



# Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery ('Sitavana')

## Annual General Meeting – October 22, 2017

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### MINUTES – AGM 2017

#### **1. Attendance**

Thomas West (Ajahn Sona), Teresa Wixted (Piyadassi), Hazel Plumbley, Brent Styra, Marie DeBow, Patricia Nichols, Jackie Grace Hall, John Derk (Kondanno), Mark Pepelnak, Judith Williamson, Dinka Pignon. Directors not in attendance: Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon) and Leslie Hanrahan

#### **2. Minutes of last year's AGM (September 25, 2016)**

The AGM 2016 Minutes were accepted unread.

*Moved by Teresa Wixted, seconded by Hazel Plumbley. Carried unanimously.*

#### **3. Matters arising**

None.

#### **4. PRESIDENT'S REPORT (Ajahn Sona – President)**

##### **a. Resident Monastics:**

Ajahn Sona continues in his active role as Abbot of Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery throughout the 2016-17 year. Making the decision last year to set aside travelling for teaching (except for one more engagement in Canmore, AB in October 2017), Ajahn Sona's energies have been directed towards creating more space for his daily meditative practice as well as shorter solitary retreats at Birken. In October 2016, Ajahn Sona travelled to Abhayagiri Monastery in California for their annual Kathina. During that same visit he was invited to speak at The Ho Center for Buddhist Studies at Stanford University (that talk may be seen on Ajahn Sona's YouTube Channel). January 2017 ushered in a new era of digital Dhamma from Ajahn Sona, including over 20 new shorter length YouTube video talks that are reaching meditators at all levels of practice. In May 2017, Ajahn Sona travelled to Amaravati in England for the International Elders' Meeting (IEM), a gathering of senior monastics in Ajahn Chah's Thai Forest tradition which is held every three years.

Sister Mon was away from the monastery from November 2016 to February 2017, spending time on Vancouver Island as part of her year-long silent retreat. Her retreat concluded in July 2017, and she is again actively engaged in supporting Ajahn Sona in the daily running of the monastery. Sister Mon continues to pursue Canadian Permanent Residency status. Efforts in that regard have included a petition signing campaign to the ministry, meetings with our local MP, and putting her wholesome efforts towards completion of her third Permanent Residency application.

Samanara Nandaka (Espen Oestrem Nesse), completed his novice training with Ajahn Sona in May 2017 and journeyed to Wat Metta in San Diego, California, to pursue training and ultimately Bhikkhu ordination with Ajahn Geoff.

## b. Monastic Visitors:

Canadian-born Luang Por Tiradhammo spent vassa (the rains retreat) with us here at Birken and returned to Thailand in October 2016. Ajahn Tiradhammo visited family and friends in Canada and offered teachings throughout British Columbia during this time as well. Luang Por Tiradhammo now has 44 years in the robes and is an important and revered elder in the Western Sangha.

From December 2016 to January 2017, Ajahn Sudanto, the Abbot of Pacific Hermitage in White Salmon, WA, and Venerable Kondanno, also from Pacific Hermitage, took up residence at Birken for a six weeks in silent retreat and seclusion. Ajahn Sudanto and Venerable Kondanno departed Birken in mid-January to resume their duties at the hermitage.

Venerable Santacitto, a Canadian-born monk training at Ajahn Wanchai's forest monastery, Wat Phu Sangko, in Thailand, ended his silent year-long retreat at Birken in February 2017. He left Birken to stay with his parents in Victoria, BC for a few months, then returned to Birken in July 2017 and spent the vassa with our community.

In May 2017, Birken again welcomed monks from the Pacific Hermitage (Ajahn Sudanto and Venerable Kondanno), along with a group of retreatants from the Portland area, for their annual silent retreat at Birken, which was led by Ajahn Sona. This year the retreat expanded to offer both one week and two week retreat opportunities to our Portland guests.

Two senior Thai monks, Luang Por Cha-Lee (60 vassa) and Ajahn Somsak (33 vassa), along with a group of Thai supporters from Oregon, visited the monastery for several days in June 2017. Their generous supporters offered several dana meals to the Birken community during their stay.

## c. Retreats and events held at the monastery and off site

We give sincere thanks to all the many Birken supporters who helped us to organize a number of retreats and events this past year (August 1, 2016 – July 31, 2017):

August 3 – 10, 2016	Victoria Group Visit to Birken
August 19 – 21, 2016	Upāsikā Program Group II – Gathering Weekend #2
September 11, 2016	Birken in Kamloops: morning meditation & talk
September 27, 2016	Kamloops Adult Learners Society: talk by Ajahn Sona in Kamloops
<i>September 30 - October 9, 2016</i>	<i>Fall 10-Day Silent Retreat at Birken, led by Ajahn Sona</i>
October 16, 2016	Birken in Kamloops: morning meditation & talk
<b>October 20 – 26, 2016</b>	<b>Ajahn Sona at Abhayagiri Kathina</b>
November 13, 2016	Birken in Kamloops: morning meditation & talk
December 11, 2016	Birken in Kamloops: morning meditation & talk
January 6 – March 29, 2017	Annual Silent Winter Retreat at Birken

