



**Report and Recommendations of the
SnowFlower Sangha Committee on Diversity**
November 19, 2015¹

I. INTRODUCTION.

SnowFlower Sangha (“SnowFlower,” “SF” or “the Sangha”) should commit to creating, implementing and sustaining a program to address diversity and related subjects.² This report of the SnowFlower Committee on Diversity (“the Committee” or “we”) explains why this commitment is consistent with the

¹ An earlier version of this report was circulated on September 27, 2015. This version corrects

² By “diversity and related subjects,” (alternatively, “Diversity”) we mean the range of issues included in multicultural awareness, understood here as the attempt to benefit ourselves and our society by achieving “a greater understanding, sensitivity, and appreciation of the history, values, experiences, and lifestyles of groups[,]” including groups based upon race, ethnicity, gender, gender identification, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, socio-economic status, and mental and physical abilities. See the University of Norte Dame Counseling Center’s website available at: <http://ucc.nd.edu/self-help/multicultural-awareness> (last visited September 6, 2015.) In the context of race, we intend to extend “diversity and related subjects” and “Diversity” to also include such terms as “individual,” “institutional” and “structural racism,” and “white privilege” as defined in the Aspen Institute’s Glossary for Understanding the Dismantling Structural Racism/Promoting Racial Equity Analysis (the “Glossary.”) See Appendix D, downloaded from <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/docs/rcc/RCC- Structural-Racism-Glossary.pdf> (Visited on June 30, 2015; the Glossary is no longer available at this link.) In the context of race, we also intend that the terms “diversity and related subjects” or “Diversity” include “implicit bias,” a term that means our thoughts, feelings attitudes, stereotypes and other hidden biases outside of conscious awareness and control that influence perception, judgment, and action. See <http://www.projectimplicit.net/index.html> (Last visited November 9, 2015).

teachings of the Buddha as interpreted by Thich Nhat Hanh and other contemporary Buddhist teachers. The report then outlines the suggested scope and details of this commitment. At its core, such a diversity program would seek to foster greater multicultural understanding and engagement among Sangha members. Finally, this report is offered as a resource to members; accordingly our quotes and cites are perhaps longer and greater than otherwise needed. When in doubt, we have erred on the side of comprehensiveness.

After summarizing in Section II the formation and meetings of the Committee, we discuss in Section III the teachings of the Buddha and present-day teachers that reflect a strong commitment to sangha diversity.³ In Section IV we recommend various steps the Sangha could take to address these issues, steps that are both general and specific in scope. As to the latter, we suggest and explain why our initial focus should address Diversity issues associated with persons of color and transgender persons, all the while not lessening our commitment to ensure that as a Sangha, SnowFlower is, and is perceived as being, open and welcoming to all.

These are just recommendations. They are neither intended to be exclusive nor unchangeable to the ideas that undoubtedly will be offered by SnowFlower's representatives on its governing councils and by other Sangha members. We look forward to these discussions.

It is our great hope that a Sangha Diversity program will help uncover and then heal the wounds of our separation, a term used here both in its Buddhist sense and in its historical/societal sense. That many of us are unaware of these wounds is at the heart of the issues waiting to be addressed.

II. COMMITTEE OVERVIEW.

Due to well-publicized incidents involving “stand your ground laws,” and extremely troubling incidents of police violence against people of color, the issues of implicit bias, racial diversity and equity have gained national attention. In response, last year Heather Mann gave a Dharma talk in which she expressed her concern about the Sangha's lack of racial diversity.

As a result of Heather's talk and subsequent requests by interested Sangha members, the Care Taking and Steering Councils (the “Councils”) approved the creation of this Committee,⁴ requesting that it “study and recommend actions

³ When used without capitalization, the term “diversity” has the meaning as stated in the Glossary.

⁴ Committee membership remained in flux throughout 2015. For purposes of this report, the Committee's members consist of Joe Fishback, Ben Hair, Keith Hazelton, Curt Pawlisch, Karen Reppen and Sue Laughrin. The Committee acknowledges and appreciates the significant

for the Sangha to take on the issue of diversity so as to support, protect and enhance the practice of the Sangha and its members.”⁵ The Councils accepted Curt Pawlisch’s offer to chair the Committee’s first meeting, a role Committee members affirmed until the Committee had submitted its recommendations.⁶

The Committee met on February 14, March 14, and July 18, 2015 for the purpose of issue identification and discussion. As a result of these discussions and further study, the Committee chair prepared and circulated a draft report for member review and comment. The Committee approved the draft report without change on September 26, 2015.

III. THE BUDDHA DEMONSTRATED A COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, A COMMITMENT THAT IS CONTINUED IN THE TEACHINGS OF THICH NHAT HANH AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES.

A. The Buddha Sought An Inclusive Sangha.

More than 2500 years ago the Buddha rejected the discrimination and inequality inherent in his society and instead opened his sangha to persons of all castes. In *Old Path, White Clouds*, Thay illustrates this rejection by recounting when the Buddha invited a woman from the untouchable class to join his sangha:

We have no caste in our sangha. Several untouchable men have already been ordained as bhikkhus. Venerable Sunita, so highly regarded by King Pasenadi, was an untouchable. If you wanted to become a bhikkhuni, you would be the first nun to come from the untouchables.⁷

Likewise, in both the Metta Sutta and the Sutra of the White Clad Disciple,⁸ the Buddha urges us respectively to extend loving kindness and compassion to all beings without discrimination and to value all persons by their virtue and not by their family or caste.⁹ Just as a mother loves and protects her only child,

contributions it received from its former members: Diane Austin, Carol Rubin and He Jingying. A special thank you to Heather Mann and Susan Pearsall for their review of this draft.

⁵ See Appendix C, Ad Hoc Snowflower Diversity Committee, February 14, 2015 Meeting Minutes; see Appendix C for the minutes of each Committee meeting.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ See Thich Nhat Hanh, *Old Path White Clouds: Walking in the Footsteps of the Buddha* at 389 (Parallax Press 1991).

⁸ Thich Nhat Hanh uses the Pali word when referring to this teaching. See Thich Nhat Hanh, *Teachings on Love* at 11 (Parallax Press 1998)(“*Teachings On Love*”).

