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# Buddhism and Barbecue



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A Guide to Buddhist Temples in North Carolina

Thomas A. Tweed  
and  
The Buddhism in North Carolina Project



Tweed, Thomas A.  
Buddhism and barbecue

The Buddhism in North Carolina Project

The University of North Carolina, CB #3225, Chapel Hill, NC

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Others helped us too. Richard Jaffe of North Carolina State University and Randolph E. Clayton, founder of the Cape Fear Tibetan Buddhist Study Group, both provided very useful leads about North Carolina temples. Cedric Chatterly provided a wonderful photograph of a ritual at the Greensboro Buddhist Center (page 35), and Barbara Lau gave us invaluable information about that temple. Hope Toscher, the exceptionally able administrative assistant in the Department of Religious Studies, offered assistance and encouragement in countless ways.

Finally, we dedicate the volume to the many women and men we met at the Buddhist temples across the state. They were much kinder than they had to be. This volume is our partial—though still inadequate—attempt to express our gratitude.



# Introduction

Thomas A. Tweed

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

What comes to mind when you think about the state of North Carolina? It might be basketball or barbecue. Maybe dogwoods. It could be NASCAR or kudzu. But I'll bet it isn't Buddhism. If you think of religion at all, it's probably Methodists or Baptists. And if an image of a religious leader comes to mind it might be the state's famous Baptist preacher, Billy Graham, and not Phramaha Somsak Sambimb, the Thai Buddhist monk who serves as spiritual advisor to the hundreds of Cambodian Khmer refugees at the Greensboro Buddhist Center (Figure 1). It's not likely that Somsak, or any other Buddhist leader in the Tar Heel State, will soon rival Graham's visibility or clout. But the religious landscape of the state has been changing during the past quarter century, and Buddhism now has an increasing presence. As twenty students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill discovered when they criss-crossed the state doing research for this collaborative project, by 2001 the Tar Heel State



*In 1994, Phramaha Somsak Sambimb consecrates the Buddhist altar at an exhibit at the North Carolina Museum of History. Photo by Robert Miller. Courtesy The News and Observer.*



boasted at least thirty-three Buddhist temples and centers.<sup>1</sup> The Buddha has come to the land of barbecue, Baptists, and basketball.

### **Buddhism in North Carolina's History**

Historically, North Carolina has been one of the most ethnically and religiously homogenous states in the nation. The Tar Heel State included European Americans, African Americans, and American Indians, but witnessed little of the European and Asian immigration that affected other states between 1840 and 1920. Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Jews were few, and adherents of other faiths were even less numerous. The overwhelming majority of North Carolinians—Black, Indian, and White—affiliated with one or another form of Protestantism. In 1960, observers could find diverse Protestant denominations—from the predominant Baptists and Methodists to Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Quakers, Pentecostals, and Moravians. But diversity didn't extend much further.

Before the 1960s, North Carolina's cradle and convert Buddhists were few, and those who tried to practice the faith didn't have temples where they might congregate with others. In the middle of the twentieth century some European-American and African-American Buddhist sympathizers and converts pondered newly translated sacred texts from Asia, and some even tried practicing meditation without the aid of Buddhist teachers or institutions. The Beat writer and Buddhist sympathizer Jack Kerouac, who penned part of his famous novel *Dharma Bums* in North Carolina, described his informal meditation practice during one of his many trips to the state, where he visited his mother in a small frame house five miles south of Rocky Mount. "There are piney woods across the cotton field," Kerouac wrote in a 1956 letter, "where I went every day this spring and sometimes in the middle of the night, without lamp, to meditate on a bed of grass . . ."<sup>2</sup> We don't have any surviving evidence that Asian-American Buddhists during the period—and in 1960 that meant a proportion of the 2,863 foreign-born Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese—meditated beneath Carolina pines on a bed of grass, but we can only assume that some who had been raised as Buddhists chanted alone or with their families at bedroom shrines or living room altars.<sup>3</sup>

Starting in 1965, however, a number of cultural factors—including the rise

<sup>1</sup> We have reliable information on thirty-three temples and centers, and we were able to profile thirty-one of those in this volume. The list of all thirty-three can be found in Appendix B.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Alex Albright, "Satori in Rocky Mount: Kerouac in North Carolina," in Leslie H. Garner, Jr. and Arthur Mann Kaye, eds., *The Coastal Plains: Writings on the Cultures of Eastern North Carolina* (Rocky Mount: North Carolina Wesleyan College Press, 1989), 89.

<sup>3</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population: 1960: General Characteristics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960).



in interregional and transnational migration, the relative decline of the liberal mainline Protestant denominations, and the counter-culture's surging interest in Asian religions—began to transform North Carolina's religious landscape. That transformation accelerated by the late 1970s, when the state's first convert Buddhist centers opened. Between 1977 and 1983 six organizations that attracted small numbers of European-American and African-American converts were founded (see Appendix A).

Asian-American Buddhists also grew more numerous and more visible. The 1965 Immigration Act, which did away with the unfair national quota system and permitted more Asians to enter the country, allowed some voluntary migrants to find their way to North Carolina, including immigrants from South and East Asian nations with a Buddhist presence—Thailand, China, Korea, and Japan. And refugees, especially those who were forced to flee from Southeast Asian nations, began to arrive in the state after the fall of Saigon in 1975. Those Vietnamese refugees were joined in the 1980s and 1990s by other displaced peoples from Laos and Cambodia. For example, many of the Khmer-speaking Cambodian refugees that Somsak nurtures now in Greensboro were among the 440 who arrived in 1983 and 1984, when the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement chose that city and Charlotte as sites to establish new Cambodian communities.<sup>4</sup> Migration from Asia continued in the 1990s, as North Carolina's Asian population rose 73 percent between 1990 and 1997, when the U.S. Census estimated that there were 92,036 Americans of Asian descent in the state.<sup>5</sup> As those Cambodian refugees in Greensboro did, many of the new Asian-American communities decided to build Buddhist temples, which have functioned as both spiritual and cultural centers for the migrants and their children. Between 1984 and 1990 seven Asian American Buddhist organizations formed, and each group either constructed a new place for worship or renovated an existing building.

### **Buddhism and North Carolina's Geography**

Those new temples, as well as the centers that converts have founded, dot the landscape all across the state, although the students who researched North Carolina's thirty-three Buddhist communities found that there were some discernible—and somewhat expected—spatial patterns. Geographers divide the state into four regions: the Mountains, the Piedmont, the Inner Coastal Plain,

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Lau, "The Temple Provides the Way: Cambodian Identity and Festival in Greensboro, North Carolina," M.A. Thesis, Curriculum in Folklore, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Sallie M. Ives and Alfred W. Stuart, "Population," in Douglas M. Orr, Jr. and Alfred W. Stuart, eds., *The North Carolina Atlas: Portrait for a New Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 80. On the number of Buddhists in the state and the nation see Appendix D.



and the Tidewater. Population growth over the past six decades has been greatest in the Piedmont, the central region that includes three major urban areas.<sup>6</sup> So it's not surprising that the Piedmont is home to twenty-four of the state's thirty-three Buddhist communities (see Appendix B). It's also not surprising that the three metropolitan areas with

the largest populations each have several Buddhist temples: The Triad (Greensboro/Winston-Salem/High Point), Metropolitan Charlotte (Charlotte/Gastonia/Rock), and the Triangle (Raleigh/Durham/Chapel Hill).<sup>7</sup> The latter, which features three research universities and Research Triangle Park, includes thirteen centers, more than one third of the state's total.

But the geographical distribution of state's Buddhist temples and centers is more complicated than that. They are not all confined to the Piedmont. There is now a Tibetan Buddhist convert center, Greenville Karma Thegsum Choling, a short drive southeast of the "piney woods" where Kerouac meditated in the Coastal Plain. The Tidewater region claims two Buddhist communities, and six more groups take advantage of the wooded splendor of the state's western mountains. Nor are Buddhist temples all in urban areas. Half of North Carolina's population is rural. In fact, only five states have smaller urban populations.<sup>8</sup> It's not surprising, then, that some of the state's Buddhists established places of worship outside cities—in rural areas, suburban centers, and small towns. So you can find temples and centers not only in metropolitan areas with more than a million residents (such as Charlotte, Raleigh, and Greensboro), but also in towns with only a few hundred. In Cameron, a small community northwest of Fayetteville in the rolling hills of the Carolina and Georgia Sand Hills, Thai Buddhist immigrants have established a temporary temple, Wat Mungme Srisuk. That Buddhist community, which congregates on Sundays in a trailer that rests at the end of a winding country road, expects to construct a permanent building soon. And as that newest Buddhist worship site is in a small town, so was the state's first Asian-American temple, Wat Carolina Buddhajakra Vanaram, which rests on twenty-three acres in Bolivia, North Carolina. That Tidewater town, which was named for the South American nation, is less exotic than its name suggests. Most of the several hundred residents are European American or African American Protestants, many of whom gather for worship at Antioch Baptist Church, which is adjacent to Wat Carolina. And even if Buddhists don't

<sup>6</sup> Ives and Stuart, eds., *North Carolina Atlas*, 86.

