



Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery ('Sitavana') Annual General Meeting – November 4, 2018

MINUTES – AGM 2018

1. Attendance

Thomas West (Ajahn Sona), Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon), Teresa Wixted, Hazel Plumbley, Brent Styra, Leslie Hanrahan, Ranjit de Silva, Sudu Vatagodakumbura, Henry Subasinghe, Rachel Telesmanick, Dinka Pignon

2. Minutes of last year's AGM (October 22, 2017)

The AGM 2017 Minutes were accepted unread.

Moved by Teresa Wixted, seconded by Leslie Hanrahan. 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 2017-2018 year. His energies remain directed towards meditative practice, instructing lay people at the monastery, providing a place of solitude for senior monastics to come on retreat, and a sustained focus on recording high quality YouTube Dhamma video talks and podcasts, with over 60 such recordings now available online.

Sister Mon was away from the monastery from October-November in 2017, spending time in Vancouver to study for her English test as part of her Permanent Residency application. She applied for an extension to her work permit in December 2017 and was granted an 18 month work permit starting in February 2018 and expiring in August 2019. After careful consideration the monastery decided to enlist the aid of an immigration attorney in Vancouver to guide us in the next steps of Sister Mon's immigration process. Her third Canadian Permanent Residency application was filed on July 17, 2018 under the Humanitarian and Compassionate Considerations (HCC) Program and included over 1,500 signatures to an online petition, as well as many comments and letters of support from both individuals and local politicians. Our attorney has told us the HCC application process can take from 1-2 years for review so we will update you again on Sister Mon's progress towards permanent residency at next year's AGM.

b. Monastic and Dignitary Visitors:

In September 2017 two nuns of the Chan tradition, Ven. Chang Lan and Ven. Chang Jia, along with a Canadian supporter and their sponsor family from Taiwan, came to Birken to pay respects to Ajahn Sona. They joined us at teatime for a thoughtful exploration of the differences and commonalities between our two Buddhist lineages

At the conclusion of vassa in October 2017 Venerable Santacitto, a Canadian monk training at Ajahn Wanchai's forest monastery, Wat Phu Sangko, returned to Thailand. Venerable Santacitto also spent a year in solitary retreat at Birken from March 2016 – February 2017.

In April 2018 we were visited for a day by Tan Sid Udaggo, a Laotian monk, along with four laypeople.

In May 2018, Birken again welcomed monks from the Pacific Hermitage (Ajahn Sudanto, Ajahn Kassapo, and Ven. Sampanno), along with a group of retreatants from the Portland, Oregon and White Salmon, Washington areas, for their annual 14-day silent retreat at Birken, which was led by Ajahn Sona.

Also in May Birken was visited for a few days by Ven Wiumalabuddhi, a Sri Lankan samanara, who resides in Surrey, BC.

In early June 2018, Ajahn Sona hosted the North American Abbots Meeting, a gathering of senior monastics from the US and Canada who are part of Ajahn Chah's Thai Forest tradition. Their meeting culminated in a Community Day on June 10th when nearly 60 supporters offered a potluck dana meal to our senior Bhikkhus.

Later in June Tan Kedaar, a Canadian monk ordained in Thailand in the Dhammayuttika Nikaya tradition, visited the monastery for the afternoon joined by a couple of his friends from Vernon.

While Ajahn Sona was away at Abhayagiri Monastery at the beginning of July we were visited by generous supporters from Calgary who offered a dana meal and brought along Ven. Medhankara and Ven. Somananda, two Sri Lankan Bhikkhus, for a day visit to the monastery. Both of them gave Dhamma talks and led us in meditation while they were here.

Also in July members of the Royal Thai Consulate General's Office visited the monastery to commemorate a Thai family who had died together in a car accident while visiting Canada. Ajahn Sona and Sister Mon accompanied the dignitaries to the accident site and chanted for the family, offering blessings and metta (loving kindness) for their transition to the next life.