⁹ See *Teachings on Love* at 11-12 (Parallax Press 1998)(quoting the Metta Sutta); see also Thich Nhat Hanh, *For A Future To Be Possible, Commentaries on the Five Mindfulness Trainings* at

the Buddha says in the Metta Sutta, we should cultivate boundless love to all living beings, extending wishes of happiness to “beings who are frail or strong, tall or short, big or small, visible or not visible, near or far away, already born or yet to be born.”¹⁰ This, he says, is “the noblest way of living.”¹¹ In the Sutra of the White Clad Disciple, the Buddha tells us that, just as the value of an ox is not determined by its various colors or places of origin, but instead by its ability to transport, so too should we not determine the value of a human being by his or family or caste, but instead by his or her virtuousness.¹² The greatest happiness, he teaches, is achieved by making offerings to those who are “truly virtuous.”¹³

B. Thich Nhat Hanh Embraces And Values Sangha Diversity.

Thich Nhat Hanh has emphasized the importance of Sangha diversity in several ways, including authoring book on the topic,¹⁴ offering retreats for people of color, and teaching about Engaged Buddhism and the importance of Sangha building. He self-identifies as a person of color and notes that he has been a victim of racial hatred in our country.¹⁵

Thay has taught that Engaged Buddhism in the context of the Vietnam War required an expansive awareness that extended beyond the meditation hall to the bombed villages, that heard the “the cries of the wounded children,” and

206-08 (Parallax Press, 1998)(quoting the Sutra on the White Clad Disciple)(hereinafter “*For A Future To Be Possible*”). Both teachings are provided in full in Appendix A.

¹⁰ See *Teachings on Love* at 11-12). Teachers who emphasize the importance of greater sangha diversity frequently cite the Metta Sutta. See, e.g., Mushim (Patricia) Ikeda of the East Bay Meditation Center, “(EBMC) *Real Refuge: Building Inclusive and Welcoming Sanghas* “Bias and Privilege,” Week 3, August 19th, 2013, an online retreat available at www.tricycle.com/retreats. Ms. Ikeda asks sanghas to look deeply at “who is not in the room,” a form of practice she bases upon the Metta Sutta’s reference to “the visible and invisible.” Drawing from the transcript on her online retreat, we have prepared a skeletal draft of this practice (see Appendix B); we invite others to develop it further. Alternatively, further work on the draft could be assigned to a permanent Diversity Committee. See *infra*, Section IV.A.2.a.

¹¹ See *Teachings on Love* at 11-12.

¹² See *For A Future To Be Possible* at 206-08.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Together We Are One: Honoring Our Diversity, Celebrating Our Connection*, (Parallax Press, Kindle ed. 2010)(hereinafter, “*Together We Are One*”). The topic of diversity is strongly evident in *Friends On The Path*, a book on Sangha building that Jack Lawlor compiled from Thay’s Dharma talks and the works of other contributors in the Thich Nhat Hanh tradition. See e.g., Thich Nhat Hanh, *Friends On The Path* (Parallax Press 2002)(“*Friends On The Path*”), Charles King, “Embracing Diversity in the Mindfulness, Diversity and Social Change Sangha at 215-23; Larry Yang, “Directing the Mind Towards Practices in Diversity” at 225-28; and “Metta as Diversity Practice” (developed by Larry Yang, Appendix II at 278-81).

¹⁵ *Together We Are One* at Kindle Locations 704-13.

saw “the pain of adults whose houses [had] been destroyed.”¹⁶ Living in awareness, then and now, Thay writes, is the most important precept: “To know what is going on, not only here, but there,”¹⁷ and with such awareness to “do something to change the course of things.”¹⁸ It is no accident that each of the Five Mindfulness Trainings begins with the clause, “Aware of . . .”.¹⁹ As discussed in Section IV, it was an awareness of the “cries of the wounded children,” that led to the creation of the Diversity Committee and these recommendations.

We likewise note that Thay’s First and Second Mindfulness Trainings are particularly applicable in the context of Diversity. In relevant part, they urge us to become aware of, and act to relieve, the suffering caused by the loss of life, exploitation and social injustice. The trainings direct us to:

- Cultivate insight on interbeing and compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of all people;
- Look deeply to see that:
 - harmful actions arise from anger, fear, greed, and intolerance, emotions that arise from dualistic and discriminative thinking;
 - our happiness and suffering are not separate from the happiness and suffering of others;
- Cultivate openness, non-discrimination, and non-attachment to views in order to transform violence
- Practice generosity in our thinking, speaking and acting; and,
- Share our time, energy and material resources with those who are in need.²⁰

Importantly, we benefit from our work on Diversity. A lack of diversity creates suffering for ourselves and others, a suffering about which we may not be fully aware, the “hidden wound” as one poet has called it.”²¹ In *Together We Are One, Honoring Our Diversity, Celebrating Our Connection*, Thay addresses the suffering caused by the inferiority complex, the superiority complex and the equality complex:

If we have only one way of thinking, one way of acting, we

¹⁶ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The World We Have: A Buddhist Approach to Peace and Ecology*, Kindle Locations 569-79 (Kindle Edition 2008.)

¹⁷ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace* at 68-69 (Parallax Press. 2009). The Five Mindfulness Trainings are available at <http://plumvillage.org/mindfulness-practice/the-5-mindfulness-trainings/> (Last visited August 6, 2015.)

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ Wendell Berry, *The Hidden Wound* (Houghton Mifflin, 1970)

imprison ourselves in the framework of that one culture, and then we cannot understand the suffering, the hopes, the dreams, the difficulties of people who live in a different place, who have a different culture, who are of a different race.²²

. . .

We may have a concept about happiness, about freedom, about the future, and we tend to impose these concepts on other races, other groups, other cultures, other countries, and we create suffering for them. We think that everybody must accept and live up to our political model in order to qualify as a civilized people. Thinking this way is like tying ourselves up with rope and using the same rope to tie up everybody else. Cultural and racial discrimination creates suffering for ourselves and for others. We have to give ourselves a chance to learn new ways of thinking and acting so that we can create connections with other civilizations, other races, other cultures.

We cannot remain stuck in our superiority complex, whether it is based on race, on culture, on technology, or on ideology.²³

Diversity is needed, another leading Buddhist teacher states, to relieve our suffering—the suffering of dominant group members. angel Kyodo Williams states:

Where diversity of mainstream communities is concerned, most of the work is for white folks to attend to. **The dominant group is actually suffering because it is not dealing with something that is present.** The structures may make it such that they don't have to, but that doesn't take away from the fact that they are suffering. **Any time we're part of a system that perpetuates oppression, ultimately we're suffering in keeping that system going.** In American Buddhism these kinds of changes don't need to come because we need to do people of color a favor, or we need to make space for the gender variant people. **We have to get clear that an essential aspect of our practice is to shift these things internally for ourselves, because our personal liberation, the very thing we come to the dharma for, is completely bound up in making these kinds of changes.** It's not a superficial concern.²⁴ (Emphasis added.)

²² Sister Jewel, Introduction, *Together We Are One* at Kindle Locations at 133-36.

²³ *Id.* at Kindle Locations at 917-22.