January 6 – 15, 2017	Upāsikā 10- Day Silent Winter Retreat – Group II
January 15 – 25, 2017	Upāsikā 10-Day Silent Winter Retreat –Group II Remote Participants and/or Group I Upāsikā Alumni
January 22, 2017	Birken in Kamloops: morning meditation & talk
January 25 – February 1, 2017	Upāsikā Silent Winter Retreat Week – Group I Upāsikā Alumni
February 1 – March 29, 2017	Regular Silent Winter Retreat Bookings
February 19, 2017	Birken in Kamloops: morning meditation & talk
March 19, 2017	Birken in Kamloops: morning meditation & talk
April 2, 2017	Birken in Kamloops: morning meditation & talk
April 21 – 23, 2017	Upāsikā Program Group II – Closing Gathering Weekend
May 3 – 17, 2017	<i>Pacific Hermitage 7-Day/14-Day Retreat(s) at Birken, led by Ajahn Sona</i>
May 14, 2017	Birken in Kamloops: morning meditation & talk
<b>May 22 – 26, 2017</b>	<b>Ajahn Sona attends International Elders Meeting (IEM) at Amaravati, England</b>
June 11, 2017	Birken in Kamloops: morning meditation & talk
June 11 – 19, 2017	Thai Group visit, including Luang Por Cha-Lee and Ajahn Somsak
July 14 – 16, 2017	<i>Absolute Beginners Weekend Retreat at Birken</i>

#### d. Dana meals and guest totals

In the past fiscal year, 43 full and partial dana meals were offered to monastics, residents and guests of Birken.

During that same period of time 380 overnight guests visited the monastery for Personal Retreats, Silent Winter Retreat and Scheduled Retreats.

#### e. Renovations and construction projects

In August 2016 a new deck was built for Kuti 6 (K6, formerly called “Stan’s Kuti”) to replace the one that had been severely damaged over the years by carpenter ants.

Also in August 2016 an extension of Ajahn Sona’s deck was added, connecting the one just outside his front door and the one added in 2015 on the south side of his kuti.

In September 2016 three new propane heaters were purchased. Two heaters replaced older ones that were no longer working properly in K6, formerly called “Stan’s Kuti” and K8, formerly called “Amin’s Kuti”, and a third heater was installed in K4, which before only had a wood stove for its heat source.

In October 2016 K8 was renovated by rebuilding the loft sleeping area, the ladder to the loft, as well as the storage space in the kuti for a cleaner, more minimal appearance overall.

November 2016 brought with it several renovations and improvements to the main building. The sala was repainted and many of the plants moved to the walking paths in the downstairs library area. Glass shower doors were installed in the two upper washrooms. This improvement required an extension of the tiled shower walls and has improved not only the appearance of the tub areas, but eliminated the high maintenance shower curtains.

From January - April 2017 the attic was cleaned out and converted to a video recording studio for Ajahn Sona's YouTube Dhamma talks. This full renovation included extending electrical circuits to the attic, closing off the open space to the sala below with sound-proof walls and windows, adding carpet, wood paneling, recessed ceiling lights, a hatch door between the attic and hallway below, as well as purchasing high end, quality video equipment and the components to build a production computer to bring the Dhamma to more people around the world.

Also through the winter months creative and constructional work was completed on a new art piece for the sala. The large painting, entitled "Where is the Buddha Now?", was unveiled in April 2017 just in time for the Upāsikā Closing Weekend Gathering. This modern expression of the Buddha in our time has become the new Birken logo.

#### **f. Other news & concluding observations**

In August 2016 the monastery purchased a new RAV4 SUV with funds donated to our "Green Vehicle Fund". Although this new car is gas powered, the cost savings in fuel have more than off-set what would have been a higher ticket price for a hybrid version of the same vehicle. The monastery plans to keep this car for 4-5 years when an all-electric vehicle will take its place at Birken.

The second year of our successful Birken Upāsikā Program for Dedicated Lay Practitioners concluded in April 2017. The program has evolved to limit the number of onsite participants and add both offsite (i.e. visits to Birken while overnighing at offsite locations) and remote (i.e. internet only) components. This year there was a total of 25 lay participants (11 onsite, four offsite and 10 remote Upāsikās.) The program continues to be a mix of study, practice, ritual, discussion, community-building, and spiritual mentorship. A new password protected blogsite was created for the second year program participants to support a private virtual discussion forum and monthly study assignments.

The first year Upāsikās were engaged in the second year of the program and continue to receive new teachings from Ajahn Sona as well as build upon the community framework established in the first year of the program.

We plan to begin the third year of the Upāsikā program in late 2018 with more details to be provided at the next AGM.

Ajahn Sona's decision to base his teachings exclusively from Birken has brought with it a mature ease and gentle grace as the monastery completes its 16<sup>th</sup> year on this property. The commitment to make Birken his sole Dhamma home allows Ajahn Sona more time and space for his own practice, as well as the generosity of private one-on-one interviews with guests, joining us several times a week for

teatime Dhamma Q&A, and sharing insightful Dhamma talks during our scheduled retreats throughout the year.