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, 2017 – July 31, 2018):

September 10, 2017	Birken in Kamloops: morning meditation & talk
<i>September 22 - October 1, 2017</i>	<i>Fall 10-Day Silent Retreat at Birken, led by Ajahn Sona</i>
October 6 – 12, 2017	Ajahn Sona at Temple Monastery, New Hampshire for Kathina
October 15, 2017	Birken in Kamloops: morning meditation & talk
October 27-29, 2017	Ajahn Sona in Canmore, AB for weekend retreat
November 12, 2017	Birken in Kamloops: morning meditation & talk
December 10, 2017	Birken in Kamloops: morning meditation & talk
<i>December 22, 2017 – January 1, 2018</i>	<i>10-Day Metta Retreat at Birken, led by Ajahn Sona</i>
<i>January 10 – February 7, 2018</i>	<i>One Month Jhana Retreat at Birken, led by Ajahn Sona</i>
February 7 – March 28, 2018	Annual Winter Retreat at Birken
February 18, 2018	Birken in Kamloops: morning meditation & talk
March 18, 2018	Birken in Kamloops: morning meditation & talk
April 15, 2018	Birken in Kamloops: morning meditation & talk
<i>May 2 – 16, 2018</i>	<i>Pacific Hermitage 7-Day/14-Day Retreat(s) at Birken, led by Ajahn Sona</i>
May 13, 2018	Birken in Kamloops: morning meditation & talk
June 3, 2018	Birken in Kamloops: morning meditation & talk
June 6-12 2018	Ajahn Sona hosts North American Abbots Meeting at Birken
<i>July 13 – 15, 2018</i>	<i>Absolute Beginners Weekend Retreat at Birken, led by Ajahn Sona</i>

d. Dana meals and guest totals

During this past fiscal year we shared in the generosity of so many people and welcomed nearly 800 visitors to the monastery. Some of our guests offered dana meals, others dropped in for a day visit, and nearly 350 meditators took time away from their busy lives to come to Birken for a Personal or Scheduled Retreat. Below are the total numbers for each group:

- 41 full and partial dana meals during fiscal year; 293 dana meal participants
- 349 overnight guests (Personal Retreat and Scheduled Retreat participants)
- 139 day visitors

e. Renovations and construction projects

Much needed improvements to our generator shed were accomplished starting in August 2017 and finishing up in December 2017. Upgrades included insulation, adding a block heater, and ventilation to the shed itself, as well as general repairs to the diesel generator, including a reliable diesel delivery system from the storage tank to the generator.

In September 2017 a propane line and tank were installed for K4 to supplement the existing wood stove in that kuti.

Additional lighting in the attic and increased wattage LED lights throughout the vihara were added in November 2017, adding more luminosity in all areas.

Several much needed projects in the vihara were completed during the break between the end of Winter Retreat and when the monastery re-opened to guests in mid-April 2018. With the assistance of nearly 20 volunteers the monastery's indoor plants were all re-potted and common areas, including the kitchen, hallways, stairwells, and washrooms, were re-painted. Our generous volunteers also donated and planted flowering shrubs and annuals in the garden beds near the outbuildings as well as in planters on the vihara deck and surrounding areas.

From November 2017 through June 2018 a major re-vamping of the outbuildings began, including transitioning the contents of the garage to the tractor shed (now called the Work Shed). The garage has been transformed into Nimmita House, a gathering place for stewards both for work and leisure, as well as becoming the new site for our video and audio production studio. Thanks to the generous donations of those who attended the Pacific Hermitage retreat in May 2018 we now have new and improved video recording and lighting equipment to produce the highest quality Dharma talks. Both Nimmita House and the new Work Shed got a fresh coat of paint in June as well just in time for the Abbots' Gathering.

Ground breaking for the Abbot's new kuti took place in June 2018. Construction continues as of the end of this fiscal year and, thanks again to the generosity of our donors, this kuti will be not only a state-of-the-art example of green building, but will also encompass all the needs of monastics seeking seclusion in a modern day forest. It will be the home for Birken's Abbot and will be used temporarily by Luang Por Pasanno from December 2018 until July 2019 during his private retreat here at Birken.

f. Other news & concluding observations

This year we introduced two new Scheduled Retreats: a 10-Day Metta Retreat (December 22, 2017 – January 1, 2018) and a One Month Jhana Retreat (January 10 – February 7, 2018). These committed blocks of time provided many serious meditators the opportunity to settle more deeply into their practice and the quiet solitude of Birken in winter. We plan to continue both retreats in the coming year as well.

