

# Dharma Teacher Order Newsletter

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 1

FEBRUARY 2020

## Virginia Beach Retreat - December 2019

On December 13-15, the Dharma Teacher Order held a wonderful retreat at the Dong Hung Temple in Virginia Beach. We assembled, practiced together and had various discussions about how all of the sanghas were doing. We were blessed with the presence of our teacher, Thích Trí Hoàng, as well as Venerable Thich Chuc Thanh and Venerable Thich Thong Chanh.

This is a summary of our discussions:

1. There is interest from a sangha in Springfield, Missouri based at Chua Djh Quang to join the DTO. We have enthusiastically agreed to help them set up the Dharma Study Class and to include them in our website as well as our meetings and retreats.
2. In 2020, we are going to try to establish a third retreat for DTO members in the summer. This retreat will be mostly a silent retreat dedicated to practice only. It will be held at Mariandale Retreat Center in Ossining, New York. It is being organized by Teo and Fernando. It will be in either July or August from a Friday afternoon until noon Sunday. You will be getting details about it within the next two months.
3. There was a significant interest in continuing to develop the monthly phone sessions for the DTO teachers and priests being organized and prepared by Tom Duva. We were all thankful for Tom's initiative in developing this important source of sangha support.
4. There was an interest to change some of the books assigned for reading in the four year Dharma Study Class. The Connecticut sangha has been working on some ideas for replacement of some books. As our last review of the curriculum was 4-5 years ago, we plan to have a session in the April 2020 retreat to address possible changes. Please bring all of your ideas and suggestions.
5. All sanghas go through phases in which the membership numbers fluctuate. We discussed ideas to try to keep the sanghas fresh and vibrant. An idea is to establish Buddhism 101 courses aimed at sharing the Dharma with beginners who do not want to become teachers but just want to be acquainted with Buddhist concepts and way of life. Another idea would be to just have regular scheduled meditation sessions and days of mindfulness with short Dharma talks. Some students at either of these above sessions might want to go deeper into learning the Dharma and then they can be referred to the Dharma Study Class. Each DTO sangha should not feel obliged to have a Dharma Study Class each year. It might be refreshing to take a year off and enjoy other ways of sharing the Dharma.
6. The year 2020 is the twentieth anniversary of the beginning of the DTO and its classes. We wanted to celebrate this event at our April 16-19, 2020 retreat at Mariandale Retreat Center in Ossining, New York. We encourage as many of the DTO members as possible to come for this very joyous event.
7. We are preparing a history of the DTO for the April retreat. We need every one's input so that it can be as complete as possible. We especially need help for the years 2,000 - 2006. Please send your thoughts and memories to me at [dharmastudent15@gmail.com](mailto:dharmastudent15@gmail.com)
8. As the DTO is becoming a larger national organization, there is a need to begin the dialogue of the future succession of the DTO leadership to allow for an uneventful smooth transition. We need to start thinking about what happens if Thay and/or Fernando are no longer able to serve in their current DTO positions. To begin this process, Fernando will be submitting to Deborah MacDonald a list of all of his responsibilities and activities with the DTO for further future discussions at our next retreats.
9. Dates and locations of our 2020 retreats:  
April 16-19 at Mariandale Retreat Center, Ossining , New York  
July or August( date to be determined), also at Mariandale  
December 4-6 at Chua Djh Quang, Springfield, Missouri