²⁴ See Lion's Roar staff, "Why Is American Buddhism So White?" (November 10, 2011) available

In her introduction to Thay's book on sangha diversity, Sister Jewel urges that we use Thay's teachings "to move past our limits and delusions of separation."²⁵ Each of us, she writes: puts it this way:

. . . contributes to the collective consciousness. As we heal our suffering, we also heal the collective consciousness, so that it becomes healthier, more compassionate, more just for future generations.²⁶

We have to change the society from its roots, which is our collective consciousness, where the root-energies of fear, anger, greed, and hatred lie.

. . .

Enlightenment has to be collective for us to achieve results. We have to stop the kinds of consuming that poison our collective consciousness. I do not see any other way than the practice of these bodhisattva mindfulness trainings. We have to practice them as a society in order to produce the dramatic changes we need. To practice as a society will be possible only if each of us vows to practice as a bodhisattva.²⁷

The benefits of a more diverse Sangha are not just the mitigation of suffering, but also the strengthening of our practice. Practicing with people of diverse background, races and identities and in diverse settings and diverse ways (e.g., volunteering to help disadvantaged youth) is like planting a seed in soil rich with many varied nutrients. It is a synergistic benefit. Dharma teacher Gina Sharpe says, "When we all study the dharma together, it becomes really rich."²⁸ In sweeping terms, Thay details the richness that greater diversity brings to our practice:

When we return to the present moment to be in touch with our true home, we are no longer backward, we no longer discriminate, and we no longer have a narrow mind. Our mind is vast and our heart is open to learn from and embrace every race, every culture.

at <http://www.lionsroar.com/forum-why-is-american-buddhism-so-white/>. (Last visited August 7, 2015.)

²⁵ *Together We Are One* at Kindle Locations 133-36.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *For a Future to Be Possible* at Kindle Locations 684-96.

²⁸ Andrea Miller, "There Is A Path That Frees Us From Suffering", October 26, 2014, www.lionsroar.com/path-frees-us-suffering (last visited 5/13/15):

Being civilized means spreading our arms to embrace everybody, every race, every culture. If young people can open their hearts to learn about other cultures, they will find much goodness and beauty that will enrich their lives. When we are able to do that, we can help people who are stuck in their own culture to understand and accept people from other cultures. Coming together with this openness and acceptance, we can transform hatred and contribute in our own personal way to prevent war.²⁹

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS.

Our Committee recommends that the Sangha: 1) Adopt certain general approaches on Diversity to ensure that it offers, and is seen as offering, a welcoming environment to all persons; 2) Initially focus on Diversity issues as to African-Americans and other people of color, and implement the ideas outlined below; and, 3) Concomitantly, take steps to educate itself as to the challenges facing transgender persons so that the Sangha can provide a safe and welcoming home to all.

A. Proposed Steps in Fulfillment of An On-Going Diversity Commitment.

We first discuss the objectives of such commitment, and then turn our proposals to obtain them.

1. Diversity efforts should begin as an inside job.

Thay has given us a blueprint on how to move forward. “We have to change the society from its roots, which is our collective consciousness, where the root-energies of fear, anger, greed, and hatred lie.”³⁰ On the advice of diversity experts, the Committee rejected as “tokenism” the notion that Sangha diversity would be achieved if a few people of color began to regularly attend Sangha gatherings. Adding members from diverse populations is not our immediate, paramount goal; opening our hearts is.³¹

We will need patience. This effort will take teachers, time and training. On the issue of race, in particular, we need to see, and then heal, our own scars of

²⁹ *Together We Are One* at Kindle Locations at 932-37. Elsewhere Thay has said that racial discrimination is part of our internal garbage that meditation can transform into lotus flowers. Thich Nhat Hanh; Arnold Kotler; Mayumi Oda, *Touching Peace: Practicing the Art of Mindful Living*, at 124-27 (Parallax Press 2009)(“*Touching Peace*”).

³⁰ *For a Future to Be Possible* at Kindle Locations 684-96.

³¹ In any event, leading Buddhist diversity teachers tell us that without the latter, the former cannot be attained, much less sustained.

fear, hatred, ignorance, and fragility, scars that remain unknown to many of us within our individual and collective consciousness. We hope to cultivate a deeper awareness of our conditioning and water the seeds of compassion, both within us and around, us as we offer our mindful presence in service to our community.

2. General Diversity Steps.

The Committee recommends that the Sangha, both as a collective entity and its individual members, make an ongoing commitment to diversity. To reflect this commitment, the Diversity Committee should become a Project of the Sangha (like Earth Holders). The Sangha should also ensure that it offers a welcoming presence to newcomers and develop a mission statement for our website that expresses a strong commitment to diversity. We review these recommendations in detail below.

a. The Diversity Committee as a Project.

Like the Love and Understanding, Coming Home and Earth Holders projects, a Sangha Diversity Project would have ongoing work such as helping to implement the recommendations of this report. That could include organizing various educational classes or retreats, perhaps surveying Sangha members to identify what diversity concerns the Sangha should address, and developing and maintaining on SnowFlower's website a list of diversity-related resources (similar to the Earth Holders Project resource page) with links to books, studies, media, videos, organizations and local events. The Committee has already assembled a number of resources to this end.

b. Mission Statement.

The Sangha should develop and prominently display on its website a mission statement that expresses SnowFlower's strong commitment to diversity. The Diversity Committee could draft such a mission statement as a starting point for the appropriate governing Councils to deliberate on this matter. Likewise, the Sangha website could display symbols that underscore the diversity mission statement (e.g., the rainbow flag, photos of Thay with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.).

The Committee has reviewed websites from other Sanghas and religious institutions. For instance, EBMC's home page states as follows: "Our mission is to foster liberation, personal and interpersonal healing, social action, and inclusive community building."³² The Insight Meditation Society in its "About Us" Diversity website page provides as follows:

³² See <http://eastbaymeditation.org>. (Last visited July 7, 2015.)

In offering a spiritual refuge for awakening, IMS is committed to cultivating a community that reflects the diversity of our society and our world. We believe that all members benefit from diversity, as a wide range of human experiences and viewpoints broadens and enriches the understanding of all. We seek to promote the inclusion, equity and participation of people of diverse identities, classes, religions, abilities and ages, that all may feel welcome, safe and respected within this community.³³

c. Welcoming Presence.

The Committee urges Sangha members not to succumb to assumptions that we project a welcoming environment to newcomers, including persons of color or other persons from non-dominant groups. Our studies affirm that SnowFlower members should re-examine such assumptions, and that the Sangha should take greater steps to ensure that it has indeed created a welcoming presence for all newcomers at its meditation gatherings.

