

Zen Community of Oregon Engaged Buddhism Committee 2020 Report February 2021

Engaged Buddhism is defined and unified by the intention to apply Buddhist practices, philosophy, and precepts to addressing personal, environmental, political, and economic suffering and social and racial injustice.

Zen practice is a wholehearted engagement with all dimensions of life. We do not seek to escape the complex systems that govern the human world, but to enter them as gates of awakening. (Kennyo, ZCO Zen priest)

At the heart of awakening is the vibrant truth of interconnection. All beings are mysteriously linked in a web of evolving relationships. Free from attachment, compassion flows forth to transform relative structure – personal, cultural ecological, social, economic and technological. The bodhisattva vow is infinite in its manifestation. This is our collective liberation! (Kennyo, ZCO Zen Priest)

In **2020**, in spite of the necessary cautions and limitations ZCO put in place to address the COVID pandemic, the Engaged Buddhism Committee (EBC), the Sangha, residents of Great Vow Monastery, and lay teachers and practitioners at Heart of Wisdom Zen Temple were incredibly active in continuing our commitment to Socially Engaged Buddhism.

The Engaged Buddhism Committee's mission is to help fulfill the fifth goal of the ZCO Strategic Plan of Nurturing a Heart-Connected and Engaged Spiritual Community and to promote ZCO as a force for compassionate, positive change in the world. Our core values and project priorities are:

1. To acknowledge and respond to the suffering caused by inherent biases and prejudices based on systems of power and oppression by promoting and integrating Equity, Diversity and Inclusion throughout ZCO and in the larger community.
2. To acknowledge and respond to the climate crisis that threatens all life on earth by working internally and locally to support environmental sustainability.
3. To be a good neighbor by identifying and responding to needs in the local neighborhood that we may be uniquely positioned to positively affect.
4. To identify and offer education and activities about these issues for ZCO leadership, Teachers and Sangha members and the larger community.
5. To fulfill our Bodhisattva vow by infusing these activities with compassion, our Zen Buddhist tradition, Dharma and practice for the benefit of all beings.

JANUARY 2020

Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI)

Planning for the EDI training continued with our consultant/trainer Yee Won Chong. The EDI survey was finalized with a deadline in February to send to ZCO leadership in preparation for the EDI training scheduled for May 2020.

ICE Meditation Walks

ZCO members participated in the weekly meditations and walks at the ICE office sponsored by the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. The ICE walks and demonstrations were protesting the separation of immigrant children from parents at the US border, the incarceration of children and adults in detention centers and the deportation of immigrants.

Awakening to Whiteness

The first 2020 ATW cohort of 13 individuals began with in person meetings at HOW for January and February. When HOW shut down for COVID the intrepid group continued to meet in smaller chunks of time and small groups until the zoom process became established and smoother. Facilitator Linda Choon reported, "Participants demonstrated engagement and tenacity to continue with this curriculum and process, and even amid the challenges of that time, the majority were able to participate even through the "Going Forth" ritual in Session 6, no small task and something to deeply appreciate."

At the same time most of the Great Vow monastery residents participated in an ATW cohort from January to July.

Origami Cranes Project

Spearheaded by past EBC member Kati Sweany, ZCO members folded several hundred origami Cranes in folding sessions at Heart of Wisdom and at home. The Cranes were to be presented at Duncan Ryuken Williams (Soto Zen priest and the author of [American Sutra](#)) and Tsuru For Solidarity's planned demonstration in Washington DC. June-5-7 to protest the incarceration of immigrants at the US border. The in-person protest was cancelled because of COVID, but was replaced by a lovely nationwide virtual event. Our cranes went to Duncan's sangha, which is a traditional Soto

temple in Southern California, to be part of their remembrance ceremony for those who died in Japanese internment camps and in more recent camps at the US–Mexico border. The priests there chanted the heart sutra surrounded by 125,000 cranes to represent all the interned Japanese citizens.

Tsuru For Solidarity set a new goal of an additional 400,000 Cranes, the number of immigrants incarcerated annually. Directions for folding and stringing Cranes can be found on their web site tsuruforsolidarity.org. They ask that you hold on to the Cranes until further notice when it is safe to reschedule the in-person demonstration.