<sup>7</sup> "Metropolitan Area Population Estimates for July 1, 1998 and July 1, 1999," Population Estimates Program, Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Internet Release Date: October 20, 2000, <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/metro-city/ma99-02>. The population estimates for those regions were as follows: the Triad (1,179,384), Metropolitan Charlotte (1,417,217), the Triangle (1,105,535).

<sup>8</sup> Ives and Stuart, eds., *North Carolina Atlas*, 83.



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### **Buddhist Traditions in North Carolina**

The Thai temples in Bolivia and Cameron are both Theravada Buddhist communities, but many other traditional expressions of Asian Buddhism have made their way into the state (see Appendix C).

Buddhism was founded in India by Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 BCE), and all Buddhists since then have looked to his life and teachings to guide what they think and how they act. Whatever their differences, most Buddhists agree to trust—or “take refuge in”—the “Three Jewels”: (1) the founder, whom followers revere as “the Awakened One” (*Buddha*); (2) his exemplary teachings and experience (*dharma*); and (3) the religious community he founded (*sangha*). According to Buddhist tradition, the Buddha presented some of his most important teachings in his first sermon at Deer Park in Sarnath, India. He taught that all humans suffer, and they do so because they desire. They desire, in turn, because they fail to understand the nature of things (all things, including ourselves, are without enduring or substantial reality). But there is a way out, a path to *nirvana*, the elimination of suffering and release from the endless cycles of rebirth (*samsara*). Buddhists can follow the “noble eightfold path.” In simplest terms, that path to liberation involves morality, wisdom, and concentration.

Buddhists agree to revere the Three Jewels and follow the spiritual path the Buddha cleared, but they also have disagreed among themselves in important ways. Divisions among Buddhists began as early as one hundred years after the Buddha's death. And Buddhists today identify at least three major forms of the religion, or three “vehicles” that can carry followers across to the shore of liberation: *Theravada*, *Mahayana*, and *Vajrayana*.

### **Theravada Buddhists**

Theravada Buddhism (literally “Teachings of the Elders”) describes a gradual path of individual religious striving. The original Buddhist community was made up of monks who renounced the world, while lay supporters offered contributions to the monasteries. Following that early model, lay Theravada Buddhists—or those who are not monks—have followed the same moral and religious teachings of the Buddha, but they have not engaged in the monastic renunciations that lead more directly to nirvana, although they do gain spiritual “merit” by supporting monks and nuns (for example, by providing them food and clothing). And that, they believe, might help them achieve a better rebirth in the next life. This form of Buddhism has had great influence in Southeast



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Asian countries such as Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon), Myanmar (formerly Burma), Kampuchea (formerly Cambodia), Thailand, and Laos.

In North Carolina, Theravada Buddhists are found at Asian-American temples where Thai, Cambodian, and Laotian migrants congregate: Wat Carolina in Bolivia, Greensboro Buddhist Center, the Cambodian Cultural Center in Lexington, Wat Mungme Srisuk in Cameron, and the Cambodian Cultural Society in Charlotte. Some converts also follow traditions inspired by Theravada, including those few European Americans who attend Wat Carolina and other Asian-American temples as well as the converts who practice Insight Meditation at one of the state's two Vipassana centers.

### **Mahayana Buddhists**

A second major form of Buddhism, Mahayana (literally "Great Vehicle"), dismisses their opponents, the Theravadins, as the "lesser vehicle." Their "great vehicle" emphasized the active virtue of compassion as well as the reflective virtue of wisdom, which was so highly valued by the Theravadins. The ideal for Theravada Buddhists was the *arhat*, one who is free from all impurities through the realization of nirvana and, so, free from all subsequent rebirth. Mahayana Buddhists, even lay followers, aimed higher. They sought to *become* a Buddha, one who achieves full enlightenment for the sake of all beings, human and non-human, and embodies compassion as well as wisdom. This emphasis on the path of the *bodhisattva* (future Buddha)—and not the path of the *shravaka* (future *arhat*)—has distinguished the Mahayana sects that have predominated in East Asian nations such as China, Korea, and Japan.

Some forms of East Asian Mahayana Buddhism have made their way to North Carolina. The state does not have a large Japanese American community, and no temples associated with Japanese Pure Land Buddhism (*Jodo Shinshu*) were established, as they were in Hawaii and along the Pacific Coast during the late-nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. But the state is home to a few thousand Chinese immigrants, and about one hundred of those attend Chapel Hill and Cary's Buddha Light International Association, which is formally affiliated with Taiwan's Fo Guang Shan (Buddha's Light Mountain) and California's Hsi Lai Temple, the largest Buddhist building in the United States. Vietnamese refugees also practice Mahayana Buddhism at three urban temples in the Tar Heel State: Raleigh's Chua Van Hanh, Greensboro's Chua Quan An, and Charlotte's Chua Lien Hoa. And fourteen convert centers are associated with one or another form of Mahayana Buddhism. Followers practice seated meditation (*zazen*) and walking meditation (*kinhin*) at eight Zen temples and at five small groups affiliated with the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh's Community of Mindful Living. And an estimated eight hundred



converts to Soka Gakkai International—U.S.A, a movement that attracts the most ethnically diverse community of Buddhist converts, meet to chant homage to a sacred text, the Lotus Sutra, in private residences in Raleigh and across the state.

### **Vajrayana Buddhists**

A third major division within Asian Buddhism, Vajrayana (“Diamond Vehicle”), emphasizes that the religious path could be briefer, even in this lifetime. It suggests that this world of rebirth and suffering (*samsara*) is ultimately identical to the final state of liberation and bliss (*nirvana*), at least for those few spiritually advanced persons who see reality as it is. Vajrayanists reconceived of the religious goal in texts called *tantras*, and in their practices followers used sacred syllables (*mantras*) and cosmic paintings (*mandalas*). As with the other two forms of Buddhism, this Vajrayana or Tantric tradition has Indian roots, but it was predominated in Tibet and Mongolia.

There were less than two thousand Tibetan migrants living in the United States in 1995, and they don’t make up a significant community in the state today. So although the exiled Tibetan Buddhist leader, the Dalai Lama, appears regularly on television and in newspapers in North Carolina, institutional forms of Vajrayana can be found only at the five convert centers devoted to Tibetan Buddhism, including two in Durham— Karma Thegsum Choling and the Shambhala Center.

The presence of these two spiritual centers, and the thirty-one others, might not prompt North Carolinians to think first of Buddhism when they think of the state. But, as the brief profiles of temples and centers included in this volume show, the spiritual landscape has been changing during the past three decades. And we hope that this project provides an angle of vision on that changing terrain for students and teachers, legislators and policy makers, ministers and caseworkers, and for all citizens who want to know more about their new neighbors. Yet because the spiritual landscape is changing so quickly, some of the information we have gathered soon will be outdated as new Buddhist communities form and existing communities shift locations, fade away, or change names. We can only hope that this snapshot of North Carolina’s Buddhist communities in 2001 will be helpful to those who pick up where we have left off, those who take up the challenge of mapping the state’s increasing religious diversity.