For instance, we must not assume that we project a welcoming presence for members of non-dominant groups at our Sangha gatherings on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday. Thay has explained why this is necessary:

In many of the cultures people of color come from, we have to be welcomed to know we are welcome. But in other cultural orientations, you simply go, and that means you're welcome. So if you are in that culture, you're already welcomed the minute you walk in the door because you have the same vibration. It's subtle, but it's a big difference when it's your own personal experience. Part of it is that some people don't know how to welcome other people. They may be afraid of making a mistake in welcoming others, so they don't say anything. But when you ask that person or that congregation, they are stunned to find out you didn't feel welcomed.³⁴

. . .

³³ See <http://www.dharma.org/about-us/diversity>. (Last visited July 7, 2015.) For examples of mission statements from other faith traditions, see https://docs.google.com/document/d/10dag5MzoXkkjkG7aNhbGxlvXcA_7K8DHj4lgJt nSXY/edit?usp=sharing. (Last visited July 7, 2015.)

³⁴ *Together We Are One: Honoring Our Diversity* at Kindle Locations 1646-50.

So love people like the sun and the moon when they come to your Sanghas. Shine your light of mindfulness, your openheartedness and nonjudgmental nature on them. Love them like the earth that can receive what we have to give and heal it and transform it and give it back. Participate in the Dharma joy of loving people who come to you like the wind with the sense of freedom, movement, and non-clinging.³⁵

The Sangha should consider whether to adopt a formal Welcoming Statement for leaders to offer at each Sangha gathering. Such a statement could be similar in form, if not in content, to the appended Welcoming Statements that Charles King provides in Thay's book on diversity.³⁶ Again, the Diversity Committee could draft a welcoming statement for Council consideration.

Schedulers should remind leaders of the importance of adequately welcoming newcomers. Leaders should urge Sangha members to converse with newcomers before they leave.³⁷ For newcomers with little or no meditation experience, leaders should be reminded to explain briefly the steps and aim of each practice and to offer reassurance that that no one "fails" at meditation if their minds wander from their breathing. While newcomers receive a welcoming email when they are added to the Sangha's listserv, leaders may also wish to email newcomers to indicate his or her pleasure that the newcomer chose to meditate with us, to invite them to return, and to let us know if SF is meeting their needs.³⁸

³⁵ *Id.* at Kindle Locations 1730-33.

³⁶ See Sample Diversity Welcoming Statements, Appendix B, From Charles King, "Embracing Diversity in the Mindfulness, Diversity and Social Change Sangha," *Friends on the Path*, ch. 29, at 215-16.

³⁷ While one might assume such interactions would occur as a matter of course, in a recent Dharma talk on sangha diversity, Tara Brach recounted the experience of an African-American visitor to her sangha, the Washington D.C. Insight Meditation Society. The visitor later informed her that throughout the session, he had sat alone among the gathered practitioners, practitioners who were white, middle to upper middle class persons. No one had spoken to him. One hears clearly the dismay and anguish in Ms. Brach's voice as she recounts the incident. This talk, entitled "Beloved Community," (a phrase used by Martin Luther King) and dated June 17, 2015 is available at <http://www.dharmaseed.org/teacher/175/talk/27860>. (Last visited November 10, 2015.)

³⁸ The Sangha may wish to review and adopt some or all of the steps taken by EBMC to create a welcoming and a safe environment. For instance, EBMC has a tradition of placing photos of diverse teachers and leaders recognized in the service of peace, justice and wisdom (e.g., Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.). Also, in an effort to avoid having teachers who are exclusively from the dominant class of society, it rotates and pair teachers of different races, and offers separate meditation groups for particular non-dominant classes, e.g., persons of color, the disabled and those with chronic conditions, and for the LGBTQI community (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and intersex) also known as the "Alphabet Sangha." EBMC's diversity is supported by its members' sense of "community ownership"—meaning the EBMC serves "the needs of the community rather than the needs of a privileged group." No doubt, EBMC's diversity efforts have been aided by its location in Oakland, California, which is

With respect to creating a welcoming environment, consideration should also be given as to how Dharma talks can speak broadly to our society as a whole. Gina Sharpe expressed the need for this step as follows:

If you're concerned about diversity, you need to talk about the bias that results in things like the high incarceration rates of African-American men. If I'm a person of color and I walk into a Buddhist community and they're not talking about the grasping that fuels racism, why should I give them *any* credibility at all? If we're just talking about the concerns of the people who are already in our center, then those are the type of people who will come in the future. If everybody in the group is middle-class and white, then the mirrors are limited—you're only seeing certain aspects of life reflected. We need *all* the mirrors.³⁹

Finally, while these steps are important, we note that more is required to ensure that SnowFlower is as welcoming as possible. As Dharma teacher angel Kyodo Williams stressed in an interview last year, it is not enough merely to extend an invitation to bring about diversity:

Many centers say, "Oh, we want to include people so let's invite them to come." *But because we, as Western-worldview, dominant-paradigm folks have not done our work, we actually don't know how to be welcoming.* An invitation is a gesture. Welcoming, though, is open-armed hospitality [that requires practitioners to] continue to truly examine their own hearts and [to be] willing to address the barriers and the hindrances to being welcoming.⁴⁰

itself a diversity community. Finally, unlike most Sanghas that exist and then take steps to address diversity, EMBC's very purpose for existence stemmed from the desire of practitioners to create a distinct sangha for members of non-dominant classes who wanted a safe place to engage in meditation practice. Ann Gleig, "Dharma Diversity and Deep Inclusivity at the East Bay Meditation Center: From Buddhist Modernism to Buddhist Postmodernism?" at 312-13, 316, 321, 328 n. 1, *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, DOI: [10.1080/14639947.2014.932487](https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2014.932487) (2014).

³⁹ Greg Snyder, "Four Ways to Connect With Your Community," LionsRoar.com (March 16, 2015) available at: <http://www.lionsroar.com/four-ways-to-connect-with-your-community>. (Last visited June 21, 2015).

⁴⁰ angel Kyodo Williams in an interview with Rod Meade Sperry, "Beyond Privilege, a Q & A with angel Kyodo Williams," LionsRoar.com (Dec. 14, 2014) available at: <http://www.lionsroar.com/beyond-privilege-qa-angel-kyodo-williams/>. (Last visited November 10, 2015.)

Accordingly, the Committee turns to how SnowFlower can help its members “to truly examine their own hearts” to ensure that they have addressed “the barriers and the hindrances to being welcoming.”

B. The Committee Submits A Focus On People of Color And Transgender Persons Is Timely and Needed.

Like most American sanghas, SnowFlower’s membership and leadership positions are comprised generally of well-educated, middle- to upper-middle class, white, liberals.⁴¹ While our Sangha’s membership and leadership appear to be both gender-balanced and diverse as to persons of different sexual orientation, almost completely absent from our Sangha are African-Americans and other people of color. It would seem therefore appropriate to begin here. The Committee likewise believes that the Sangha would benefit from education on transgender issues to help ensure that we are indeed welcoming to transgender persons.