FEBRUARY 2020

A full day of [Sangha Treasure](#) was attended by 60+ members to review the status of the sangha and brainstorm ideas and priorities for the transition of leadership with the future retirement of the Roshis.



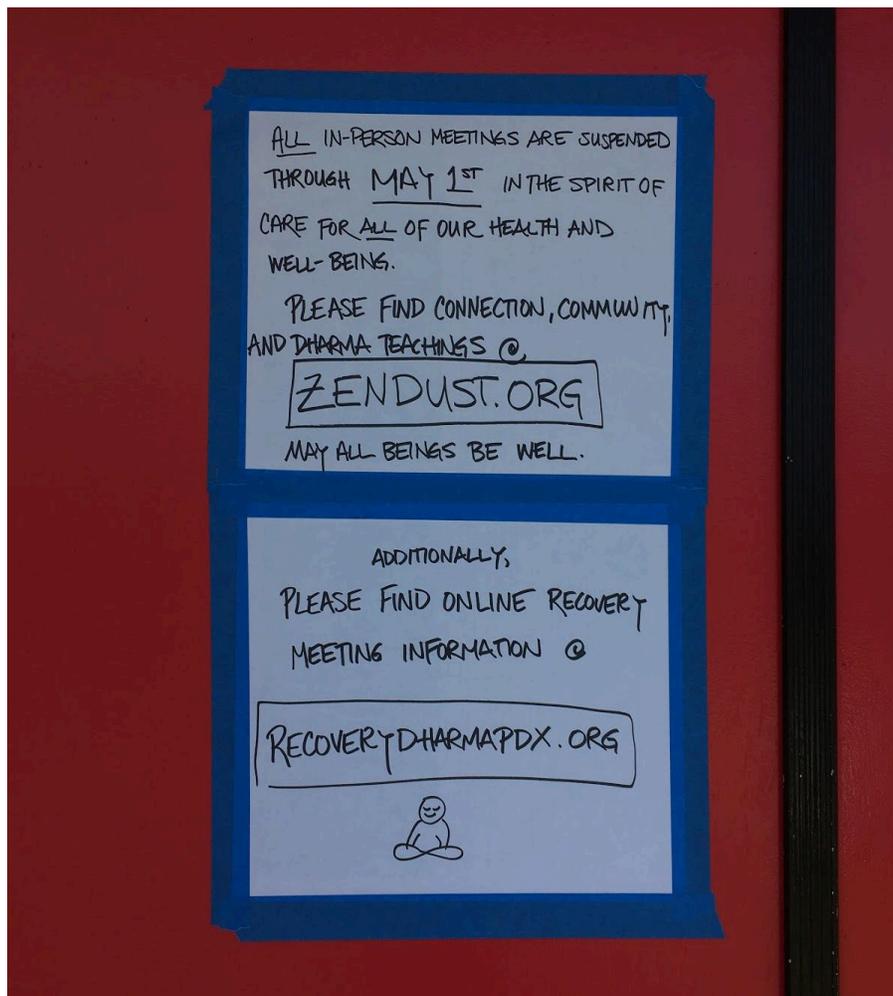
The EDI training survey was distributed.

ICE walks and crane project continued.

Heart of Wisdom spoke [names of people killed by police](#) during services one week in February.

MARCH 2020

The country began shutting down in response to the COVID pandemic. Great Vow went into cloister and Heart of Wisdom closed by the third week in March. Very quickly ZCO's services were offered on zoom thanks to the expert technical talent in the Sangha. ZCO's teachers continued their weekly zazen and dharma talks and Great Vow continued sesshin via zoom.



The Engaged Buddhism Committee began figuring out how to meet via zoom and continue our planning for EDI training and the other EB activities for 2020.

APRIL 2020

ZCO Outreach

Several ZCO members divided up the ZCO members list and made phone calls or sent emails to check-in on people isolated by the COVID pandemic and to identify medical, emotional and material needs. Out of this effort a **Mutual Aid** process was developed and sent via email to all members.

☆ Mutual Aid- Give and Receive
 https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18HrOWegtTvS_73wdFC26OjjOIs0VTxrtMN... 34 1 Search @ ?

Beginning of Mutual Aid- Give and Receive

This is the start of the Mutual Aid- Give and Receive channel, created by jiku on July 09, 2020. Any member can join and read this channel.