# The Temples



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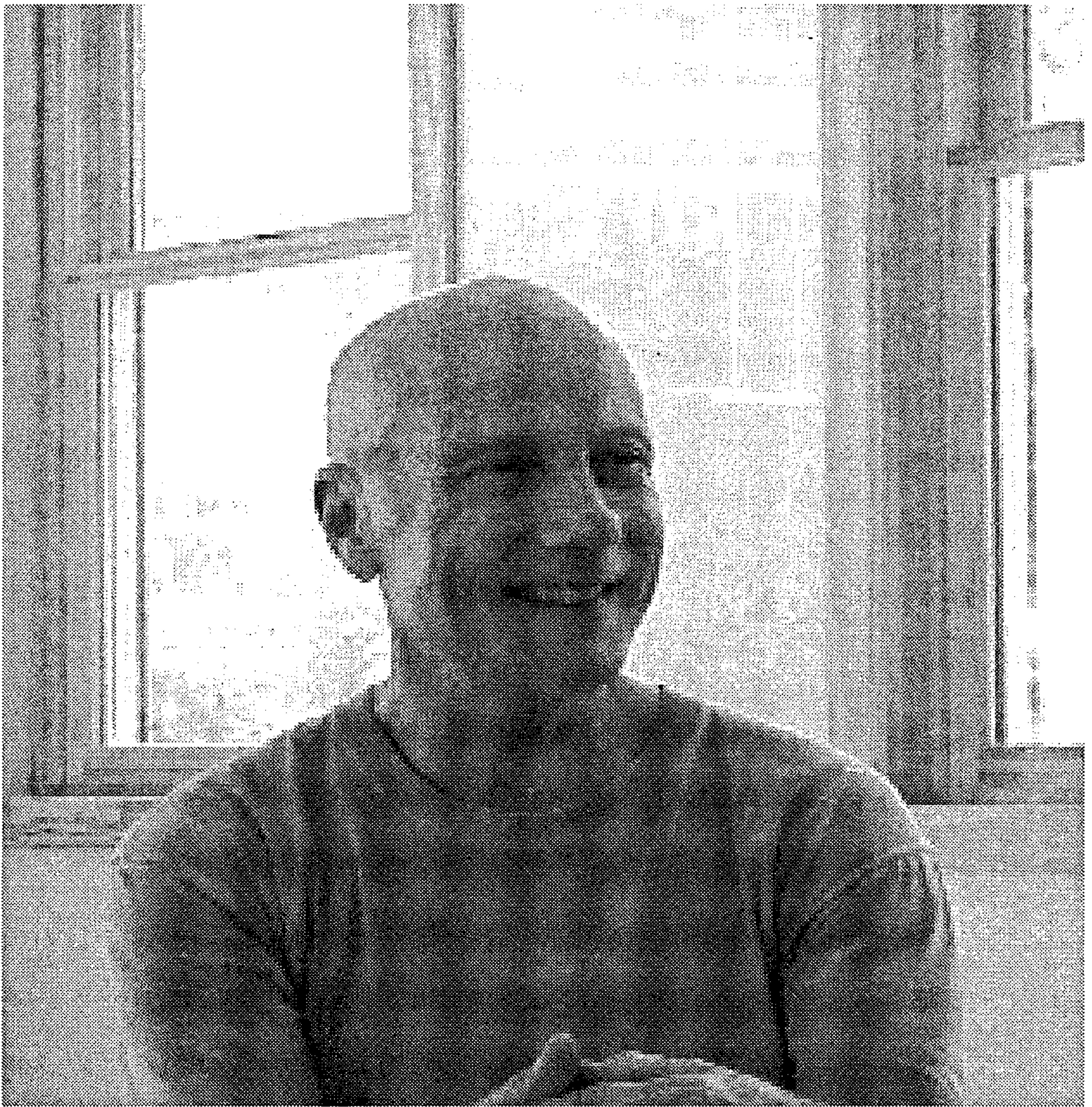
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wood floors, wild flowers on the altar, and a wood stove burning in the zendo all add to the rustic atmosphere. With fifteen acres of forested land, Brooks Branch Zendo also provides an ideal setting for sesshin or retreats, which last up to one week.

The temple was originally established in 1977 by the efforts of Sandy's wife, Susanna Holzman. It has moved from Holzman's backyard to a wooded area donated by one of the members. The first Zen center in North Carolina, Brooks Branch's expanding membership has caused the community to seek a larger building and a new location. Once construction is completed on the new temple, which will include a kitchen and living area, the group will sponsor longer retreats, and monks might be invited to stay.

*MC and AC*



# Buddha's Light International Association

**Address:** P.O. Box 1632, Cary, NC 27512. Meetings are held in members' homes and various rented facilities in Cary and Chapel Hill.

**Contact:** Shu-Ching Cheng (919) 929-3261; Diann Liu (919) 851-9375

**Spiritual Leader:** The Venerable Jue Chuan

**Lineage:** A combination of Mahayana schools, particularly Pure Land and Ch'an

**Affiliation:** Fo Guang Shan (Buddha's Light Mountain), headquartered in Kao hsiung, Taiwan; U.S. headquarters at the Hsi Lai Temple in Hacienda Heights, California.

**Website:** <http://www.blianc.org>

**Newsletter:** BLIANC Newsletter (monthly, printed in Chinese). Circulation: 100.



In a spacious ranch-style home nestled in a quiet, wooded Chapel Hill neighborhood, fifteen to twenty BLIANC members gather to chant sutras, discuss Buddhist teachings, and enjoy a vegetarian lunch. A day later, another fifteen or so members assemble in a home in Cary for a similar morning of devotion. Meeting every other weekend (Chapel Hill on Saturdays and Cary on Sundays), the BLIANC consists almost entirely of first generation ethnic Chinese immigrants and graduate students. Most hail from Mainland China or Taiwan, and a few are from Southeast Asia. Contrary to the presupposition that all Asian American followers are cradle Buddhists, many members at BLIANC are adult converts, with some taking refuge in the Three Jewels only after arriving in the U.S.

Founded in 1992 by a small group of lay people, the BLIANC now counts over one hundred members on its roll. An elected president and board of directors form the official leadership of the group. As an affiliate of the internationally active Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order, the BLIANC is able to draw upon many resources. The Venerable Jue Chuan, the nun assigned to the BLIANC by Fo Guang Shan, serves as the spiritual advisor who oversees all regular services and special rituals, such as those commemorating the Buddha's birthday. The BLIANC also sponsors periodic lectures by visiting lay or clerical speakers and organizes social events to celebrate important days on the Chinese lunar calendar. These special activities, like the regular services, are conducted in Mandarin Chinese, with English translation on rare occasions. With the membership growing, the BLIANC is planning to construct a full-scale temple in the town of Apex.



# Cambodian Buddhist Society

**Address:** 219 Owen Boulevard, Charlotte, NC 28213

**Phone:** (704) 596-6628

**Contacts:** Bun Lengh, Thy-Lort, and Penny Lang (English)

**Lineage:** Theravada

**Newsletter:** Cambodian Buddhist Society



Located in a quiet residential neighborhood, the Cambodian Buddhist Society provides both a worship site and community center for Charlotte's Cambodian population. In 1984, three private investors purchased the two acres of land and the ranch house where the temple is now located. The temple is now in the process of expanding its worship facilities and—to attract families—adding playground equipment and a child care program. Even without attracting anyone else, the temple already has approximately eighty member families. Most of those members are Cambodian refugees, although other ethnic groups are represented in small numbers. As at other Asian American temples in the state and the nation, a small group of devotees attend the weekly services, while holiday celebrations can draw up to two hundred participants.



On the weekends, the Cambodian Buddhist Society comes alive with religious and social gatherings. Members meet in the house to talk together, prepare meals, and worship. Pillows and blankets on the floor provide a place to sleep for those who want to stay over on weekends. Throughout the week, members prepare meals for the two resident monks, who (like most of the temple's members) speak little English. The monks lead services at the Cambodian Buddhist Society and occasionally travel to other Theravada temples in the region to do the same. They also preside over weddings and funerals. But the temple's New Year's celebration in April remains a highlight of the ritual calendar and always attracts a large crowd.



# **Cambodian Cultural Center**

(Cambodian Buddhist Society of Lexington)