These first steps should be seen not as a recommendation for remaining forever inactive on other Diversity issues, but instead as an acknowledgment that the compelling reasons set forth below support the Committee’s suggested priorities.

While the Committee included in its Diversity inquiry all non-dominant classifications of people, it was in particular the nationally publicized events of racial animus that energized the Committee’s work. Committee members stated they had been deeply moved by the seemingly non-ending video recordings of incidents of malfeasant law enforcement treatment of African-Americans. International media sources have likewise detailed with shocking reports the extent and depth of our racial animus.⁴² These events and the wounds they opened in us likewise served as an urgent call that we deepen our understanding of Thay’s teachings and apply them to help us heal, to help us

⁴¹ See Lion’s Roar Staff, “Why Is American Buddhism So White?” (November 10, 2011) available at: <http://www.lionsroar.com/forum-why-is-american-buddhism-so-white/>. (Last visited November 10, 2015.)

⁴² Because there are no national statistics that record annually the number of persons killed by our country’s various local, state, and federal law enforcement personnel, *The Guardian*, an English newspaper, has begun such a count. See <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-police-killings-us-database>. (Last visited July 22, 2015.) The newspaper’s investigative journalists also uncovered a so-called “black site,” where Chicago police would take “detainees” without record of arrest. See <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/feb/24/chicago-police-detain-americans-black-site>. (Last visited July 22, 2015.) It also reported on the City’s offer of reparations to torture victims of the City’s police. <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/may/07/chicago-police-brutality-reparations>. (Last visited July 22, 2015.) See also <http://boingboing.net/2015/07/21/chicagos-police-review-agen.html>. (Last visited July 22, 2015.)

develop awareness and insight. As one scholar has said, the matter of race is not just limited to people of color, but to white people as well.⁴³

Ongoing initiatives in the Madison area to address racial equity are likewise a compelling reason to prioritize Sangha racial Diversity work. In the Madison area, a wide disparity exists in social outcomes between whites and African-Americans as documented in the *Race to Equity* report released in 2013. The report documents examples of this disparity, such as the following:

In 2011, for example, the official unemployment rate for blacks in Dane County was 25.2%, compared to 4.8% for whites. Dane County African Americans, in other words, were almost 5.5 times more likely to be jobless than their white neighbors. By contrast, in the same year, the national African American unemployment rate averaged only a little more than twice that of whites.

The black/white poverty rate gap in the county is even wider than our local employment disparities. In 2011, the Census' American Community Survey reported that over 54% of African American Dane County residents lived below the federal poverty line, compared to 8.7% of whites, meaning Dane County blacks were over six times more likely to be poor than whites. Compare this with the fact that in the country as a whole African Americans were about 2.5 times as likely as whites to be in poverty.⁴⁴

This disparity has not gone unnoticed. The local media,⁴⁵ leaders in the city's African-American community,⁴⁶ and grassroots activists have called for action.⁴⁷ SnowFlower Sangha has been contacted to help support these efforts.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ See Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, *Race to Equity* (2013) available at <http://racetoequity.net/dev/wp-content/uploads/WCCF-R2E-Report.pdf> ("Race to Equity"). (Last visited July 7, 2015.)

⁴⁵ See especially, *The Capital Times* website page "Together Apart, The Cap Times Explores Race in Madison," at <http://host.madison.com/ct/topics/race-in-madison>. (Last visited July 7, 2015.)

⁴⁶ Reverend Alex Gee has emerged as a strong voice for racial equity for African-Americans in the Madison area. See e.g., "Justified anger: Rev. Alex Gee says Madison is failing its African-American community," *The Capital Times*, December 18, 2013 available at: http://host.madison.com/news/local/city-life/justified-anger-rev-alex-gee-says-madison-is-failing-its/article_14f6126c-fc1c-55aa-a6a3-6c3d00a4424c.html#ixzz3eYrRpfP7. (Last visited June 30, 2015.) See also Alison Geyer, "Young Gifted and Black," *The Isthmus* May 1, 2015, available at: <http://www.isthmus.com/news/cover-story/young-gifted-black/>. (Last visited July 4, 2015.) The article portrays the leadership of the organization by the same name.

⁴⁷ See *Our Madison Plan, Justified Anger*, available at <http://nehemiah.org/justified-anger/>. (Last visited June 30, 2015.) See also *Race to Equity op. cit n. 41.* and ongoing *Capital Times* coverage available on its "Together Apart" webpage at: <http://host.madison.com/ct/topics/race-in->

Now is also opportune to address racial diversity in that the American Buddhist media and leading Buddhist teachers have offered ways to remedy the lack of diversity in American sanghas. As demonstrated by the amount of authority cited in this report, these resources are readily accessible

We recognize that some Sangha members may question the importance of Diversity issues *to them* because they believe they are neither racist nor biased against any non-dominant group. We urge Sangha members to let go of such beliefs. Indeed, it would be very surprising if SnowFlower Sangha members were without hidden biases towards non-dominant groups. Even the members of the Diversity Committee—presumably comprised of individuals strongly committed to an anti-racist agenda—found they held either a moderate to strong preference for whites after taking the test to uncover implicit bias.⁴⁹

As one scholar has observed, especially in the context of racism is “a system of structured relations in which we are all socialized,” a system so pervasive as to make intentions and self-belief far less important than we may believe.⁵⁰

Discussions about race in particular may cause discomfort. After all, perhaps no greater opprobrium can fall upon an individual in Madison than to be called a racist for any aspect of his or her thoughts, words or deeds. It should come as no surprise, then, that to be told one holds hidden biases against people of color or other non-dominant groups may well trigger what one author has called “white fragility,” meaning a set of avoidance behaviors such as anger, arrogance or dismissiveness.⁵¹ We ask all Sangha members to be mindful of

[madison/#utm_source=host.madison&utm_campaign=hot-topics-2&utm_medium=direct](#). (Last visited June 30, 2015.)

⁴⁸ The request was for financial assistance for the making of a movie about these community efforts. We hope that a review of this request could be part of the work of the on-going Sangha Diversity Project that we propose later in these recommendations.

⁴⁹ See Diversity Committee minutes March 14, 2015, Appendix C. The test may be found at: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>. (Last visited November 10, 2015.) It can be finished in 15 minutes or less. For background, see this excerpt from *American Denial*, a documentary about bias in America that aired on PBS’s Independent Lens program: <http://video.pbs.org/video/2365399552/>. (Last visited November 10, 2015.)