[Invite others to this channel](#) [Set a Header](#)

July 09, 2020

-  System 5:38 PM
@jiku joined the channel.
-  System 5:39 PM
@jiku updated the channel header to:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18HrOWegtTvS_73wdFC26OjjOIs0VTxrtMN0vUwoq2ys/edit#gid=0
-  System 5:40 PM
@jiku updated the channel header
From: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18HrOWegtTvS_73wdFC26OjjOIs0VTxrtMN0vUwoq2ys/edit#gid=0
To: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18HrOWegtTvS_73wdFC26OjjOIs0VTxrtMN0vUwoq2ys/edit#gid=0 use this link to access the google doc containing mutual aid information
-  jiku 5:41 PM
please check out our mutual aid spread sheet and follow the directions to edit. also, please feel free to post new additions in this chat so folks can see what's recently been added!

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18HrOWegtTvS_73wdFC26OjjOIs0VTxrtMN0vUwoq2ys/edit#gid=0

Residents at Great Vow and many lay Sangha members began sewing masks for the Sangha and the community. Masks were distributed to Sangha members, family members and nursing homes.

EDI training, scheduled for May, was canceled and rescheduled for September in an on-line zoom format. Yee Won collated the results of the survey and the EDI sub-committee began analyzing the data in preparation for the training.

MAY 2020

Great Vow and Heart of Wisdom continued to be closed as the pandemic spread, the death toll rose and the lack of federal response devastated the country.

On May 25 the country and the world watched as Minneapolis police officers killed a handcuffed [George Floyd](#) by kneeling on his neck. The country erupted in protests demanding justice for Mr. Floyd and for [Black Lives Matter](#). On May 28 BLM protests began in Portland. Several ZCO Sangha members joined the peaceful protests or offered medical aid and food.



JUNE 2020



Thousands of people lay down on June 2 on the Burnside Bridge for 8 minutes and 46 seconds in remembrance of George Floyd, who was killed by a Minneapolis police officer. (Andrew Wallner)

ZCO Merit List

Continues to include BIPOC individuals killed by police as well as:

All those losing their homes due to sweeps and evictions

All those ill with coronavirus, and their families

All healthcare workers

All grocery, delivery, and other front-line workers

All families separated at the border

Those killed in the wildfires

All Black people killed by white supremacy and institutionalized racism

All those who have died in the pandemic

All humans and non-human beings harmed by human-caused climate crisis

BLM Shrine at Heart of Wisdom

On June 6 several members of the ZCO Sangha and the Engaged Buddhism Committee created a shrine to Black Lives Matter in the Heart of Wisdom garden. The shrine continues to stand and evolve as the seasons change and, sadly, more names are added.



Juneteenth 24 Hour Vigil

At Great Vow Monastery residents placed George Floyd's picture on the Buddha's lap and held a 24 hour meditation vigil marking the 49th day after his murder. A public ceremony was held on zoom to end the vigil and celebrate his life. The vigil also marked, in an embodied way, our commitment to end racial injustices in our society. This is an acknowledgement of the need to heal the wounds of racism in our selves and in our world.

JULY 2020

Awakening To Whiteness

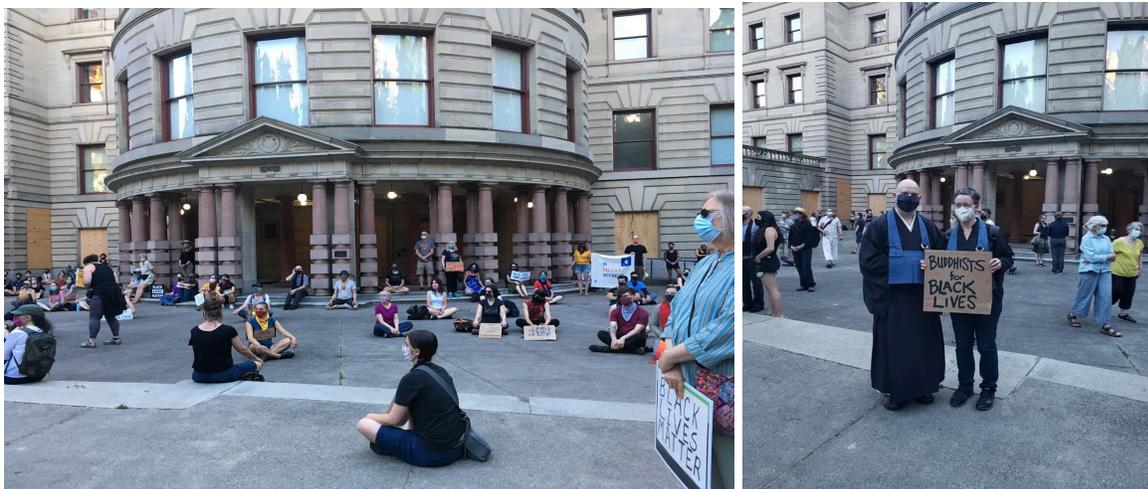
The second 2020 cohort for ATW was conducted completely on zoom from July to January 2021. With 97 people registered the ATW facilitators divided the group into two cohorts with 68 individuals on Sunday and 28 on Wednesday.

