

Annual Meeting Report

May 16, 2010

Rev. Nicholas Ozuna – Intern Minister

My annual report will be broken down into the four areas that I considered my internship goals at the beginning of the year. The report will summarize my thoughts on various aspects of each area based on the experiences I have accrued during my internship.

Worship & Education

1) Worship

I have had the opportunity to serve as worship associate for UUC Sunday services a few times, although worship was not the focus of my internship. However, these opportunities taught the value of organizing the structure of the service as well as communicating with others involved to encourage a smooth-flowing service. This quality has been especially important for me in my work at the Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center, where one of my major roles is organizing the service and communicating with others to take on various roles. The production of clear and concise Dharma Talks and other presentations are critical in connecting with aspiring Buddhists, just as delivering a sermon is for UUs. I have tried to follow Rev. Abhi's example of dedicating sufficient time and energy towards the dissemination of the faith, so that it can be expressed as effectively and as passionately as possible.

2) Meditation

From the beginning of my internship, I have assisted Rev. Abhi with his Loving Kindness Meditation session on Tuesdays. Meditation is not as critical in Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhism as it is in other Buddhist traditions, therefore I often questioned myself whether or not it was appropriate for me to be leading such a meditation. I was not familiar with Loving Kindness Meditation either, however, I had led meditations groups in the past through silent meditation, though I did not consider myself a professional.

Meditation may not have originally been part of RK tradition, however, in recent years in the U.S. at least, we have begun to incorporate silent meditation into the service as a skillful means of attracting Buddhist aspirants and others who associate Buddhism primarily with meditation. There are a variety of forms of meditation and all are for the purpose of creating a calm and peaceful state of being, which is entirely consistent with our teachings. I was a little hesitant to lead the meditation, however, as I was given freedom of style and a wonderful following of individuals who were most accepting of a new method, I began to feel more comfortable in the role. Nowadays I look forward to the meditation, as it serves as a wonderful start to the new week.

3) Buddhism Study Course

From the middle of February, I began a month-long course on Practical Buddhism as part of the UU Adult Education series. The course was designed to introduce basic Buddhist teachings to the general public, at a beginner level, while emphasizing how these teachings could be readily applicable in one's daily life.

The structure of this course was geared at creating a syllabus of set topics, which would include both a lecture segment as well as a segment for open discussion on the topic. The topics were chosen through a RK textbook, which was sold to participants.

The four-session series was successful from the standpoint of delivery and consistency of participant attendance, however, that attendance was much lower than I had anticipated. The series as a whole averaged around five participants per session. I also found that preparation was difficult for a Tuesday session, since the weekend is very busy for me and I have Mondays off. Therefore, I found myself preparing Tuesday morning and afternoon. I have used this experience as a learning curve for my upcoming class on the Lotus Sutra, which will be held on Thursdays. I also feel that I had not properly reached out about the study session to the public as much as I could have. I am currently advertising Lotus Sutra study in the newspapers to attract a larger audience.

4) Religious education for Children

Children's education was a concept that I had not fully explored prior to my internship and have still had but limited experience in this area. I tried to make myself available as a RE assistant, however, I found my participation inconsistent. The times that I did interact with children, I was able to learn quite a bit about keeping topics simple and engaging. I also learned the valuable concept of patience when dealing with kids. I look forward to taking on more of a Sunday school teacher role in the Fall.

Administration

1) Participation in Board and Staff Meetings

During the first half of my internship, participating in board, staff, and other administrative meetings were the focus of my internship. From an observation standpoint I could grasp the general workings of the church, how committees functioned, and how governance takes place in a liberal religious institution. The committee system served as a new experience for me, and I came to understand the value of such committees, generating greater wisdom in numbers. The purely democratic nature of it is quite different from a RK perspective, which is more hierarchical. I could see that the members claimed a sense of ownership in the church, which inspires them to see it succeed. Though we at RK are not at

level where we can utilize committees yet, we are already trying coordinators who serve as leaders in distinct areas.

2) Volunteer Management

As the Dharma Center begins to grow, I have found the necessity to delegate responsibilities to other members. This is not solely for the purpose of getting things done, rather to encourage the members to do bodhisattva practice as a volunteer. At the same time, I am given more freedom to focus my energy on other areas of need. I have started assigning members to take on different roles in the service. Up until now, the response has been for the most part good and members come prepared, but there is almost always some role that needs filling. The members are good about taking on those roles at the last minute, but it remains a challenge and I hope that I can start to get a much greater consistency with those assigned roles. I continue to train the members to be able to take on different roles, so that I can choose more and more people at the beginning of each month.