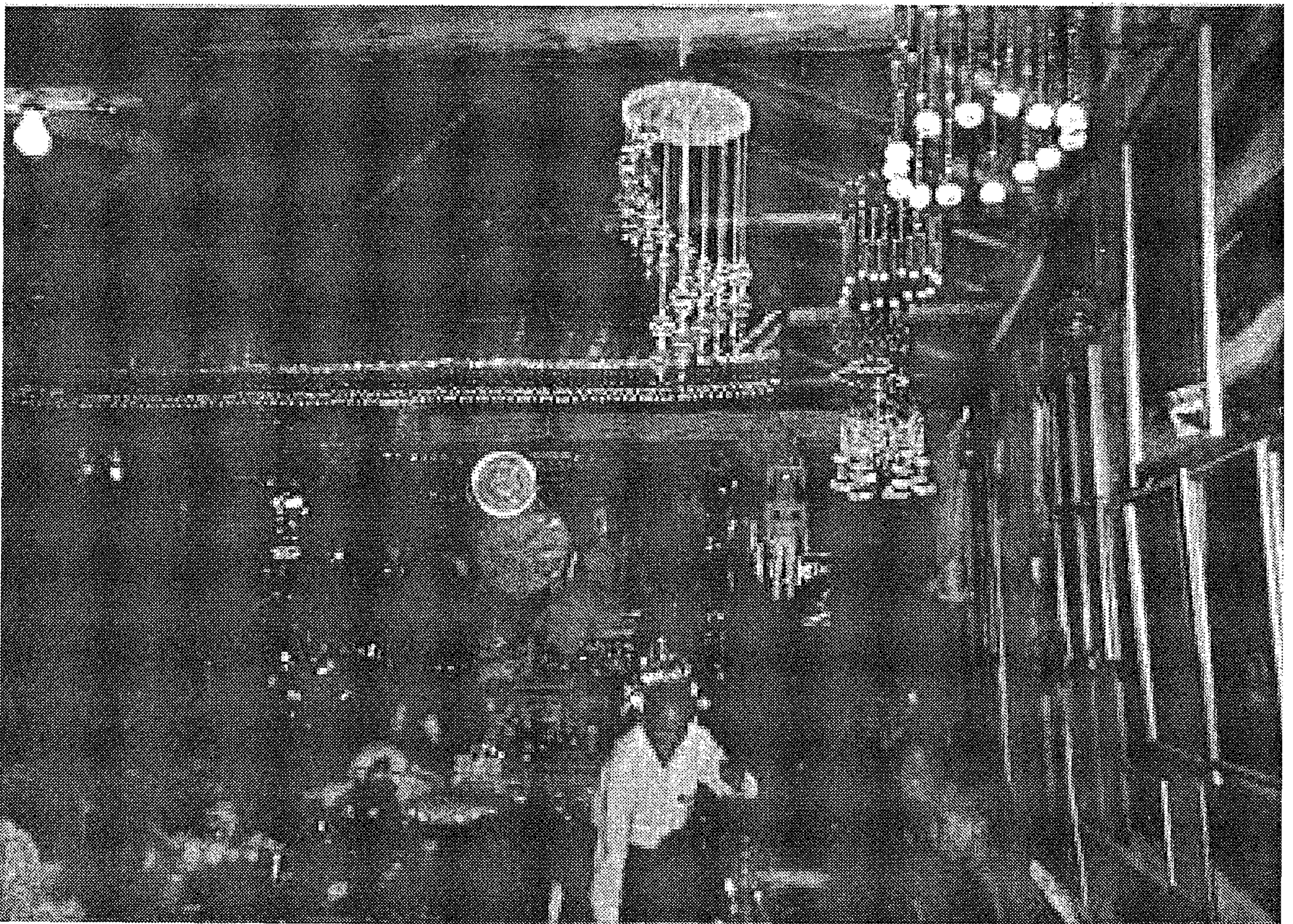
**Address:** 185 Pine Lodge Road, Lexington, NC 27292

**Phone:** (336) 357-5769

**Contact:** Saroeung Vay

**Lineage:** Theravada

**Affiliation:** Greensboro Buddhist Center. (Also with support from Americorp.)



A large stone archway decorated with Buddhist images greets visitors at the entrance to the Cambodian Cultural Center, which dates from 1990, when the businessman Saroeung Vay founded the organization to provide a common ground on which Cambodians and other Buddhists would be able to gather. Functioning as both a religious and community center, the Cambodian Cultural Center is now a place where Cambodian and Laotian refugees interact with one another, share their culture, and express their faith.

Recently, the organization acquired a plot of roughly ten acres that contains a two-story, sprawling structure reserved for religious purposes. That space includes an old barn converted to a dance or reception hall, a volleyball court, and a basketball court. It also includes a few other smaller structures, such as a



small, brightly painted shrine. The grounds are home to six resident monks, only one of whom speaks English. With about 150 member families, the Center is a mix of generations and traditions. A small group of those members attend weekly services, and hundreds from North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia travel to the temple four or five times each year for holiday celebrations, which involve chanting and bowing and are performed in the members' native tongue. In one of those communal rituals, which is traditional in Theravadin countries, devotees present the monks with gifts, such as new robes, sandals, toiletries, food, and other necessities. While it is primarily adults who attend the religious services, members of the younger generation come to the center for social interaction. Even if the generations don't always concur on other issues, the refugees and their children agree that the Center is a gathering place that has kept alive the cultural traditions of their homeland.

*EA and MZ*



# Cape Fear Tibetan Buddhist Study Group

**Address:** 310 N. Front Street Suite 4, #179 Wilmington NC, 28401

**Phone and Email:** (910)-792-5958; [cftbsg@pchealingarts.com](mailto:cftbsg@pchealingarts.com)

**Contact:** Randolph E. Clayton (Orgyen Sherab), Resident Director

**Lineage:** Tibetan, especially Nyingma and Kagyu

**Website:** <http://members.tripod.com/~cftbsg>

The Cape Fear Tibetan Buddhist Study Group (CFTBSG) was recently established to create a forum for the practice and study of Tibetan Buddhism. Services are held on Sunday mornings and evenings and again on Wednesday nights at 7 p.m. At each service they do prostrations and meditation, and they participate in a discussion. CFTBSG is also in the process of building a library of Dharma books, some of which are very rare. Orgyen, the leader of the center, attempts to organize a trip each month to temples across the state and the region, so he and the other members can become more familiar with varied forms of Buddhist teachings and traditions. For instance, the group has traveled to the Triangle area (Raleigh/Durham/Chapel Hill) to study preliminary teachings, and to Florida to study Medicine Buddha teachings and empowerment.

*AC*



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cisco Zen Center under Zentatsu Richard Baker and Sojun Mel Weitsman.

The center holds six services throughout the week, and those include *zazen*, *kinhin*, chanting, and prostrations. Chapel Hill Zen Center also holds all-day sittings and *sesshins*. Those are led by Phelan as well as guest teachers from the San Francisco Zen Center and other Soto temples. There are many more general and participating members, but approximately thirty fill the small zendo for most Sunday services. Members are primarily European-American and African-American, ranging in age from 10 to 75.

*LA, CW, and KM*



# Charlotte Community of Mindfulness

**Address:** c/o Dr. Bill Chu, Kennedy 220, 9201 University City Boulevard, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001

**Contact:** Dr. Bill Chu: (704) 547-4568; [billchu@uncc.edu](mailto:billchu@uncc.edu)

**Lineage:** Mahayana

**Affiliation:** Thich Nhat Hanh's Community of Mindful Living

**Spiritual Leader:** Dr. Bill Chu

**Website:** <http://www.coe.uncc.edu/~billchu/sangha/>

**Newsletter:** Charlotte Community of Mindfulness (online)



The sound of Protestant hymns drifts down through the ceiling as a dozen women and men sit cross-legged to meditate. This is a typical service at the Charlotte Community of Mindfulness, a group of European-American Buddhist sympathizers that gathers on Sunday mornings from 8:30 to 10:45 in Myer's Park Baptist Church's basement. That room is filled with Buddhist posters and statues—in contrast to the cross that adorns the altar in the church above. But the connection between the basement Buddhist meditators and the Baptist hymn singers in the pews above is closer than it might first appear. In 1994, four members of this liberal mainline Protestant congregation founded the Buddhist group. The co-founders, and the others who have joined them, came to believe that there was no conflict between Buddhism and Christianity. In fact, most of



the members of the Charlotte's Community of Mindfulness report that they practice meditation and mindfulness to enrich their Christian faith.

Thich Nhat Hanh, the popular Vietnamese Mahayana teacher who inspires the group, teaches that "every act is a rite" and mindfulness, or offering one's full attention to each action, is a central spiritual practice for the basement Buddhists. Dr. Bill Chu, the Chinese-American Buddhist convert who leads the Charlotte group, turned to Buddhism after hearing Nhat Hanh speak in Washington, D.C. And Dr. Chu has encouraged the others who meet in that church basement to incorporate mindfulness practice into their lives. And the group emphasizes that practice, as well as seated meditation, during their weekly sessions and on their monthly Day of Mindfulness.

*CW and MC*



## Charlotte Zen Meditation Society

**Address:** Harmony House 726 East Boulevard, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor Charlotte, NC 28210 (For the Sunday meetings only)

**Mailing Address:** Charlotte Zen Meditation Society PMB 169, 4736 Sharon Rd., Suite Charlotte, NC 28210

**Phone and Email:** (704) 846-0676; [CZMS486248@aol.com](mailto:CZMS486248@aol.com)

**Spiritual Leader:** No resident leader. Most members look for guidance to the Reverend Teijo Munnich of the Zen Center of Asheville.

**Lineage:** Soto and Rinzai Zen

**Affiliation:** Zen Center of Asheville and Sanshin Zen Community

**Website:** [http://members.aol.com/\\_ht\\_a/czms486248/myhomepage/](http://members.aol.com/_ht_a/czms486248/myhomepage/)

Each Sunday night a small group of European-American Zen practitioners sits cross-legged in a large open space beneath a cathedral ceiling in the heart of North Carolina's largest city. These weekly meetings of the Charlotte Zen Meditation Society (CZMS), which congregates on the third floor of a large white house used by the Therapeutic Massage Institute, include two thirty-minute periods of zazen and ten minutes of kinhin. The evening ends with reading and discussion. No permanent spiritual leader presides over the weekly sessions, but most members look for guidance to the Reverend Teijo Munnich, who travels from the Zen Center of Asheville every ninety days to offer instruction. Some members in the Charlotte group, which was founded in 1990, look to other Soto and Rinzai teachers around the state and the nation—including John Daido Looi of Zen Mountain Monastery in Mt. Tremper, New York; Gentei Andy Stewart of Pittsboro's Brooks Branch Zendo; and Shohaku Okumura of Sanshin Zen Community, who has co-taught with Teijo Munnich at the Southern Dharma Retreat Center. Although attendance at CZMS's weekly sessions rarely is more than fifteen, it can rise to more than one hundred when Munnich or some other teacher visits the group.



