



# DHARMA TEACHER ORDER

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## News from the Texas Sangha from Catharine Hill



The purpose of my Commitment Ceremony, as I understand it, is to formally commit to the monastic way of life. I have felt called to this for many years. However, until now, the time and circumstances were never right.

When I arrived at Phap Nguyen Temple 2 1/2 years ago, I found a spiritual home. And now, at the ripe old age of 63, I have been given the opportunity to answer the call I heard so many years ago. I have responsibilities at home, so I won't be living at the temple for the time being. However, I do go to the temple to practice with the community twice daily in the morning and the evening. In five months, I will take the vows of a novice.

It was so special to share this meaningful occasion with my brothers and sisters from Pearland, New York and Connecticut. I am a happy little bald monk!

## Fernando Camacho Meets Matthieu Ricard, Monk and Scientist



Rev. Dr. Fernando Camacho at a conference in San Diego for work with the objective of trying to start a loving kindness study in newly-diagnosed patients with cancer. The name of the conference is the International Symposium of Contemplative Studies. Matthieu Ricard is one of the speakers. Matthieu Ricard, monk and scientist, is the author of many books. The one he is autographing for Fernando is *Happiness: a Guide to Developing Life's Most Important Skill*.



**Houston Walk  
to Feed the Hungry**  
Submitted by Catharine Hill of the  
Pearland Sangha

For the fourth year, the Pearland sangha participated in the Houston Walk to Feed the Hungry. This annual event benefits the many worthy projects sponsored by Buddhist Global Relief.

To our delight, Ven. Bikkhu Bodhi, founder of Buddhist Global Relief, was in town to lead the walk this year. It was a beautiful fall day, and as we walked, we created an epicenter of peace in our city which spread to en-

compass our state, our country, and the whole world. It was a breath of fresh air during a time of national turmoil.

**Catharine Hill from  
Texas Sangha  
Gets Ordained**



# Robin Ryan from CT Sangha Reflects on the Annual Pearland Retreat

The recent retreat in Texas presented a wonderful opportunity to appreciate the glimmering jewel of Sangha. Coming together to enjoy a cup of tea (boy, that was good, wasn't it!), or a cup of Vietnamese iced coffee (with a wink to Kyle!), or one of the bounteous meals offered up by the loving and talented Phap Nieghe, provided us with great sustenance, enabling our graceful

Sitting together with our brothers and sisters, those who have come before us, showing the way, and those following in our footsteps, giving hope for the future, we were able to witness the important transitions in our lives as Buddhist practitioners - the taking of precepts, the Bodhisattva vows, and the ordination commitment courageously decided upon by our radiant sister Cathy!

We shared and received insights with each other, practiced peacefully together, and provided a container of support for those of us who have been experiencing challenging times, such as our committed sister Sondra in her ongoing and difficult pursuit of the Buddhist chaplaincy. Let us draw inspiration from Sondra, as we continue upon this noble path set forth for us so many years ago."



## De la Miami Sangha...Como yo Llegué al Budismo—Susette Cuoso

Me llamo Susette y pertenezco a la sangha de Miami desde aproximadamente el 2007. Llegué a la sangha a través de mi ex-esposo. Es curioso que él ya no está en mi vida pero el budismo sigue presente, de hecho, el budismo fue integral en mi habilidad de sobrepasar un embate tan difícil como un divorcio.

Mi ex comenzó a atender las meditaciones de los domingos con Noble Silencio y otro pequeño grupo que, a través del tiempo, ha crecido, disminuido, transformado y vuelto a crecer; y que gracias a la impermanencia, continuará cambiando. Así como todo cambia, yo también he cambiado y he aprendido a darle bienvenida al cambio también. Recuerdo que mi ex me pedía que fuera con él a las meditaciones, pero yo estuve renuente por mucho tiempo ya que eran a las 8 a.m. los domingos y yo no quería levantarme tan temprano los fines de semana. Recuerdo que muchas veces él intentó decirme cuanto le gustaba el budismo y como me ayudaría a mí también, y cuántas veces le contesté que ¡estaba loco de querer ir y sentarse con un grupo de personas en silencio a las ocho de la mañana un domingo!

Yo nací en Cuba, sitio en el cual la religión no predomina en la mayoría de la vida de las personas a causa de la revolución comunista. A pesar de eso mi abuela logró llevarme a una iglesia católica y seguí todos los pasos de la iglesia católica. Después mi familia me trajo a los Estados Unidos buscando una vida mejor para ellos y para mí y mi hermana. Cuando comencé en la universidad aquí en los Estados Unidos aprendí muchos puntos de vistas diferentes que eran incongruentes con las cosas que me había enseñado la iglesia, y por lo tanto la dejé a un lado. Nunca más pertencí a ningún grupo o congregación religiosa. Es más, sentía cierto resentimiento contra la iglesia como institución.