3) Financial Analysis

Providing financial reporting has become another one of my major monthly activities. This includes accounting for all expenses, membership fees, donations, and sales. From this month, I will be working with a volunteer on all financial reporting; however, it has been a challenge to keep up in the past. Without much of a precedent or template, I have been working with RKINA to manage all financial transactions. From my experience in the internship, I have attended the finance committee meetings, learning how to prepare monthly reports, etc. However, I have found that because of the large size of the UU church and its many sources of revenue and expenses, as well as clear distinction in money management (i.e. minister's salary) such accounting is not readily applicable in the context of a small Dharma Center. Instead, the greatest awakenings for me have come from the variety of fundraising efforts the UUC employs. I believe similar efforts could be implemented within a few years, depending on the growth and activity of the sangha.

Administration has become far and beyond the most time-consuming of my activities in starting the new Dharma Center. On top of the aforementioned areas of work, I also dedicated time each month to writing the newsletter and other email correspondence, to website maintenance and volunteer management. In all facets of administration, I have been training on the job and working based on trial

and error. Originally, this was the one area I knew I needed the most training, and up to now, I believe has been the most valuable of my experiences.

Community Involvement

Becoming more involved with the UUC community has been one of my focuses as of late. I had felt a slight disconnection earlier in the year, mainly because of my Buddhist background, and did not feel comfortable being too emotionally involved in UU activities. I instead took myself out and became more of an observer, especially in terms of business. I realized that though I wanted to maintain my observer role in business affairs, I also wanted to become closer with the UUC community, whom I felt could be the greatest teachers for me.

1) Public Relations

From the founding and inception of our activities at the Dharma Center, public relations have been critical. Early on Rev. Abhi, expressed the need to advertise for large events like the enshrinement of the Focus of Devotion as well the Grand Opening. We employed various tools, from reaching out by newspaper, creating flyers, banners, and other signage, as well as sending out press releases and face-to-face promotion. The results were marginal; however, the activity was very important in my opinion, as it taught me about preparing for events and how to maximize attendance. Public relations remains a significant area of work at the Dharma Center. A PR coordinator has been assigned to help me facilitate public exposure. We currently have a homepage, a "meetup" website, a "Facebook" ad page, and advertise in 7 magazines and 3 different newspapers. On top of this, I have also attended area Buddhist meetings and even served as a guest speaker for a Buddhist class at USF. I believe all these actions are areas of dissemination and will need to continue such work to make our presence known.

2) Pastoral Care

One area that I have focused on since the beginning of this year is pastoral care. I have some experience in this realm from the RK practice of Tedori, which is very similar. The greatest difference is that the people that I tended to visit were generally elderly or otherwise incapable of attending services on a regular basis. At first I was appointed individuals to take care of, however, over time I began choosing them myself, and by now I have also included RK members and participants into my pastoral work,

though not necessarily elderly. Though I have been working at this role for a few months, I feel I still could learn more from more experience, and so plan to continue this work for the duration of my internship, as time allows.

3) Interfaith Work

I have had the opportunity to engage in interfaith work on a few occasions since the beginning of my internship. From praying at peace poles in two locations, to helping in the coordination efforts for the IARF congress that was held at the UUC, as well as attend larger UU cluster events, I have been given the chance to meet with clergy from different faiths and serve as a representative for RK.

All along, my work with the UUC has been interfaith. I have attended nearly all of the Sunday services that I have been available and try to be supportive to the UUC, just as the UUC members have been incredibly supportive of me. I think that because we share many ideals, there has not been much of any conflict between our two organizations, and the members seem to be very accepting of my presence as an intern from a different faith. Though I have had times of spiritual conflict within myself, I have recognized the importance of letting go of my own ego to do the Buddha's work in whatever situation I am in. The fact that I have been given roles of leadership in the service indicates that I have been trusted to represent the UU faith at times, which is most humbling.

I look forward to my increased role for the summer and fall seasons and hope to do all that I can as a representative of both organizations to further develop the relations shared between the Unitarian Universalists and Rissho Kosei-kai.

In Reverence,

Nicholas Ozuna