With Metta,  
Fernando



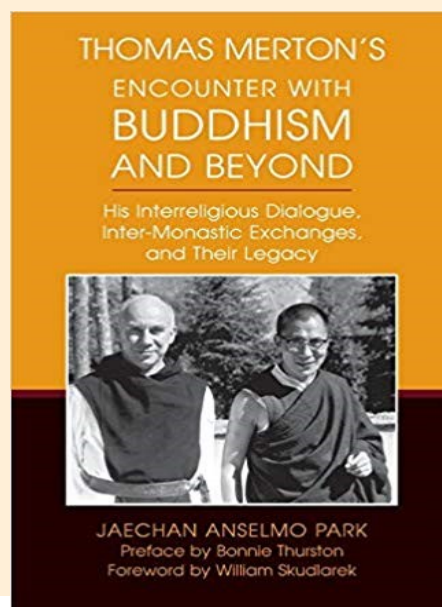
Photo by Craig Hannah

## Buddhist-Christian Dialogues By Maeve Eng-Wong

New York  
Sangha's  
Focus on  
Buddhist-  
Christian  
Dialogues and  
other  
Interreligious  
Dialogues

The NY Sangha has been engaging in Buddhist Christian Dialogues at Mariandale Retreat Center as part of our choice to explore Buddhism with different populations in order to enhance our own grasp of where Buddhism and other spiritual and religious practices find commonality. The meetings were well attended and found a focus on a common book each time. The books that were chosen for discussion were *The Emptied Christ of the Philippians* by John P. Keenan and *Thomas Merton's Encounter with Buddhism and Beyond* by Jaechan Anselmo Park. We also participated in a dialogue at Graymoor Spiritual Life Center in Garrison, NY with Father Anthony Ciorra, the author of many works on mysticism, spirituality, and moral theology. He is known within the Catholic community for his work in interreligious dialogue and ecumenism. He shared the leadership of the day long retreat with members of the NY Sangha with generosity and grace.

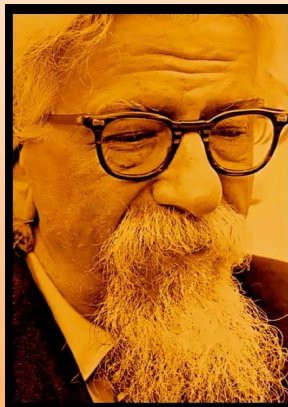
It is the hope of the NY Sangha that we can have a discussion as part of our yearly retreat in April at Mariandale about our experience participating in these interreligious dialogues. We would also like to compile a list of five to six books like the ones listed above to begin to develop a curriculum that would offer guidance to others in the DTO who are interested in creating similar dialogues in their own communities.



"Faith is not the clinging to a shrine but an endless pilgrimage of the heart. Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement, [to] get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted.

Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.

Prayer begins at the edge of emptiness. Wonder rather than doubt is the root of all knowledge. Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy. We can never sneer at the stars, mock the dawn, or scoff at the totality of being.



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- Abraham Joshua Heschel -

Self-respect is the root of discipline: The sense of dignity grows with the ability to say no to oneself. The primary purpose of prayer is not to make requests. The primary purpose is to praise, to sing, to chant. Because the essence of prayer is a song, and man cannot live without a song.

When I was young, I admired clever people. Now that I am old, I admire kind people. Know that every deed counts, that every word is power... Above all, remember that you must build your life as if it were a work of art."

~Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel  
(January 11, 1907 – December 23, 1972)



# Photos from Virginia Retreat December 2019

A big "thank you" to Connecticut Sangha's Craig Hannah for all these photographs. And, while I'm at it, thank you for always putting our newsletter on the website so promptly.



Please click on photos and zoom to be able to see better.





## More Photos from Virginia Retreat December 2019



This is a link to a slide show of more photos from Craig Hannah taken at Dong Hung Temple:

<http://bit.ly/CRH-DTO-201912>

Left click, “open hyperlink” on pull-down menu.

## Commentary on the Winter Retreat at Virginia Beach by Elena Bravocruz

Dong Hung, a beautiful Buddhist Temple in Virginia Beach hosted the Dharma Teacher Order Winter Retreat on December 13-15, 2019. I think I speak for all who attended the Retreat when I say that we were deeply grateful for the warmth hospitality with which we were received. This was certainly a joyous occasion where all the existing DTO Sanghas, and more, came together to enjoy each other’s company, practice together, and look at the future of the DTO. Sadly though, the program, set for three days, could only meet for two to avoid interfering with the Temple’ regular Sunday schedule. Still, the days were filled with delightful food and company, insightful dialogue, and Dharma sharing.