# Chua Lien Hoa

**Address:** 6505 Lake Dr. Charlotte, NC 28215

**Phone:** (704) 537-1126

**Contact:** Ms. Van Tran, Temple Secretary

**Spiritual Leader:** Dai Duc Thich Chan Hy

**Lineage:** Vietnamese Mahayana

A large image of the Buddha greets visitors to Chua Lien Hoa, a temple founded in 1987 to nurture the growing number of Vietnamese refugees who had been relocating to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg region. The temple has a large worship space and a separate building that contains a kitchen, dining hall, and childcare center that serve the two hundred members. The group also tries to provide transportation, food, and clothing to the thousands of Vietnamese migrants in the area, although members acknowledge that they struggle to keep up with the internal and external demands on the popular temple. One sign of the popularity of the temple and the relative paucity of its resources can be found in the parking lot, which cannot accommodate the swelling numbers of weekly visitors. Many have to park at remote lots and hike back to the modest temple grounds.

The temple's spiritual leader is the monk, Thich Chan Hy, who received his formal training in Vietnam. The temple is also home to several other Vietnamese Mahayana monks. And, as at the three other Vietnamese temples in North Carolina, the services those monks preside over are conducted in Vietnamese and they consist primarily of chanting and meditation, although the monks also spend some time during those communal rituals discussing Buddhist history. On Sundays at noon, while the adults are in the main worship space, children and youth congregate in another building, where lay volunteers introduce the refugees' children to Buddhism. Following the adult service and the children's lessons, a meal is served in the dining hall. That provides a time for the congregation to socialize, and, as at most other Asian-American Buddhist temples Chua Lien Hoa is as much a cultural center as a worship site.

*JA*



# Chua Quan Am

**Address:** 1410 Glendale Dr., Greensboro, NC 27406

**Phone:** (336) 854-5238

**Spiritual Leader:** Dai Duc Thich Thien Quang

**Lineage:** Vietnamese Mahayana



A statue of Amida Buddha stands in front of Chua Quan Am, a meeting place for several hundred Vietnamese refugees and a small number of American converts. Vietnamese refugees founded the group in 1989, and six years later members dedicated the temple, which is now a cultural bedrock for the local Vietnamese community. There are approximately three hundred members, of whom about 90 percent are first or second generation Americans of Asian descent. On most Sundays about fifty members attend the regular worship service. That service is led by the recently installed monk, and it includes chanting Buddhist sutras in Vietnamese. Adults and children homage the Buddha in separate services, both of which are conducted in Vietnamese. Following the children's service, a Vietnamese "Youth Group" gathers. There adult members educate the children in Vietnamese Buddhist culture. The temple features Buddhist theater productions, which are performed by the children and highlight the Buddha's life and teachings. Children also benefit from weekly Vietnamese music and language instruction at the temple. In these and other ways, Chua Quan Am tries to pass on Vietnamese traditions in the new cultural context.

*CG and DP*







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the Buddha's Birthday celebration in 1999.

In many ways, Chua Van Hanh is a typical Vietnamese American Buddhist temple, and the contours of its history are mirrored in countless communities across the state and the nation. It began in November 1986, when the North Carolina Buddhist Association officially incorporated. The core members, who were all Vietnamese refugees, then arranged to convert a modest home into a temple. They vigorously sought a resident monk, and after Thich Thien Tam arrived the community began to gain members and visibility.

But if the story of its growth is familiar, Chua Van Hanh is distinctive in another way. At the urging of the resident monk, who served two temples in Vietnam before coming to Raleigh, the community has been at work on a long-term project they started in 1998. They are building a sculpture garden depicting the life of the Buddha. When it is finished in several years, it will include five main statues, and several others, including one image that already has been put in place—a twelve-foot concrete Buddha seated on a white lotus petal. That sculptural garden already has attracted local notice, including a story in the Raleigh newspaper, and the temple might be even more visible in the years ahead if the community follows through on its plan to construct a larger temple on the grounds.

*TT and DL*



## Cloud Cottage Sangha

**Address:** The Black Mountain Wellness Center 1243 Montreat Road, Black Mountain, NC

**Mailing Address:** 623 Old Toll Circle Black Mountain, NC 28711

**Phone and Email:** (828) 669-0920; [pjtoy@juno.com](mailto:pjtoy@juno.com)

**Contact:** Judith Toy and Philip Toy

**Lineage:** Mahayana

**Affiliation:** Thich Nhat Hanh's Community of Mindful Living

In the heart of western North Carolina's Appalachian mountains a group of fifteen European Americans meets five times a week at the Black Mountain Wellness Center to practice Buddhism in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing (*Tiep Hien*). This group offers beginner's meditation instruction each Wednesday at 5:45pm, and the rest of the community gathers Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays, when there is an informal tea after the service. Those regular sessions include a variety of practices—seated meditation, walking meditation, chanting, prostrations, and dharma discussions.

Cloud Cottage Sangha, which formed in 1998, is guided by Judith Toy, who received the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings from Nhat Hanh, and her husband, Philip Toy, who received the Five Mindfulness Trainings from Lyn Fine, teacher from the Order of Interbeing.



# Community of Mindful Living—Durham

**Address:** Eno River Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship 4907 Garret Road,  
Durham, NC 27707

**Phone and Email:** (919) 956-9700

**Contact:** Jolene Barber

**Lineage:** Mahayana

**Affiliation:** Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing and Community of Mindful Living

In the local Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship's non-sectarian worship space a modern high-ceilinged structure that is decorated in muted gray and mauve and without any Christian symbols above the altar, ten members of Durham's Community of Mindful Living sit on chairs or cushions with their eyes closed in seated meditation. At this and other Thursday evening sessions, these European-American Buddhist sympathizers and converts also will do walking meditation and chant in English, and end the evening at 9:00 with informal conversation. As at other groups inspired by the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing, on the Thursday nearest the full moon they also recite the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

This group, which was organized in 1999, shares the space not only with the liberal Unitarian-Universalist congregation, which meets on Sunday mornings and is led by a minister who has practiced Buddhist meditation for years but a non-sectarian Buddhist group, the Eno River Buddhist Community, also gathers in a back room every Monday night. So in Durham—as in Raleigh and elsewhere in the United States—Unitarian-Universalist churches provide meeting space for Buddhist groups, especially those affiliated with Thich Nhat Hanh's Community of Mindful Living.

*T*



## Community of Mindful Living-UUFR

**Address:** 3313 Wade Avenue

Raleigh, NC 27607

**Phone and Email:** (919) 833-4027; [Gail\\_Obrien@ncsu.edu](mailto:Gail_Obrien@ncsu.edu)

**Contact:** Gail O'Brien

**Lineage:** Mahayana

**Affiliation:** Thich Nhat Hanh's Community of Mindful Living

**Website:** <http://coml-uufr.8m.com/>

Former Unitarian-Universalist Interim Minister, and follower of Thich Nhat Hanh, Marcia Curtis, inspired Raleigh's Community of Mindful Living. This group, which consists of approximately twenty-five Euro-American Buddhist converts and sympathizers, began when Curtis gave a sermon on Buddhism and Mindfulness in May 1996. She followed that with a six-week course that introduced members of the liberal congregation to seated meditation, walking meditation, and mindfulness practice. The following fall, a small group linked with the Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship formed, and it has continued to meet each Monday night for practice and gather once a month to share a potluck dinner.

A typical Monday night session begins with the members sitting in a circle around a statue of the bodhisattva of compassion Avalokiteshvara, a photograph of the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh, and a stick of burning incense. The leader, who comes from among the group's members and changes from week to week, invites a bell to sound the commencement of the meditation period. Some sessions focus on silent or guided meditation. Others highlight a previously selected reading or topic, such as relaxation techniques. On the third Monday of each month the group gathers for a ceremony in which participants rededicate themselves to the mindfulness trainings as outlined by Thich Nhat Hanh, and they return on the first Monday of the month for a Dharma discussion, when the group reads and talks about the writings of the popular Vietnamese teacher who has inspired this group and two others in the state.