Major building projects are complete and there is now time for refinements to be taken care of at an easy pace. Individuals and groups continue to visit Birken, seeking and enjoying this time of sustainable comfort at the monastery. Whether people engage in personal time at the monastery or discover Birken through YouTube and other digital portals, the Dhamma continues to spread and the future of Birken looks bright indeed.

## **5. FINANCIAL REPORT**

Consistent support from the friends of Birken has resulted in a net income of \$16,489.98 for this fiscal year. Extraordinary donations, those in excess of \$5000.00, have declined in number since 2012, but remain a much appreciated source of monetary support for Birken. This fiscal's donation income, including extraordinary donations, is 6.1% above the trailing 14 year average.

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Year less Extraordinary Donations</b>	<b>Extraordinary Donations</b>	<b>Year with Extraordinary Donations</b>
<b>2002-03</b>	105,817.53	76,056.00	181,873.53
<b>2003-04</b>	140,244.18	50,000.00	190,244.18
<b>2004-05</b>	124,010.70	0.00	124,010.70
<b>2005-06</b>	146,243.20	36,335.40	182,578.60
<b>2006-07</b>	121,863.14	60,800.00	182,663.14
<b>2007-08</b>	135,118.63	0.00	135,118.63
<b>2008-09</b>	138,494.98	33,000.00	171,494.98
<b>2009-10</b>	123,893.13	35,860.91	159,754.04
<b>2010-11</b>	133,272.30	15,412.00	148,684.30
<b>2011-12</b>	124,163.51	22,995.75	147,159.26
<b>2012-13</b>	102,017.67	26,500.00	128,517.67
<b>2013-14</b>	76,002.50	15,000.00	91,002.50
<b>2014-15</b>	129,238.05	20,000.00	149,238.05
<b>2015-16</b>	142,510.09	25,000.00	167,510.09
<b>Sum</b>	<b>1,742,899.61</b>	<b>416,960.06</b>	<b>2,159,849.67</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>124,492.12</b>	<b>29,782.86</b>	<b>154,274.98</b>
<b>2016-17</b>	<b>138,722.95</b>	<b>25,000.00</b>	<b>163,722.95</b>
<b>% of avg</b>	<b>111.4%</b>	<b>83.9%</b>	<b>106.1%</b>

As in years past, no new debt has been incurred. Due to the generosity of Birken's Harita Yana fund donors in the 2015-16 fiscal, a new Toyota RAV4 was purchased from savings early in the 2016-17 fiscal year. This was the monastery's only capital expense in this fiscal.

Liquid assets have decreased slightly from \$162,865.00 in 2015-16 to 161,465.00 in the 2016-17 fiscal year. There was also a small decrease in revenue of \$3,787.00 from that of the year prior. There was an increase to infrastructure spending in 2016/17, with the renovation of the loft and purchase of equipment to create a video recording studio, allowing Ajahn Sona's teachings to reach a larger audience through his YouTube channel.

Externally driven costs related to the operation of the monastery such as insurance, software updates, postage, freight, utilities and fuels increased from the prior fiscal. However, internally monitored costs such as household expenses decreased by 8 percent, indicating continuing frugal spending by Birken's worthy stewards. Please see the attached financial statements for more information.

## **6. BOARD OF DIRECTORS:**

This was a voting year. All board members will continue in their roles for another two years.

### **The new 2017-18 Board of Directors was accepted as follows:**

Thomas West (Ajahn Sona) – President (*continuation*)  
Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon) – Vice President (*continuation*)  
Teresa Wixted – Secretary (*continuation*)  
Hazel Plumbley – Treasurer (*continuation*)  
Brent Styra – Member at Large (*continuation*)  
Leslie Hanrahan – Member at Large (*continuation*)

## **7. MOTIONS:**

- That changes to the constitution by-laws be approved and adopted in accordance with B.C.'s New Societies Act.  
***Moved by Judith Williamson, seconded by Marie DeBow. Carried unanimously.***
- That Society funds be transferred in the event of a dissolution to Tisarana Buddhist Monastery in Perth, Ontario, Canada.  
***Moved by Hazel Plumbley, seconded by John Derk. Carried unanimously.***
- That Tombe Herrington Chartered Professional Accountants LLP be reappointed our accounting firm for the next fiscal year.  
***Moved by John Derk, seconded by Hazel Plumbley. Carried unanimously.***
- That the Proposed Board of Directors (no changes from previous term) be re-elected:  
Thomas West (Ajahn Sona) – President (*continuation*)  
Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon) – Vice President (*continuation*)  
Teresa Wixted – Secretary (*continuation*)  
Hazel Plumbley – Treasurer (*continuation*)  
Brent Styra – Member at Large (*continuation*)  
Leslie Hanrahan – Member at Large (*continuation*)  
***Moved by John Derk, seconded by Brent Styra. Carried unanimously.***
- That the 2018 AGM be held at Birken Forest Monastery on **Sunday, November 4, 2018.**  
***Moved by John Derk, seconded by Judith Williamson. Carried unanimously.***

## **MEETING ADJOURNED**

***Moved by Teresa Wixted, seconded by John Derk. Carried unanimously.***