⁵⁰ See Dr. Robin DiAngelo, “White Fragility and the Rules of Engagement,” (June 13, 2015), available at www.goodmenproject.com/featured/white-fragility-and-the-rules-of-engagement/twim. (Last visited August 1, 2015.)

⁵¹ Dr. DiAngelo coined the phrase “white fragility” to express her findings that white people have a low threshold for talking about race. See *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* (vol. 3, no. 2011), available at:

<http://libjournal.uncg.edu/ijcp/article/view/249/116>. (Last visited August 1, 2015.) See also “White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard to Talk to White People About Racism,” (April 9, 2015) available at:

white fragility so that it not block our endeavor to practice and cultivate mindfulness, compassion and awareness as we learn about such issues as structural racism, the forces in our history led to such societal separation, and the suffering it has created.

As to transgender issues, the Committee recommends the Sangha educate itself on issues of importance to transgender persons. While we believe that our Sangha is open and welcoming to persons of different sexual orientation,⁵² transgender issues remain new to many of us. Helpfully, a new group of Buddhists has created a website, transbuddhists.org that provides a guidebook, *Developing Trans*Competence: A Guide for Meditation and Retreat Centers*,⁵³ Both the site and the guidebook will facilitate the Sangha's education on this issue. We review its recommendations more fully below.

1. SnowFlower And Racial Diversity.

We recommend that the Sangha, through the appropriate governing mechanism, formally endorse, and become signatory to, the Buddhists for Racial Justice Open Letter and that it further commit itself to the program outlined in the Call to White Buddhists.⁵⁴

In furtherance of creating a welcoming environment, we recommend that the Sangha address the issues of implicit bias and unrecognized white privilege and that it offer its members educational and service opportunities to address our conditioning.⁵⁵

<http://goodmenproject.com/featured-content/white-fragility-why-its-so-hard-to-talk-to-white-people-about-racism-twlm/>. (Last visited August 1, 2015.) See also "White Fragility and the Rules of Engagement," (June 13, 2015) available at: <http://goodmenproject.com/featured-content/white-fragility-and-the-rules-of-engagement-twlm/>. (Last visited August 1, 2015).

⁵² As noted above, the Committee suggests conducting a survey of Sangha members to test their assumptions that we are as welcoming as we think we are to certain non-dominant populations.

⁵³ See <http://transbuddhists.org/retreat-guide/about-the-guide/>. (Last visited July 18, 2015.)

⁵⁴ See <http://buddhistsforracialjustice.org/an-open-letter> and <http://buddhistsforracialjustice.org/call-to-white-buddhists>. (Last visited September 8, 2015.) For convenience, the documents are provided Appendices E and F.

⁵⁵ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. challenged whites to educate themselves about race with this provocative statement:

Whites, it must frankly be said, are not putting in a similar mass effort to reeducate themselves out of their racial ignorance. It is an aspect of their sense of superiority that the white people of America believe they have so little to learn.

"Here are 10 Warnings Martin Luther King Jr. Gave Black People About White People," in [Bookshelf](http://blacklistory.com/2014/06/here-are-10-warnings-martin-luther-king-jr-gives-black-people-about-white-people/) by Yvette June 8, 2014 (available at: <http://blacklistory.com/2014/06/here-are-10-warnings-martin-luther-king-jr-gives-black-people-about-white-people/>.) (Last visited September 12, 2015.)

We believe the steps outlined below are generally consistent with those methods now used for “de-biasing” as listed in a report from the American Bar Association task force:

Taking as a given that implicit bias exists and that many of us would want to be sure our decision making is not biased, research suggests some techniques that can be useful to debias decisions. Shawn Marsh summarizes these debiasing techniques from the research: [Marsh]

- Education around awareness that implicit bias exists;
- Reducing cognitive load to allow more time and space for accurate reflection;
- Encouraging high effort processing for more careful attention to information and to one’s own thinking errors;
- Employing checklists to assure thought at certain points; Encouraging mindfulness to increase understanding of one’s own thought processes and to watch out for thinking errors;
- Exposing people from different groups to each other to “help counteract biased thinking”;
- Reducing bias-related cues within environment;
- Reviewing organizational behavior.⁵⁶

James Baldwin, in his 1963 work *The Fire Next Time* (at Apple eBook location 120), addresses what we might call “conditioning”:

The American Negro has the great advantage of having never believed the collection of myths to which white Americans cling: that their ancestors were all freedom-loving heroes, that they were born in the greatest country the world has ever seen, or that Americans are invincible in battle and wise in peace, that Americans have always dealt honorably with Mexicans and Indians and all other neighbors or inferiors, that American men are the world’s most direct and virile, that American women are pure. Negroes know far more about white Americans than that; it can almost be said, in fact, that they know about white Americans what parents—or, anyway, mothers—know about their children, and that they very often regard white Americans that way. And perhaps this attitude, held in spite of what they know and have endured, helps to explain why Negroes, on the whole, and until lately, have allowed themselves to feel so little hatred. The tendency has really been, insofar as this was possible, to dismiss white people as the slightly mad victims of their own brainwashing.

⁵⁶ The American Bar Association Section on Litigation and Implicit Bias Task Force (2011-12), *TOOLBOX POWERPOINT INSTRUCTION MANUAL ABA SECTION OF LITIGATION (“ABA IMPLICIT BIAS POWERPOINT”)* at 49, available at: <http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/litigation/implicit-bias/Facilitator-Instruction-Manual.authcheckdam.pdf>. (Last visited September 7, 2015).

Implicit bias is malleable and can be changed.⁵⁷ Awareness of the existence of implicit bias, motivation to change it, mindfulness practices, education and exposure to the non-dominant group against which an individual holds an implicit bias are all recognized steps that can bring about improvement.⁵⁸

Second, to educate Sangha members about implicit bias, and to offer instruction on how mindfulness practices can help reduce and eliminate implicit biases, we suggest the Sangha offer classes and perhaps organize a retreat on these issues; and third, to increase exposure to non-dominant groups, we suggest that the Sangha help make available a series of service opportunities in our community.

a. Dharma Talks

We propose that one or more Dharma talks be given to promote awareness of implicit bias, other Diversity issues and the relevance of Thay's teachings in how to address them.

Accordingly, we suggest that the Scheduler's Council, in consultation with the Diversity Committee, schedule at least one Dharma talk for SnowFlower's Friday night, Sunday morning, Tuesday night, and Wednesday Sangha gatherings. In the emails preceding the Dharma talk, each leader should strongly encourage attendees to take the implicit bias test as it relates to race prior to the dharma talk.⁵⁹

Importantly, to help ameliorate white fragility, these talks should be offered in a non-threatening, non-accusatory, nonjudgmental, and disarming manner. For instance, each Dharma talk on this subject might include *a mea culpa* statement, citing disappointing implicit bias test results or his or her insensitive behavior to a person of color. Each talk would be offered in a positive framework—this is not about correcting faults, but about our awakening: our becoming aware of the seeds of fear, anger and hatred that have been watered by society and that are rooted in our collective unconsciousness. The talks would explore why whites, as the dominant group, also suffer from the conditioning we receive in a culture based on white domination and the responsibility we bear in challenging that conditioning.