Ajahn Sona's decision two years ago to discontinue his offsite teaching events culminated in October 2017 with his final travelling commitment by leading a weekend retreat in Canmore, AB. This year as well marked the end of Ajahn Sona's decade-long Birken in Kamloops teaching engagements; the final one took place in June 2018. Almost immediately we began to see more and more day visitors come to the monastery from Kamloops. This has proven to be another positive outcome of Ajahn Sona's commitment towards teaching exclusively from Birken, both face-to-face with practitioners and in his offering of Dhamma videos and podcasts over the internet.

The first and second year participants in Birken's Upāsikā Program for Dedicated Lay Practitioners are now engaged in a shared online community. The program continues to be a mix of study, practice, ritual, discussion, community-building, and spiritual mentorship under the guidance of Ajahn Sona. The third group of Upāsikās began their training here at Birken in September 2018 and we look forward to the seeds of practice planted by each group to flower and grow in the coming years.

Finally this year's rains retreat, represents the 30th vassa for Luang Por Sona, a designation that may usher in a gentle transition from a more active role at Birken to one of increasing time for meditation and reflection.

5. FINANCIAL REPORT

Construction donations and related expenses were predominant in the 2017-2018 fiscal year. Massive support for construction projects from the friends of Birken resulted in a net income of \$106,885.00 for this fiscal year. Extraordinary donations (>\$5000.00), having declined in number since 2012, made their resurgence in this fiscal as generous patrons contributed to the building and landscaping costs of a new Senior Ajahn's Kutī. This major infrastructure project will be completed by the end of 2018. This fiscal's donation income, including extraordinary donations, is 174.3% above the trailing 15 year average.

Fiscal Year	Year less Extraordinary Donations	Extraordinary Donations	Year with Extraordinary Donations
2002-03	105,817.53	76,056.00	181,873.53
2003-04	140,244.18	50,000.00	190,244.18
2004-05	124,010.70	0.00	124,010.70
2005-06	146,243.20	36,335.40	182,578.60
2006-07	121,863.14	60,800.00	182,663.14
2007-08	135,118.63	0.00	135,118.63
2008-09	138,494.98	33,000.00	171,494.98
2009-10	123,893.13	35,860.91	159,754.04
2010-11	133,272.30	15,412.00	148,684.30
2011-12	124,163.51	22,995.75	147,159.26
2012-13	102,017.67	26,500.00	128,517.67
2013-14	76,002.50	15,000.00	91,002.50
2014-15	129,238.05	20,000.00	149,238.05

Fiscal Year	Year less Extraordinary Donations	Extraordinary Donations	Year with Extraordinary Donations
2015-16	142,510.09	25,000.00	167,510.09
2016-17	138,722.95	25,000.00	163,722.95
Sum	1,439,652.50	441,960.06	2,323,572.62
Average	125,440.84	29,464.00	154,904.84
2017-18	145,927.43	124,000.00	269,927.43
% of avg	116.3%	420.9%	174.3%

As in years past, no new debt has been incurred. The building of the kuti and significant upgrades to the former workshop, now known as Nimmita House, were the monastery's only capital expenses in this fiscal, increasing the value of tangible capital assets held by Birken to \$717,258.00.

Liquid assets have increased appreciably from \$161,465.00 in 2016-17 to \$248,551.00 in the 2017-18 fiscal year. This is due to the 421% increase in extraordinary donations cited above that resulted in an increase in revenue of \$106,104.00 from that of the year prior.

Externally driven costs related to the operation of the monastery such as insurance, property taxes, postage, freight, utilities and fuels increased slightly overall from the prior fiscal. Internally monitored costs such as grocery, maintenance and household expenses, increased slightly as expected with the rising cost of goods. However, continued frugal spending by Birken's worthy stewards keeps the impact of these items to the monastery's bottom line minimal. Please see the attached financial statements for more information.

6. MOTIONS:

- That Tombe Herrington Chartered Professional Accountants LLP be appointed our accounting firm for the next fiscal year.

Moved by Hazel Plumbley, seconded by Brent Styra. Carried unanimously.

- That the 2019 AGM be held at Birken Forest Monastery on Sunday, October 27, 2019.

Moved by Teresa Wixted, seconded by Rachel Telesmanick. Carried unanimously.

Meeting Adjourned.

Moved by Teresa Wixted, seconded by Thomas West. Carried unanimously.