*EM*



# Durham Karma Thegsum Choling

**Address:** 5061 Hwy. 70 West, Durham, NC 27705

**Phone and Email:** (919) 383-0410; kcl@visionet.org

**Contact:** Lily Gage

**Lineage:** Tibetan, especially Karma Kagyu

**Affiliation:** Karma Triyana Dharmachakra in Woodstock, NY

**Website:** <http://www.mindspring.com/~strategix/DurhamKTC/index.html>



In a cozy house on the outskirts of Durham, Karma Thegsum Choling (DKTC), a Tibetan Buddhist community founded in 1981, “provides a place for the hearing, contemplation, and practice of the teachings of Buddhism. Although the seventeenth Karmapa, His Holiness Ugyen Trinley Dorje, is the head of the Kagyu lineage, Lily Gage and Christine Lowry serve as co-directors of the local KTC. The group, which currently has ten dues-paying members, meets Wednesday nights from 7:30 to 8:45 pm in the residence of co-director Gage. She has transformed one room within her home, filled with vivid images of colorful gods and goddesses, into a comfortable meeting place for the European-American Buddhist converts who gather there. The weekly meetings open with a brief discussion of group business and continue with a thirty-fourty-five minute session of chanting. Devotees engage in traditional Tibetan



uddhist chants to the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Chenrezig. They believe that this practice, which include directions and dedications, makes one kind-hearted and aware.

KTC sponsors two guest lamas per year. Although the group does not produce a formal newsletter, they do have a mailing list they use to notify followers when a lama is visiting. There are currently 250 names on their mailing list, which allows the small number of core members to reach out toward others in the Triangle and the region who have some sympathy or interest in Tibetan Buddhism.

*SS and RB*





# Durham Meditation Center

**Address:** 1214 Broad St. #2, Durham, NC 27705

**Phone and Email:** (919) 286-4754; bodhi@duke.edu

**Contact:** John Orr

**Spiritual Leader:** John Orr

**Lineage:** Theravada, especially Vipassana meditation

**Affiliation:** Insight Meditation Society, Barre, Massachusetts; and the Seven Dharma Retreat Center

**Newsletter:** Leap of Faith (published three times a year). Circulation: 400.

The Durham Meditation Center's Broad Street office in Durham acts as the organizational base for director John Orr and his three fellow teachers of insight meditation. Ordained in Thailand as a Theravada monk in 1978, Orr spent eight years studying in Asia, then received his teacher training at the Barr Meditation Society in Massachusetts before moving to North Carolina 17 years ago. Since then, he has worked to spread Vipassana practice throughout the state.

The Durham Meditation Center (DMC), which was founded in 1993 and now has 400 names on its mailing list, offers insight meditation classes and sittings led by trained teachers. A typical sitting attracts approximately thirty European Americans interested in Vipassana practice, and it includes a forty-five-minute meditation, followed by a Dharma talk and discussion. The meditation classes begin with chanting, continue with silent meditation, and conclude with guided meditation. Each year the DMC also sponsors many retreats—at Seven Dharma Retreat Center, Windsong Retreat Center, and other sites in the North Carolina mountains. Orr and his fellow teachers also offer continuing education courses at local universities in Buddhism, yoga, and meditation. Through these classes, sittings, and retreats, the leaders at the Durham Meditation Center aim to help North Carolinians relieve suffering and experience joy.

*K*



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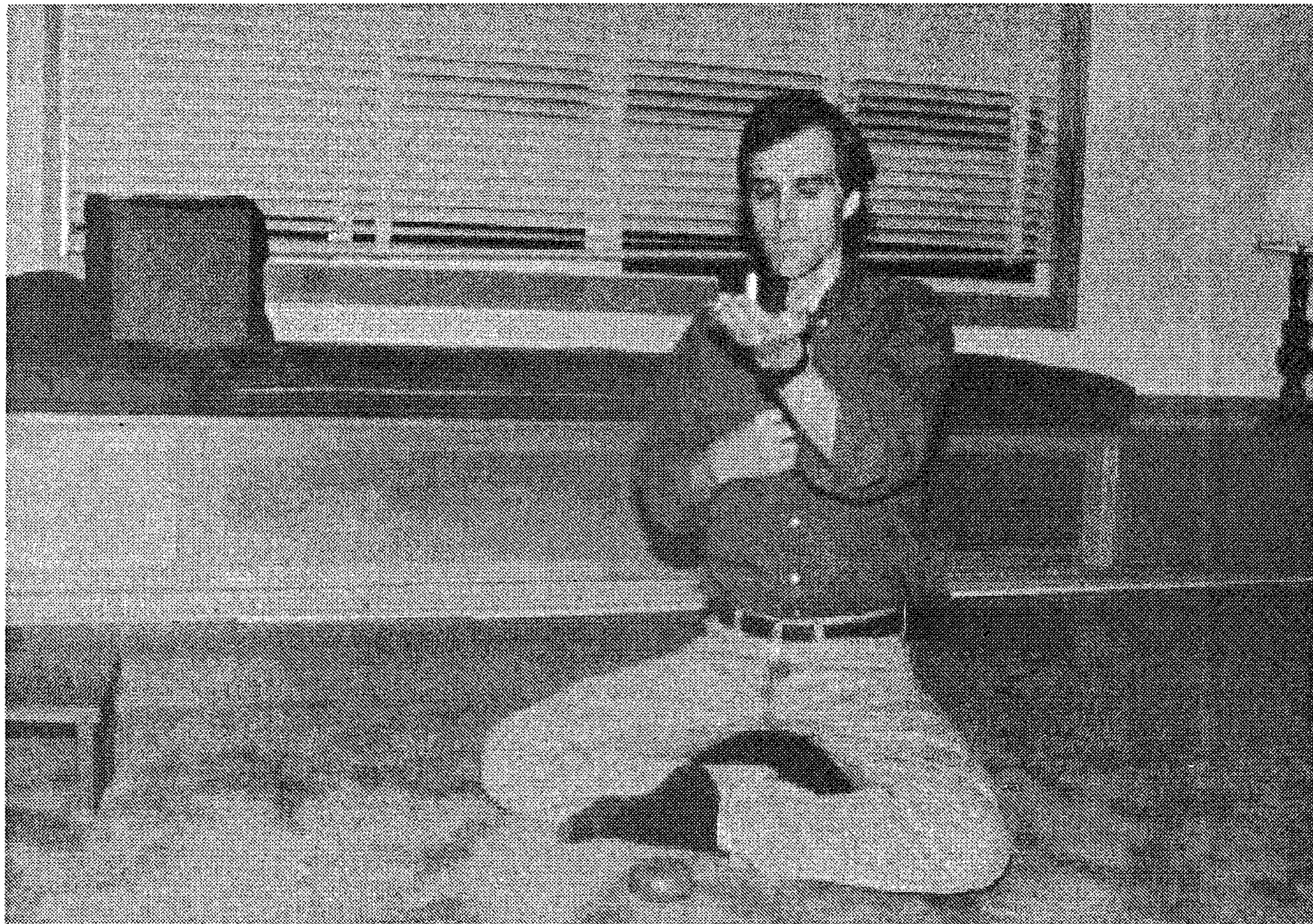
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meetings. On the fourth Monday of the month practitioners recite the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings of Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing, while the occasional fifth Monday consists of Metta, or loving-kindness meditation. Strongly influenced by the teachings of the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh, but also drawing from other traditions—Insight Meditation, Japanese Zen, and Tibetan Buddhism—the group considers itself ecumenical. Average attendance is about twenty each week, but all of the estimated fifty members are invited to attend special half-day mindfulness retreats that take place once each month. This amiable group, which is connected with a non-sectarian UU congregation, provides a cozy atmosphere for casual study and meditation.