Alternatively, consistent with the practice of Sunday and Wednesday Sanghas, those attending a Sangha session could read selections from Thay's works

⁵⁷ ABA IMPLICIT BIAS POWERPOINT at 50.

⁵⁸ ABA IMPLICIT BIAS POWERPOINT at 50-63.

⁵⁹ See *supra* n.19.

concerning Sangha building and Diversity. Members of the Diversity Committee could prepare an appropriate reading list.

b. Invite a person of color to give a “Dharma talk,” on racial diversity and equity.

In the course of its work, the Diversity Committee consulted with Sangha members who have been active on faith and justice issues for persons of color in Madison.⁶⁰ One such member suggested that the Sangha invite a person of color to speak to our Sangha:

Invite someone like Everett Mitchell to speak to the sangha. He can speak very clearly and fairly forcefully to what people need to do to cross the ‘color line’: things like going to black churches, etc. In my experience, he is the best in town at issuing a challenge to white allies to step up. My guess is that he’s pretty busy these days, though, and in demand. It might need to be an intersangha gathering to have bigger numbers.⁶¹

Reverend Alex Gee, pastor of Madison’s Fountain of Life Covenant Church, may be another potential speaker we could invite. He too may be greatly in demand.

c. Retreat, workshops, readings, films.

The Committee recommends that the Sangha explore organizing a one-day or a weekend retreat or workshop on Sangha diversity and related subjects, including an exploration of implicit bias and white privilege. This has the potential of attracting a large attendance, so it may be appropriate to co-organize the event with other Sanghas and/or the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. Because our Sangha has limited resources, we may also wish to consider offering this retreat as the annual “Thaypassana” retreat.

Speakers/teachers for the event could include one or more of the following individuals:

- Cheri Maples who has previously taught police officers to recognize and remediate their own implicit biases using mindfulness. She has also led instruction on these issues with Don Coleman, an African-American residing in the Madison area.

⁶⁰ To be clear, Kate was not a member of the Diversity Committee. That said, several recommendations in this report reflect her input.

⁶¹ Email of Kate Edwards to Curt Pawlisch (June 1, 2015.)

- Ruth King, a nationally recognized Buddhist teacher who offers workshops targeted at Buddhist leaders in locales across the country.⁶² Ms. King expressed to Committee members a warm willingness to help SnowFlower Sangha on diversity and related subjects, either as an informal advisor or as the leader of a retreat on these issues.⁶³
- UW Madison Professor Richard Davis might teach at such an event, although his normal practice has been to teach evening classes for community members using materials developed by the National Institute for the Healing of Racism for identifying and eliminating implicit bias.⁶⁴
- Committee member Karen Reppen has offered to engage the Sangha in readings and film offerings.

d. Weekly classes.

In an interview on Lionsroar.com, Dharma teacher angel Kyodo Williams insists that meditation alone “takes too long” to create a welcoming environment fostering diversity:

Meditation is awesome, but it’s not fast enough. People need to get trained. Training amps up the intensity, bringing things intentionally into our view so that we can work on what’s there to be worked on.⁶⁵

⁶² See <http://ruthking.net/leadership-development/mindful-of-race-2/>. (Last visited November 10, 2015.) Ms. King’s Dharma talks on diversity are available at <http://dharmaseed.org>. See, e.g., 5-7-15 Polishing the Third Jewel - Sangha: Being Mindful of Race available at: <http://dharmaseed.org/teacher/539/talk/27182/>. (Last visited November 10, 2015.)

5-20-15 Morning Session, Mindful of Diversity. Ruth King PART 01 available at: <http://dharmaseed.org/teacher/539/talk/27267/>. (Last visited November 10, 2015.)

5-20-15 Morning Session, Mindful of Diversity. Ruth King PART 03 available at: <http://dharmaseed.org/teacher/539/talk/27269/>. (Last visited November 10, 2015.) Please note that Part 02 is unavailable at the Dharmaseed.org website.

⁶³ Skype conference with Ben Hair, Keith Hazelton, Curt Pawlisch (July 24, 2015). Ms. King charges a fee for leading residential retreats.

⁶⁴ See <http://richarddavis.org/activist/institute-for-the-healing-of-racism/>.

⁶⁵ Rod Meade Sperry, “Beyond Privilege: a Q&A with angel Kyodo williams” (December 4, 2014) available at: <http://www.lionsroar.com/beyond-privilege-qa-angel-o-williams>. (Last viewed August 7, 2015.) Larry Wang, who is cited earlier in this report for his contributions to *Friends On The Path* concurs with this assessment:

One of the main obstacles is how long it takes to cultivate an increased multicultural awareness. This always takes a lot more time than we would like because, as we know, awareness practice is incremental. It blossoms slowly.

See Lion’s Roar Staff, “Why Is American Buddhism So White?” *op. cit.* n.40.

Sangha and Diversity Committee member Karen Reppen has offered to help organize such training by leading a weekly class on multicultural awareness,⁶⁶ the elements of which would include, in her words:

- Very fundamental work on the basics of multicultural awareness on matters of—economic status, gender/sexual/affectional orientation, class, age, education, health, profession, physical ability, language, affiliations, faith/spiritual beliefs, etc.
- Using an interactive approach (exercises and discussions), to explore class participants' core beliefs in a safe way to help them reveal their personal feelings, beliefs, and values about who they are relative to others who they presume to be similar to, or different from, them (on personal, interpersonal, institutional/systemic, cultural levels), to help them to better practice inclusion in our sangha.

The goals of the instruction would be:

- To reveal some of our biases and blind spots in a non-threatening way so we can then recognize, understand and appreciate differences in ways that would invite and nourish a more diverse sangha. This includes learning, unlearning, non-blaming, and taking responsibility, acknowledging that we live in a society that is embedded in systemic oppression of certain groups of people.
- Become more familiar with those who are different from us, and gain a better understanding of worldview differences and the connection between feelings and social change.
- To start to create a better climate for participant interaction that encourages pluralism (vs. monoculturalism/assimilation) that results in true participation from a more diverse population.
- Ensure that participation is nourishing for all. Just getting or having a more diverse mix of people in the room is only one step in becoming multicultural. More important is the process of how we are with each other and our willingness to address the cultural differences that are part of our community.⁶⁷

e. Service Opportunities.

