue binder on the shelf in the closet.

Place the following documents on a small table near the door:

Introduction to SnowFlower Sangha

A recent Newsletter

Love & Understanding Program pamphlets and envelopes

You may also place a statue of the Buddha or Quan Yin and a candle next to the documents.

Put the remaining materials (including the library box) on the large rectangular table near the windows.

Be available to greet people and notice if there are new people. If you prefer not to be responsible for newcomers, ask another Sangha member to do so.

Lights:

Check the lights and make sure that they are not too bright yet provide enough light to move around the room and read if you plan to do so. You may choose to use the two table lamps rather than the overhead light during the meditation.

Opening the Sit:

Be seated around 6:55 and be ready to invite the first bell at 7:00.

Invite the first bell once.

Welcome everyone to SnowFlower Sangha.

Ask everyone to say their names, starting with yourself, and ask that new people identify themselves as such.

If there are new people, welcome them again, and direct their attention to the written information. Also, let them know that you and/or other Sangha members will be available

at the end of the evening to speak to them and to answer any questions. You may want some members who are willing to act as resources to raise their hands.

Explain the format of the evening. Do so more elaborately and in more detail if there are new people. Briefly introduce the meditation practice. There are suggestions on how to do this in the red folder.

You may or may not wish to mention the evening's topic or theme and/or provide further information such as a short reading or specific instructions that pertain to the topic or theme.

Instructions for Leading a Guided Meditation:

When leading a guided meditation, it is most important to remember that when people are meditating, they should not be startled by the sound of words. To avoid jolting people, the bell is gently used before words are spoken. Wakening the bell, rather than inviting it with a full sound, by touching the rim of the bell firmly with the inviter and not moving the inviter away does this. This muffles the sound. (For more complete information, consult Thay's book, *The Blooming of a Lotus*.)

First Sit:

Wake the bell and invite it three times to mark the beginning of the first sit.

Specific instructions for bell invitation are available. If you are new to inviting the bell, it is good to read those and to practice inviting the bell.

The first sit is 20-25 minutes.

At the end of the sit, wake the bell and invite it once. Bow.

Preparation for walking Meditation:

Invite people to stretch their legs.

Announce that walking meditation will be starting.

Explain walking meditation basics if there are new people.

Let people know how to arrange themselves for the walk (how many circles and the flow).

Explain the bell sequence if there are new people.

Bell 1: stand, move sit-upons if necessary, and get into circle(s).

Bell 2: bow to the center of the circle.

Bell 3: turn to the left and begin to walk.

Bell 4: stop and turn to face into the circle

Bell 5: bow and then return to seats.

Use the small bell.

Invite the bell once.

Stand up and move your sit-upons and materials.

Take the small bell with you for the walk. Use the wall clock to time the walking.

Walking Meditation:

When everyone is in the circle, invite bell the second time and bow.

Invite the bell third time and begin walking.

After 10-15 minutes, invite the bell for the fourth time.

When people are facing into the circle, invite the bell for fifth time.

Begin to move slowly towards your seat, rearrange yourself and have the large bell at hand.

Second Sit:

Wake the bell and invite it three times.

After 20-25 minutes wake the bell, invite it once, and bow.

Dharma talk:

Announce your topic or theme.

Spend 10-15 minutes providing your comments.

If there is more than one presenter, the entire presentation time should not exceed 20 minutes, so that there is sufficient time for the discussion.

When you are done, bow. If there are new people, explain the practice and the intention behind bowing.

You may want to mention that silence is also a wonderful way to take in the topic.

Be attentive and respond to Sangha members who are bowing.

At about 8:25 announce that there are just a few minutes left and invite any final comments.

After a couple of additional minutes, invite the bell once, and ask if there are announcements.

After announcements, explain the suggested \$2 donation and ask people to place it in the basket by the door as they leave.

Ask that socializing be held off until those who wish to leave silently can do so.

Encourage new people to stay and meet Sangha members and ask Sangha members to stay and talk with them.

Invite everyone to form a circle and hold hands. Invite them, if they wish, to put those who may need support into the circle.

Stay in the circle for a few minutes, allowing time for names to be placed in it.

Then raise your arms to signal the end of the evening, and after everyone raises their arms, bow to the center of the circle.

Room Re-Setup and closing down:

Roll up the rug, fold it once, and put it back into the closet.

Put the documents back into their folders, and the folders back into the binder.

Take down the altar and wrap Quan Yin and the Buddha in altar cloths. Put the statues and the photos back into the bin.

Put both bells into the small cardboard box.

Try to find the leader for the following week and give her/him the bag. If the next leader is not present, give the to bag to someone who can come early the following week or will be in touch with the next leader. Put all boxes, bins and library materials back on the shelf in the closet.

Turn off lights and make sure to close west doors behind you when you leave.



Thank you for your courage and generosity in volunteering to lead Sangha. Remember that these guidelines are intended as supports rather than mandates: we appreciate your efforts and don't expect perfection!

May you be happy and may you have peace.

Last revised, April, 2009.