Al fin, mi ex-esposo logró convencerme y asistí a una meditación. No se me olvida el dolor tan intenso que sentí la primera vez que me senté a meditar y se me dormieron las piernas. Al tratar de salirme de la posición de meditación sentí unas punzadas intensas y pensé que esto era una locura. Pero tiendo a ser una persona consistente y continué asistiendo con mi ex esposo. Después de más o menos un año, Noble Silencio nos presentó la posibilidad de comenzar un estudio más intelectual del budismo a través de un curso anual. Noble Silencio fue el emprendedor del curso en nuestra sangha y dedicó su tiempo a buscar textos equivalentes a los textos que eran utilizados por la sangha de Nueva York para las clases de Dharma Teacher Order. Él organizó todo el curso y completó un horario anual para el primer año. Nos apuntamos ese primer año seis personas. Recuerdo que no tenía interés en hacerme Dharma Teacher, pero si tuve mucha curiosidad sobre la historia y la filosofía budista, y decidimos matricularnos.

A través de ese curso aprendí temas como la impermanencia, el vacío, y los beneficios de la plena conciencia en la vida cotidiana. Fuí introducida a Thich Nhat Han, quien sinceramente ha cambiado mi forma de ver la vida y de responder a mis circunstancias. Pero una de las cosas que más me atrajo fue la libertad de pensamiento que provee el budismo. El budismo no requiere una renuncia total a cualquier otra perspectiva de la vida, y eso fue algo refrescante para mí.

En el grupo también conocí personas excelentes que hoy por hoy han sido integrales en mi vida, como Noble Silencio, Teo, Mercedes, y Maricruz. También he tenido el placer de conocer grupos de personas que se reúnen con el simple propósito de ser mejores seres humanos y transformar al mundo, como los miembros de las sanghas de Nueva York, Connecticut y Texas. Hoy soy una mujer latina, joven, y soltera que se enfrenta a un mundo cambiante y que vive al borde del progreso. A veces me involucro más y a veces menos en los temas administrativos de mi sangha, pero como quiera que sea, sé que es mi casa espiritual y que gracias a las perspectivas que trajo el budismo a mi vida, puedo reaccionar a la vida de una forma más equanime y más conciente.

## New York DTO Sangha

### Teaching at Mariandale Conference and Retreat Center

### Elena Bravocruz Reporting

#### No-Self

No-Self, like many other fundamental doctrines in the Buddhist nomenclature, can be confusing and daunting, at times even for some long-time students of Buddhism. No-Self or Anatta is one of the Three Marks of Existence and is closely related to Suffering-Dukkha and Impermanence-Anicca. For the last 4 months, our not so new friends at Mariandale have had a taste of the feelings and mental formations one experiences upon first contact with these terms and, it would not be surprising to learn that some might have wanted to walk out and never come back. However, what is wonderfully surprising is: they all stayed!

Buddhism and Christianity part from very different thinking patterns. They both challenge each other in ways that can be at once, mind-boggling yet, great mind-openers. And this is probably true because both of them champion the practices of compassion, loving-kindness and renunciation. They both encourage the recognition of “the other” as an extension of “one’s self” and in spite of the differences in doctrinal foundations, the end result is the same: we come together for the love of learning; we learn together for the love of sharing and growing our skills of giving, to give better each time, free from selfishness and, hopefully, devoid of self-grandeur.

We started this journey by recognizing Mariandale as one of the 84,000 Gates to the Dharma now, the sun is shining through, let’s hope we can continue to bask in it as one body. Be it the Body of Christ or the Body of the Dharma, it does not matter what we call it. After all, they both in their own way, lead us to freedom from suffering to a life inspired by hope.



## **Deborah McDonald of CT Sangha Gives Summary of December Retreat and Overview of Each Sangha's Activity**

The DTO Winter Retreat this December was incredible. There was the opportunity to interview and practice with the Venerable Thích Trí Hoằng, eat fabulous food and attend cooking classes with Sister Phap Nghiem. We practiced tai chi, experienced a Sound Bath and saw Kyle's slide show of his and Thay's trip to Vietnam for the casting of the Temple bell.

We shared information, Fernando talked about where we are and where we are going, a brief history of the Dharma Teacher Order and our vision for going forward. Check out Fernando's article on page seven.

Alex Quiros gave a very informative presentation on the Mindfulness Movement, the history, benefits and risks. The word "mindfulness" is everywhere and is used to sell all sorts of things. Alex dubbed this movement, "McMindfulness," and talked about ways to improve on what's being done. He discussed using what we know about learning styles to more skillfully open the "gate of mindfulness."