*QW*



# Greensboro Buddhist Center

(Wat Greensboro)

**Address:** 2715 Liberty Road, Greensboro, NC 27406

**Phone:** (336) 272-1607

**Fax:** 272-2074

**Spiritual Leader:** Phramaha Somsak Sambimb

**Lineage:** Theravada

**Affiliation:** Mahanikayah



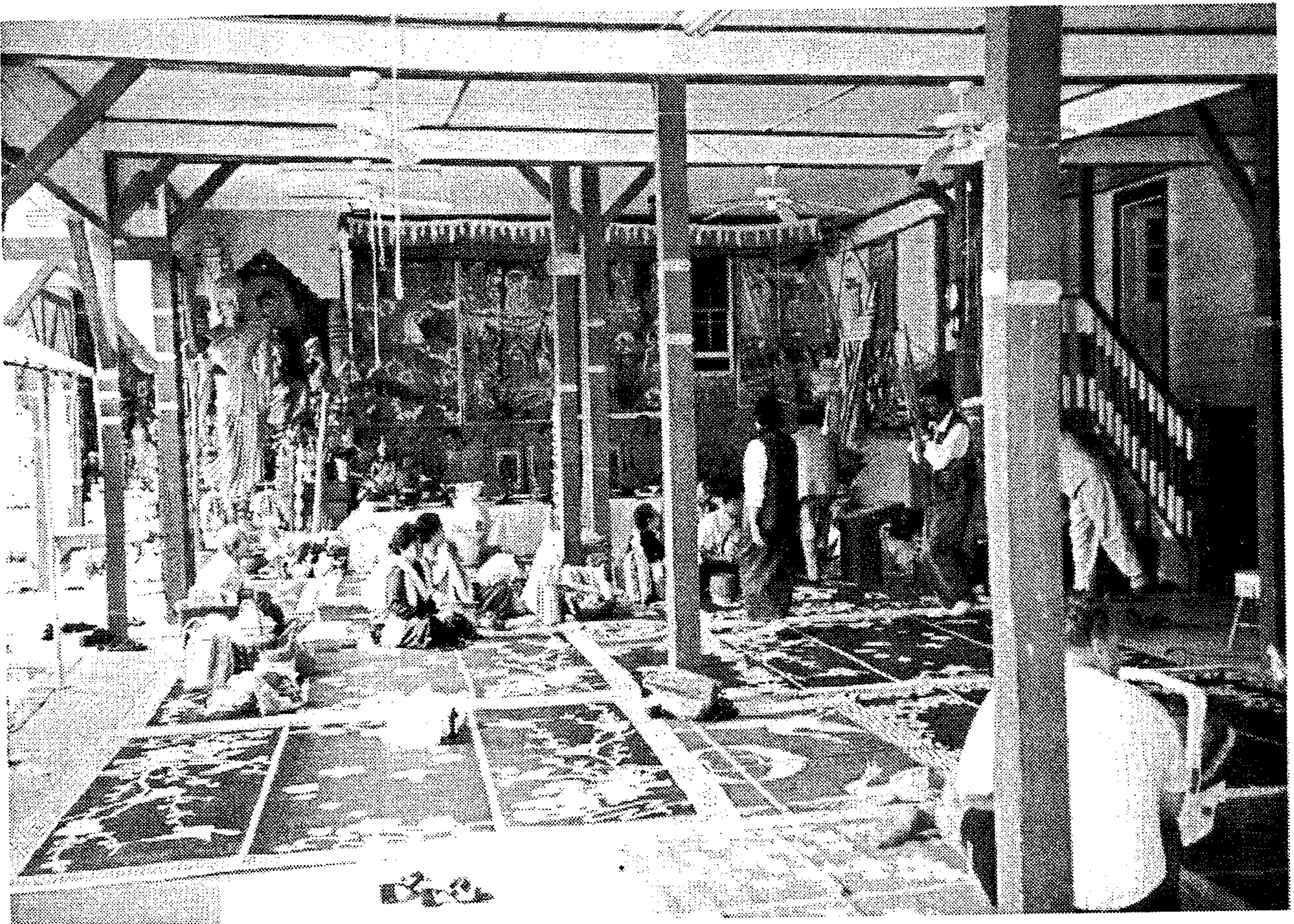
The rural setting of the Greensboro Buddhist Center enhances its serene atmosphere despite its location in one of North Carolina's largest metropolises. Organized in 1985 by the Khmer Aid Group of the Triad with help from Lutheran Family Services and a grant from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, the center is located on ten acres that includes two houses. The temple functions as a religious, cultural, and educational center for over 500 families from North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia. The congregation is made up primarily of Lao and Cambodian refugees and their families.

An annual calendar of Buddhist ceremonies are held at the Greensboro Center, including celebrations of Buddha's Birthday, Southeast Asian New Years, and Kathin, when the monks are offered new robes. Each week the Greensboro Buddhist Center holds a service beginning at nine o'clock. Up to two hundred



regular members attend and stay for lunch, dharma lessons, and recreation. The temple holds larger monthly services in Thai, Lao, or Cambodian traditions that attract four or five hundred devotees. Led by the three resident monks, the services include chanting of the sutras and offerings of food to the monks. Although the monks (including the temple's Thai-born spiritual leader Phramaha Somsak Sambimb) speak English, the services are held in Lao or Khmer. Translators are available for these languages and the center also offers language classes. During the week, Somsak and the other monks offer classes in Buddhism and lecture at local schools. The temple also sponsors two dance groups as well as a summer camp for children. Members of all ages enjoy the lake, volleyball court, and gardens located behind the worship site. In these and other ways, the Greensboro temple provides a religious, social, and cultural center for refugee and immigrant families in the surrounding area.

*NP*





# Greenville Karma Thegsum Choling

**Address:** P.O. Box 4243, Greenville NC, 27836

**Phone:** (252) 756-8315

**Contact:** Bonnie Snyder

**Lineage:** Tibetan, especially Karma Kagyu

**Affiliations:** Karma Triyana Dharmachakra, Woodstock, New York; Durham Karma Thegsum Choling

**Website:** <http://www.kagyu.org>



In front of a beautiful altar, which a Tibetan artist painted, members of the Greenville Karma Thegsum Choling (GKTC) practice meditation and prayer. Devotees meet twice a week at the local Unitarian-Universalist Church, as well as at a member's home. The GKTC was founded in 1983, and includes about twelve convert members. They also send mailings about their activities to approximately one hundred and fifty people. A majority of those affiliated with this Buddhist group, the only one located in Carolina's Inner Coastal Plain, are European-Americans from either Jewish or Christian backgrounds. Participants range in age from seventeen to seventy-six, and an equal proportion of men and women attend. Approximately ten devotees come to the Unitarian Church on Wednesday nights, and eight to twelve participate weekly in the Sunday practices held at a member's private residence. At the Wednesday sessions, the group



practices *shinay*, or silent meditation. They offer devotions to Chenrezig Amitabha, and Medicine Buddha on Sundays. Greenville KTC organizes other activities as well. They sponsor visits by guest lamas and plan First Light services on New Years Day. The First Light service includes readings, light offerings for hope, and prayers for world peace.

*EW*





# Healing Springs Community of Mindful Living

**Address:** 222 E. Fifth Avenue, Red Springs, NC 28377

**Phone and Email:** (910) 843-2427; [johnbowmanathome@aol.com](mailto:johnbowmanathome@aol.com)

**Contact:** John Bowman

**Lineage:** Mahayana

**Affiliation:** Thich Nhat Hanh's Community of Mindful Living

In a rural region of southeastern North Carolina, about thirty-five miles west of Fayetteville, followers of Thich Nhat Hanh's Community of Mindful Living meet weekly in members' homes for seated meditation, walking meditation, chanting, singing, and dharma discussion. To enrich their Buddhist practice the members of the Healing Springs sangha also travel to attend retreats several times a year in North Carolina and around the United States.

John Bowman and Emily Whittle founded this small group in 1999, and Whittle is now training with Anh Huong, Thich Nhat Hanh's niece, as she prepares to join the Vietnamese monk's Order of Interbeing.

*TT*



# Kadampa Center

**Address:** 7404-G Chapel Hill Road, Raleigh, NC 27607

**Phone and Email:** (919) 859-3433; 73571.701@compuserve.com

**Contact:** Robbie Watkins, Center Director

**Spiritual Leader:** Geshe Gelek Chodak

**Lineage:** Tibetan, in the Gelugpa tradition

**Affiliation:** The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, Taos, New Mexico

**Website:** <http://www.kadampa-center.org>

**Newsletter:** Prayer Flag (quarterly). Circulation: 800.



Founded in 1992 by Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, Kadampa Center, a Tibetan temple in the Gelugpa tradition, seeks to cultivate wisdom and compassion in the group's eighty-five European-American member families. On Sunday mornings at 9:45, some of those devotees gather for meditation and instructional sessions, which are led by the resident teacher, Geshe Gelek Chodak. A monk since the age of seven, Geshe Gelek studied at the Sera Je monastery in India and was ordained by Geshe Larumpa. About forty devotees usually attend the Sunday services that Geshe Gelek leads, with somewhat fewer coming to the weekday meetings. Both services usually involve meditation and chanting; and, as the center's name signals, there is a focus on applying Buddhist teachings. As the center's website reminds visitors, *kadampa* refers to "those who are able to see the word of the Buddha as personal instruction that applies immediately to their own practice." The members of this center dedicated to integrating instruction and practice meet now in a leased office space they have remodeled; however, they are searching for a more permanent space.