Oregon Fire Season Donations

The 2020 Oregon fire season was one of the worst in history with over a million acres burned, many homes lost and complete communities destroyed. ZCO Engaged Buddhism Committee, through its Engaged Buddhism Opportunities emails encouraged the Sangha to donate money, food and clothing to various organizations providing fire and water resources to affected communities. We supported the Sierra Club's fire fund drive, the Josephine County fire fund, the Warm Springs Reservation Water project and more.

Buddhist Peace Fellowship Meditations & Walks

ZCO members joined other Buddhists in meditation and walks around Portland City Hall in July and August 2020. These peaceful demonstrations were in support of Black Lives Matter and in protest of the violence by Portland police and later unidentified federal armed forces against BLM demonstrators.



AUGUST 2020

Plans for the [EDI training](#) were finalized and invitations sent to ZCO leadership.

Buddhist Peace Fellowship vigils at City Hall continued.

ATW continued.

Mutual Aid continued.

Fire aid continued.

SEPTEMBER 2020

On Two Saturdays, the Zen community of Oregon held its [first Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Training for all Sangha leaders](#) with the goal of becoming a more multicultural antiracist organization. We were assisted by Yee Won Chong and Roberta Hunte, very experienced EDI trainers. The post training evaluation indicated participants found the training very useful and felt it was successful in establishing a common language and understanding of systemic racism and white supremacy. Many creative ideas and suggestions were generated for how ZCO should move forward to achieve our EDI goals.

OCTOBER 2020

[The Engaged Buddhism Committee](#) continued meeting via zoom and exploring ways to involve Sangha individuals in EB projects and improving communication with the Sangha. The committee held a Participatory Decision-making Model training for the committee via zoom conducted by EBC member Bob Soken Davis. The EBC committed to learning and using this model and training members to be facilitators.

Autumn Ango, Collective Liberation & Climate Justice

In the fall of each year ZCO focuses on 10 weeks of Ango a period of deepening Zen practice. This fall over ninety people participated in Autumn Ango, where monastics and lay sangha members made commitments to meditation, retreat practice, study, service AND collective liberation and climate justice. We leaned into the teachings of Larry Ward, Zenju Earthlyn Manuel, angel Kyodo williams and others and inquired into what our work is. **The monastery formed a Climate discussion group** to begin anew the conversation within our community. Our first task was to raise community awareness about the **proposed land rezone of over 800 acres in the Port Westward property across the street from Great Vow**. As we see more and more clearly how interconnected this web of life is, may we look deeply at our role and responsibility as Zen Buddhists in co-creating a just and equitable world for the benefit of all beings.

NOVEMBER 2020

Election Day Vigil

A 24-Hour vigil, a place of refuge, an ongoing practice, and an alternative to over-consumption of news on Election Day. Every hour we offered either a period of zazen, guided meditation, loving kindness practice, movement practice, or chanting via zoom. Great Vow residents held space for the entire 24 hours. Teachers from the community guided different practices at different times throughout the 24 hours.

School Backpack Lunch Program

Every November the EBC coordinates ZCO's participation in the School Backpack Lunch Program. This program collects food and funds to provide lunches for children over weekends when they don't have access to school lunches. Backpacks are filled with easy to prepare nutritious food and given to the child at the end of the school week to take home. This year ZCO officially donated \$300.00 from ZCO's budget and another \$400.00 from the participants in the Gratitude Sesshin and unknown amounts from ZCO members. Actual food donations equal 24 boxes, more than ever before. Thank you to all who donated this year and years past.