Social scientists suggest that exposure to persons in groups against whom

⁶⁶ In telephone conversations with Curt Pawlisch earlier this year, Professor Richard Davis also expressed interest in making available for SnowFlower members a special offering of his community class as described above. Professor Davis requested remuneration for this initiative at a rate of \$20 per class per student.

⁶⁷ Email to Curt Pawlisch (2015). (Exact date no longer of record.)

we hold implicit biases can be an effective method for reducing those biases.⁶⁸ Accordingly, we offer ideas as to how such exposure could occur.

We begin by noting that SnowFlower Sangha members have a rich history of helping persons held by our criminal justice system, a system in which people of color are disproportionately incarcerated.⁶⁹

Several members teach meditation and mindfulness in state correctional institutions, serve as prison chaplains, and participate in the Madison Urban Ministries (“MUM”) Circles of Support program.⁷⁰ The Committee is uncertain as to how often announcements are made about the opportunities for service made available to Sangha members by way of SnowFlower’s Projects. The Committee recommends that such announcements occur quarterly at each of the Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday meditation groups.

Many other opportunities to volunteer and assist persons of color in our community are listed in the Justified Anger Next Steps document.⁷¹ Nehemiah.org also offers a volunteer application and training at <http://nehemiah.org/get-involved/>. Other volunteer and training opportunities may exist through WISDOM and MOSES, statewide Wisconsin and Madison-area area grassroots organizations, respectively.⁷²

Sangha members with a record of involvement with Madison Urban Ministries suggested other volunteer opportunities that merit further exploration. For instance, the Sangha or its members could:

- Send three to five Sangha members to attend Sunday services at traditional black churches in Madison.
- Offer to teach a Mindfulness Stress Reduction Course for people of color, perhaps at Fountain of Life, Zion City International

⁶⁸ See *ABA IMPLICIT BIAS POWERPOINT* at 55-56.

⁶⁹ See *Race to Equity* at 11. (“While black men made up only 4.8% of the county’s total adult male population, they accounted for more than 43% of all new adult prison placements during the year.”)

⁷⁰ See Coming Home Project at http://snowflower.org/drupal/sangha_projects. (Last visited July 18, 2015.) See also Circles of Support at <http://www.emum.org/wedo.html>. (Last visited November 10, 2015.)

⁷¹ The Next Steps document, as well as the full Justified Anger report, may be found at: <http://nehemiah.org/justified-anger>. (Last visited November 10, 2015.)

⁷² For WISDOM, see <http://prayforjusticeinwi.org/about-us/>. (Last visited November 10, 2015.) For MOSES, see <http://mosesmadison.org/about-us/>. (Last visited November 10, 2015.)

Ministries or at the south side library⁷³

- Volunteer for MUM's other service opportunities such as its 'Read to Me' program in prison or its program of taking busloads of kids to see their incarcerated mothers at Taycheedah.⁷⁴
- Connect with the Boys and Girls Club about mentoring kids.

2. Transgender Diversity Issues.

We suggest that the Steering and Care Taking Councils review, adopt and apply, as appropriate, the suggested practices for Sanghas to address the needs of transgender persons as set forth in the booklet "Developing Trans* Competence," a copy of which is provided as Appendix G. The booklet lists resources, provides definitions and suggests Sangha "Ways To Get Started" that not only can help make transgender persons feel they are in a safe and welcoming environment, but that also can help create an opportunity for cisgender Sangha members to "learn from others and to practice compassion and generosity."⁷⁵

The booklet offers these suggested ways to get started:

- Read articles on the experiences of trans* practitioners.
- Throw a fundraiser for specific trans* supportive changes.
- Have a panel and listen to personal experiences.
- Hold educational sessions when there is usually a dharma talk, such as bringing in leaders from the community or showing films with discussion.

⁷³ One advocate identified Karen Reece at Nehemiah/Fountain of Life as a point of contact in implementing this idea. Perhaps it is appropriate here to note that one SnowFlower member who has been actively organizing and serving Madison's African-American community advises that Sangha members should remain sensitive to the obstacles that are likely to emerge in reaching out to people of color, such as the perceived "weirdness" of Buddhism, the Sangha's all-white, west side location at a Quaker Meeting house, and the fear of Black ministers that we might be recruiting their black congregational members.

⁷⁴ We were advised that Ruth Poochigian is MUM's contact person for administering these programs.

⁷⁵ See Appendix G, "Developing Trans* Competence: A Short Guide to Improving Transgender Experience At Meditation and Retreat Centers" at 3 and 18. ("Developing Trans* Competence.") The booklet is also available electronically at <https://transbuddhists.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/developing-trans-competence-printable-booklet.pdf>. (Last visited July 13, 2015.) See generally <http://transbuddhists.org>. (Last visited July 13, 2015.) The term "cisgender" means "having a lived experience and understanding of one's gender that is aligned with one's assigned sex." See Appendix G, "Developing Trans* Competence" at 19.

- Hold a LGBTQ sangha sit, yoga class, or retreat.⁷⁶
- Have a LGBT breakout group after retreats.
- Create a process to thoughtfully draft a diversity or inclusion statement, and post it publicly. Elicit and act on feedback from sangha members about structural changes needed to make the goals of the inclusion statement a reality.⁷⁷

The Steering and Care Taking Councils should review closely the suggestions as to appropriate housing and facilities for transgender persons. Input from the Sangha, especially members who have organized our retreats, should be sought. As part of its ongoing duties, the Diversity Committee could catalogue and post resources relevant to the concerns of the LGBT community, likely beginning with those resources listed in “Developing Trans* Competence” booklet.⁷⁸

V. CONCLUSION.

For the reasons stated above, the Committee submits these recommendations to the Care Taking and Steering Councils for consideration on behalf of the Sangha. We are certain that the collective wisdom and years of practice of Council members will improve these recommendations, and we look forward to these discussions.

We believe each Sangha member can benefit by learning about Diversity. Indeed, as to the issue of discrimination as that word is used both in its Buddhist and secular senses, Thay has said it is time for us to don the mantle of Bodhisattvas:

We have gone through interminable suffering, an endless tunnel of sorrow and darkness. But we have practiced, and through the practice we have obtained some insight and freedom. Now it is time for us to join with the children—*the children of all colors*—and bring our strength to bear on the challenges that are before us. I am sure we will do better this time.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ See *supra*, n.18 concerning the EMBC’s Sangha gatherings for LGBTQIs: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning and intersex persons. EBMC members refer to it informally as “The Alphabet Sangha.”

⁷⁷ See Appendix G at 18.

⁷⁸ See Appendix G at 17-19.

⁷⁹ See *Touching Peace* at 127 (Parallax Press 2009.) (Emphasis added.)