Our beloved Thay was suffering terrible back pain and was not able to be fully present as he has always been during our Retreats. His eternal smile and probing but compassionate eyes were missing for most of the time. Instead, the Virginia “Hahayana Guru” Thay Thahn took the lead and gave some Dharma talks raising awareness of the need to become active in our communities to help ease suffering of everyday life. He encouraged us to become educators of economics in a Western wealthy world that does not know how to spend money wisely, which I would call the “economy of Karma.” Teach them, show them, he said: how to give, where to give, to build temples and give to schools; give to the poor instead of wasting on clothes and things they have too much of, already. As a reward they’ll be happier and healthier. Needless to say, his laughter bounced off the Temple walls as much as the silence of his moments of deep introspection. In the end, I think he made his point: greed and useless consumption breed individual grief and social discontent; on the other hand, generosity and wise spending spread gladness and joy among many, as a result good Karma multiplies.

Sondra Kaighen shared the challenges and joys she encounters, every day, in her new job of Chaplain in the Texas hospital system where she works. She also gave a generous account of her experience in completing the requirements to become certified using our DTO’s Buddhist studies curriculum as the educational foundation. Sondra broke the ceiling and now, this avenue is open to any of us Lay DTO Ordained Priests to follow on her foot steps and example, helping the helpers and the needy. For this I give KUDOS to Sondra for a job well done!

And, the DTO family of Sanghas keeps growing. Some members of the Dinh Quang Buddhist Temple in Springfield, Missouri requested support from our NY (Central) DTO Sangha to start studies of the Dharma following the DTO curriculum. This means, one more sangha becomes a member of the DTO! Of course, we all welcome the Dinh Quang Temple, and thank David Ketchum and head monk Venerable Thich Thong Chanh for honoring us with their presence at the Dong Hung Virginia Retreat and for opening their Temple’s doors to host our December 2020 Retreat.

Saturday night, just as we folded the program, we were delighted to see Thay came to meet us and stayed with us for quite some time. As we enjoyed his presence, Fernando shared an update and Thay made some comments and recommendations. Together with Thay, Thay Thahn, and Thay Thong, those of us who were still at the Temple enjoyed laughter and late-night snacks, shared information, and warm farewell hugs, aspiring to keep the flame of the Dharma forever burning bright until we meet again.



## You Never Graduate from Buddhism 101 - by Alex Quiros

A notorious and infamous Cuban doctor we have grown to know and love came to San Antonio, TX for his yearly Oncology Conference. Twice now over the last two years, the mischievous Fernando Camacho reached out to me and asked me if I wanted to get together. Twice I said yes, I don't know why -- maybe temporary insanity. But it has happened twice so now it's a tradition and he is obligated to contact me every time he comes to San Antonio. I say this to warn you all that if you do the same, I will hold you to the same standards.

Anyways, this great listener got me talking about a new group I started called Buddhism 101 at the Phuoc Hue Buddhist Temple of San Antonio. About a year ago, August of 2018, I moved back to San Antonio and started attending services again at Phuoc Hue, the temple run by my first Dharma teacher, Venerable Thich Phuoc Quang. He introduced me to Buddhism, gave me my Dharma name of Quang Tam, and helped make me conscious of how beautiful life is when one keeps one's eyes on the Three Wonderful Jewels of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. But when Thich Phuoc Quang and Thich Tri Hoang met one day in Pearland, Thich Phuoc Quang was not supportive of the very disruptive idea of ordained lay Dharma teachers. So when I returned to San Antonio and to Phuoc Hue Temple, I never mentioned my ordination to others (though Phuoc Quang knew), I only wore the grey robes all were asked to wear during services, and I started out at the bottom rung in the unspoken hierarchy that inevitably develops in a Sangha, even if it's not intended. I wanted Thich Phuoc Hue to know that I would respect his wishes in his temple.