Columbia River Port Westward Project

The residents of Great Vow Monastery in association with the Columbia Riverkeepers organized to influence the Columbia County Board of Commission's plan to rezone Port Westward from agricultural to industrial use. Kisei sent an appeal to ZCO Sangha members to write letters to the Commission explaining the negative spiritual and ecological effects the re-zone would have on Great Vow Zen Monastery, the city of Clatskanie and the entire Columbia River ecosystem.

“Many of you have enjoyed the peace, serenity and open skies of Great Vow Zen Monastery. Many of you have found the location of the monastery situated in a temperate rainforest in the Columbia River Valley to be a sanctuary of healing. So many beings -- deer, coyote, raven, salamander, red-wing black bird, geese, bald eagle, turkey vulture, osprey, crane, bushtit, rabbit, opossum, tree frog, dragon fly, nutria and so many more make the Columbia River Valley their home - and we have managed to cohabitate together in a way that supports a healthy ecosystem.

The Port of Saint Helen's owns the land that rests directly adjacent to the Columbia River - the land that we rest our gaze on whenever you look across the parking lot and into the valley. They have been trying for years to rezone the land from agricultural to industrial.” Kisei Costenbader, Sensei

DECEMBER 2020

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Based on the feedback received after the EDI training the EBC decided to continue working with Yee Won Chong to develop ZCO's EDI program. A diverse EDI sub-committee, chaired by Zen priest Kisei Costenbader, was formed to develop a roadmap to help ZCO fulfill its vision as an anti-racist organization that prioritizes racial justice and equity.

VOLUNTEERING AND DONATIONS

In spite of COVID restrictions members of the Sangha and monastic residents at Great Vow continue to volunteer for non-profit organizations and community efforts that spring from immediate needs and crises.

In 2020, the Zen Community of Oregon donated to many Zen, Buddhist and non-profit organizations and projects including:

\$500.00 to the Association of Soto Zen Buddhists 100 Anniversary Fund

\$600.00 to KEAP Cambodian student/monk fund

\$200.00 to Zen Center of Los Angeles

\$100.00 to Zen Center of Syracuse

\$100.00 Ancient Dragon Gate

\$1200.00 Pointing Out the Great Way Foundation, 2021 for one Geshe

Sonam's students at their new boarding school in Mustang, Nepal

\$100.00 Portland Friends of the Dhamma

\$300.00 to Rodrigo Reijers, composer of the recording of the Entering the City of Vaisali chant that has been used during the pandemic

\$35.00 The Natural Resources Defense Fund

\$100.00 Peace in the Schools

\$30.00 Habitat for Humanity

\$1200.00 Turning Point Community Center in Clatskanie

\$300.00 Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

\$400.00 Columbia Riverkeeper

\$700.00 School Backpack Food Program

Many ZCO Sangha members participated in Engaged Buddhism Committee projects and efforts by:

- cooking meals, running errands and giving rides to medical appointments for members who became ill from COVID or other conditions.
- Sewing and distributing masks for Sangha and community.
- writing letters to the Clatskanie planning board to urge cancelation of zone changes that would allow expansion of industrial projects on the Columbia River north of Great Vow Monastery.

- writing letters and postcards to registered voters all over the country to encourage voting in the 2020 election and in support of City of Portland's environmental and police reform measures.
- sending messages to the Portland City Council in support of regulating Oil Trains that pass through the Woodlawn Neighborhood that increases air pollution in this largely BIPOC neighborhood.
- joining with environmental organizations in Portland to successfully strengthen the code for tree cover in neighborhoods historically over-heated for lack of tree cover.
- contributing warm, winter clothing for children of the Lakota tribes continuing to protest the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) that would cross their sacred lands.

MEMBERS OF THE ENGAGED BUDDHISM COMMITTEE IN 2020:

Kodo Conover, Kisei Costenbader, Bob Soken Davis, Kennyo Dunn, Alexa Jiku Hanshaw, LoriAnn Jikai Lima, Jomon Martin, Gail Shoei Morishige, Gina Ortola, Christy Seicho Smith, Kati Sweaney, Linda Chorin Vick, Nan Kyoko Whitaker-Emrich, Chris Dokan Wilhite