Each state gave a summary :

- Texas is teaching DTO classes, promoting interfaith dialogue and continuing their work in prisons. They participated in the Hunger Relief Walk and one of their members, Sondra Kaighen, is doing an internship for hospital/hospice chaplaincy (the number of hours, schedule, and emotional demands on her are grueling). In addition the Texas sangha is working to get the DTO online course up and running.
- Florida is looking for a new place to practice. Moving has made it difficult for them to maintain consistent classes and their sangha has temporarily decreased. They believe they have found a way to acquire a new home with the help of the Neighborhood Assistance Corp. of America.
- New York's collaboration with Mariandale Retreat and Conference Center has gone well. Mariandale is including the DTO's classes in their promotional literature. The class enrollment is increasing and the teachers are feeling reinvigorated.
- Connecticut reported moving to the Universalist Church in West Hartford and increasing class size to over 20. They participated in the hunger walk and are trying social media to help get the word out. Richard Zipoli's post certificate course to train teachers is so popular he has opened it to the whole group.
- After hearing Venerable Thích Trí Hoằng speak, a Buddhist Sangha in Virginia Beach, Virginia is beginning a DTO class. Welcome Virginia.

After the silent auction Saturday night, Sunday concluded with a Commitments and Precept ceremony. The weekend went by too quickly. I am looking forward the December retreat next year.

## Fernando Camacho on “Where We Are” and “Where We Are Going”

The DTO was started by Venerable Thích Trí Hoằng in the late 1990's at Hai An Pagoda in Connecticut. It was started as one class and now we have five sanghas: New York, Florida, Connecticut, Texas (Pearland) and Virginia (Virginia Beach).

Its aim is to spread the Dharma in the West to try to alleviate suffering. The means by which we try to do this is through the classes to teach the Dharma, involvement in our communities as well as providing services such as the prison correspondence course, participating as chaplains, running children's groups teaching meditation classes and others. Some of our teachers have gone on to participate in other sanghas or starting new groups.

We are a 501(c) (3) not-for-profit religious corporation recognized by the IRS and listed as such in the states of New York and Florida and soon Connecticut. We have a Board of Directors with Fernando Camacho being the Chairperson and Treasurer, Maeve Eng Wong is the Vice Chairperson and Janet Reale is the Secretary. Our income is about \$15,000 per year primarily coming from registration to classes or retreats, although we do get donations from the teachers. Most of these monies are spent on the cost of rent, retreat costs, insurance and supplies. We currently have about \$4,000 in the bank.

We are people from many different professions, most are currently employed, some are retired.

We do have a website ([dharmateacherorder.org](http://dharmateacherorder.org)) which needs to be updated and expanded. We have been unable to do this due to lack of money and volunteer time.

We strongly support the work of the Prison Correspondence Course run by Richard and Adrienne Baksa. We encourage all of our teachers and students to participate.

The current status of our classes are: 1) The Dharma Study Class is a 4-year program leading to those who meet the requirements to get a Certificate of Buddhist Studies. 2) For those who interested to teach the Dharma, and have finished the Study Class, they might be invited to take part of the Dharma Training Class, a 1-3 year program to develop further understanding of the Dharma, sharpen your teaching skills as well learn how to take part and lead ceremonies. 3) For those who want to dedicate themselves to share the Dharma for the rest of their lives, then there is an opportunity to become a lay Buddhist priest. This has to be approved by Thay, Venerable Thích Trí Hoằng. This can take many years and would be decided by Thay.

We do have a quarterly newsletter which is aptly prepared and edited by Janet Reale.

Current projects:

- 1) We are providing support to a sangha in Virginia Beach which just started the first year of the Dharma Study Class in November 2016.
- 2) In New York, we are teaching an experimental class geared to teaching students who want to learn about Buddhism but are not interested in becoming teachers. The class is topic oriented and not book oriented.
- 3) We need to invigorate the Prison Correspondence Course as the Baksa's are planning to retire in the near future.
- 4) We need to establish an Online Correspondence Course and Alex Quiros has accepted the invitation to become the lead in this project. We will be reaching out to many of our teachers to help Alex conduct this very important project.
- 5) We have been able to recruit a new volunteer to lead the renovation of our web site. Rebecca Stanley, Bobbie Martin's sister, has graciously accepted. We will be introducing her to our IT consultant.

**Note: left click on link in blue above and then, from pull-down menu, click “open hyperlink”**

## **Michelle Härtel of CT Sangha Takes Bodhisattva Precepts while in Pearland, Texas**

Michelle was inspired to write this haiku in honor of her Bodhisattva Precepts:

**Bodhisattva Vows**

**Shared with Sangha Family**

**Made my heart smile wide.**



Photo of Buddha outside Thay's Temple

### **Important Notice!**

**Due to the fact that our Annual April Retreat was scheduled during Easter weekend, we have to change the date of the retreat. The retreat is now scheduled from Friday, April 7 through Sunday, April 9.**

**There will not be a Thursday retreat this year. Please change plans accordingly and share this information with all sangha members.**