Fernando liked where this was going and asked me what I've done since then. I told him that after a year, I approached Thich Phuoc Hue and asked if I could start a simple introductory group, free of many of the religious trappings, in order to make the temple more welcoming for newcomers. We'd often have new people come to our 3hr service, but they rarely returned. When we could get an answer to the question of, "why they did not come back?" the typical answers were the service was too long, being forced to wear a robe made it feel like a cult, and the 30-40 minutes of chanting didn't ease fears of being drawn into a cult. I proposed to Thich Phuoc Quang that I could hold a weekly, one-hour Buddhism 101 service that would include meditation instructions, sitting meditation, walking meditation, and a Dharma discussion that included a brief teaching and a Q&A session. I would make it very informal meaning no robes, no bowing, no chanting, and sitting in a circle in order to make it more welcoming to those who wouldn't understand the importance of those elements. The goal being that once they understood Buddhism better, they would be more likely to attend the longer service and other service a new monk at the temple was developing. He agreed and I was off to cloud-9. I was so happy that I would finally be able to follow my vocation to spread the Dharma in a new, more formal way.

Well the time came for our first meeting on Aug 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019. We had a respectable size crowd of 8 people. Not bad for a first meeting. But every week the crowd grew until week 5 when we had a group of 25 in the small room of the temple. Man, I was so proud of what I had accomplished! I like to imagine that Fernando had a smile when I got to this point of the story. I can't remember, but in my imagination, he had a smile. Not a smile of, "wow, Alex, you've done so well," but rather a smile of, "Oh Boy! Look at that EGO GO!"

At week 5, the monk communicated to me that he wanted me to make some changes to the group. He stated that the temple is a sacred place that needed to be respected. He wanted an opening and closing chant, all members to bow during the chanting, all senior members to wear robes, and the seats arranged in rows like a classroom with me at the head. WAIT WHAT??? Aren't those exactly the things I said I would remove in order to make the service more welcome to newcomers? WHY??? I tried to argue against the changes, noting that this could potentially destroy the group, but to no avail. Out of obedience I made the changes... grudgingly. Sure enough, within two weeks, the group went from an attendance of 25 to just 5. I was so furious. I wanted to cuss and scream at the ignorance. I... I... oh! That's a whole lot of I's. Not only had I incorporated this group into my ego identity making it **my** group, but I had made this group about my mad Dharma teaching skillz. Yep, my "Mad Skillz" as in I must be insane. How embarrassing. How humbling.

Continued on Page 6

## You Never Graduate from Buddhism 101 - by Alex Quiros (continued)

In a weird way, my former Catholic upbringing made the process of confessing all my ego sins to Fernando comforting. And like a wise priest/ monk/ Dharma Teacher, he listened compassionately as I talked about the continuing transformation from anger to acceptance. At the time, I was still angry... and I must confess I'm still a little angry. But by the time Fernando had come to San Antonio, three months after the changes had been implemented, I had already been at work trying to recover from the damage done by the changes and my ego. Fernando made sure to let me know, what I felt was normal and ok. He encouraged me to keep trying and praised that I had at the very least had the insight to notice the ego in action. He told me that in time the group would recover and that such ups and downs in attendance is also to be expected. He did all this as we were driving to that evening's Buddhism 101 class where, to my surprise, we had an attendance of 32 people!

Moral of the story, keep Fernando around. He's a great lucky charm!

All joking aside, I'd like to end with these words. The word vocation is derived from the Latin *vocare* meaning "to call." Those called to take refuge under the Three Wonderful Jewels instinctively understand that inner pull. And when that pull leads us onto the path of the DTO program, it's understandable and expected that we should feel some apprehension-- especially as the calling to teach gets stronger and stronger. It's ok to be scared as you start something new. It's ok to fail. But if you continue to remain open to the transformative power of your calling, more and more, little by little, your true Buddha nature will arise.

I humbly bow to you, the arising Future Buddha.