*EW and JE*



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# Sandhills Zen Group

**Address:** 150 Merry Mock Hill Road, Southern Pines, NC 28388

**Phone and Email:** (910) 695-7851; [76460.3000@compuserve.com](mailto:76460.3000@compuserve.com)

**Contact:** Barbara Muso Penn

**Lineage:** Zen

**Affiliation:** No official affiliation, but they incorporate the practices of Ordinary Mind Zen School of Charlotte Joko Beck, spiritual leader of the Zen Center of San Diego

**Website:** <http://literary.org/sandhillszen/>

Candles flicker in a darkened room, where a small group sits in silent meditation. This is the Sandhills Zen Group (SZG), which was founded in 1998 by its current leader, Barbara Muso Penn. The community she leads is predominantly European-American, and many affiliate with religions other than Buddhism. Although there are no official ties, SZG draws on the practices developed by the Ordinary Mind Zen School, which is inspired by Charlotte Joko Beck, leader of the San Diego Zen Center. Penn, who has been sitting regularly for twenty years, studied with Beck in San Diego.

SZG moved to its current location in the southern piedmont in 1999, and sponsors meditation sessions on Sundays from 5:00 to 7:00pm, Tuesdays from 7:00 to 9:00pm, and Wednesday mornings from 6:45-7:45. Each session consists of two periods of zazen (seated meditation) and kinhin (walking meditation). That is followed by a taped Dharma talk by Beck and a discussion by SZG members. Every third Sunday of the month the SZG holds half-day or full-day sittings, and followers do a more strenuous two-day sitting every few months.

C



# Seidoan Soto Zen Temple

**Mailing Address:** P.O. Box 1447, Blowing Rock N.C. 28605

**Address:** 418 Curwood Lane, Boone N.C. 28607

**Phone and Email:** (828) 295-0916; seidoanhardison@boone.net

**Spiritual Leader:** Tozan (Tom) Hardison, a Soto Zen priest

**Lineage:** Soto Zen

**Website:** <http://users.boone.net/seidoanhardison>



Tucked away in a valley of the Blue Ridge Mountains is Tozan (Tom) Hardison's quaint home, which doubles as the Seidoan Temple. Its serene location provides an excellent setting for the practice of Soto Zen, which includes both zazen (sitting meditation) and kinhin (walking meditation).

Tozan Hardison, the temple's spiritual leader, studied Zen for years in several Buddhist temples in the United States and Japan. He spent time at Squirrel Mountain Zendo in North Carolina and practiced under both Dainin Katagiri Roshi at Minnesota Zen Meditation Center and Tenshin Reb Anderson at San Francisco Zen Center. He then practiced for years in Japan, where he was ordained as Seiun Tozan at Daimanji Temple and later received dharma transmission from Kosen Nishiyama, who formally acknowledged his spiritual insight and readiness to teach. Hardison then returned to the United States and eventu-





ally settled in the North Carolina mountains, where he opened his home to other followers of the faith. Seidoan Temple was officially established on May 17, 1998.

The core congregation consists of about five or six middle-aged European American converts. Occasionally, on days of celebration or sesshins, more visitors attend. Zazen is held daily at 7 a.m., as well as on Sundays mornings and Thursday evenings. Those regular practice sessions are complemented by all day sittings the last Saturday of each month.

*KM*



# Shambhala Meditation Center

**Address:** 733 Rutherford Street, Durham, NC 27705

**Phone and Email:** (919) 286-5508; [gaylords@med.unc.edu](mailto:gaylords@med.unc.edu)

**Contacts:** Susan Gaylord, Center Director: (919) 286-1487; Wendy Farrell, Center Coordinator: (919) 382-2811; Lee Bowers, Practice Coordinator: (919) 683-1409

**Lineage:** Tibetan, Kagyu and Nyingma lineages

**Affiliation:** Shambhala International, Halifax, Nova Scotia

**Website:** <http://www.shambhala.org/centers/durham>

**Newsletter:** The Durham Shambhala Center News (quarterly).



In a one-story wooden house set in a spacious yard, Shambhala Meditation Center members, most of them European-American converts, gather for religious practice. Although there are currently about twenty-five members, an average of twelve attend the service.

The Shambhala Meditation Center is part of a network of centers throughout the U.S. and the world affiliated with Shambhala International, headquartered in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Shambhala International, originally known as Vajradhatu International, was founded and directed by the Vidyadhara Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, a Tibetan meditation master and holder of the Kagyu,



Nyingma, and Shambhalian lineages. After the death of the Venerable Trungpa Rinpoche in 1987, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche became the spiritual director. He changed the name of the parent organization to Shambhala International.

Founded in 1978, the Durham center continues to thrive under the leadership of Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, who trained in India and in the United States under the direction of senior teachers of the Kagyu and Nyingma lineages. Services typically include opening chants followed by sessions of sitting meditation alternating with briefer periods of walking meditation. After the sessions close with another chant, the devotees drive off to their homes in Durham and other cities and towns in the Piedmont region.

S



## **Soka Gakkai International—USA**

**Address:** 6307-A Chapel Hill Road, Raleigh, NC 27607

**Phone and Email:** (919) 859-0112; [SGINCTER@aol.com](mailto:SGINCTER@aol.com)

**Contact:** Walter T. Woodall

**Lineage:** Mahayana: Nichiren Buddhism

**Affiliations:** Soka Gakkai International—USA, Santa Monica, California;  
and Soka Gakkai, Tokyo, Japan

**Website:** <http://www.sgi-usa.org/>

This Raleigh-based group is a part of a larger organization, Soka Gakkai International (SGI). SGI, a form of Nichiren Buddhism, claims approximately 3 million members worldwide and boasts more than sixty centers in the United States.

In North Carolina, where a group formed in 1960 as part of the Washington, D.C. chapter, there are an estimated 800 followers of Soka Gakkai (literally “Society for the Creation of Value”). Most of those are converts, although some are cradle Buddhists of Asian descent. SGI, the most ethnically and economically diverse U.S. Buddhist convert group, also includes many European-Americans and African-Americans, and some Hispanic members as well.

Those diverse members engage in a variety of rituals. At home, most members regularly chant *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, the title of the Lotus Sutra, the most sacred text for all who revere the teachings of Nichiren (1222-82), the Japanese religious founder. When devotees gather together in private residences each week they not only chant but also hold discussions. And there are activities for the younger members too, including a youth group that meets once a week. The North Carolina SGI, like the national organization, has been active in working for peace, and in a larger and more formal gathering followers come together on the first Sunday of each month to participate in the World Peace Gongyo, when the members chant the first two chapters of the Lotus Sutra.



# Southern Dharma Retreat Center

**Address:** 1661 West Road, Hot Springs, NC 28743

**Phone and Email:** (828) 622-7112; [sdharma@main.nc.us](mailto:sdharma@main.nc.us)

**Contact:** Ron Dogyo Fearnow, co-manager

**Lineage:** Ecumenical

**Website:** [www.main.nc.us/SDRC](http://www.main.nc.us/SDRC)

Located in the North Carolina mountains, an hour's drive from Asheville, the Southern Dharma Retreat Center (SDRC) is a nonprofit educational facility that organizes regular meditation retreats. Spiritual teachers from a variety of religions lead those multi-day sessions—including Christians, Hindus, Sufis, and Jews—but the majority are Buddhists from Zen, Vipassana, or Tibetan traditions. Among those Buddhist retreat leaders have been prominent teachers from the state, including Tej Munnich from the Asheville Zen Center and Sandy Gentei Stewart from Pittsboro Brooks Branch Zendo.

The retreats began in 1978, when Melinda Guyol and Elizabeth Kent founded the center. And the facilities now include a meditation hall, dormitory, forest hermitage, as well as primitive creek-side campsites. Individual visits are arranged for private meditation when the facilities are not being used, but thematically focused collective retreats are held throughout the year, with the topics changing regularly. The topics and teachers for the communal sessions vary widely, all use some form of silent seated meditation as a central practice. By offering a secluded center for meditation, the SDRC aims to provide a comfortable gathering place, removed from everyday distractions, where Buddhists and those who affiliate with other traditions can find spiritual quiet.

*A*



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# **Wat Carolina Buddhajakra Vanaram**

**Address:** 1610 Midway Rd. Bolivia, NC 28422

**Phone and Email:** (910) 253-4526; Debby@webtrawler.com

**Fax:** (910) 253-6618

**Contact:** Debrah Welch (910-791-5238)

**Spiritual Leader:** The Venerable Phrakru Buddhamonpricha, abbot

**Lineage:** Theravada

**Affiliation:** Dhammayut Nikaya

**Website:** <http://www.wisecom.com/wat>



Nestled comfortably in the small Tidewater town of Bolivia, Wat Carolina offer a taste of Thai religion and culture. The impressive red-roofed building, standing on its twenty-three-acre plot, makes the monastery a prominent fixture in the small town. The Venerable Phrakru Buddamonpricha, a monk ordained in the Dhammayut Order of Thai Theravada Buddhism, is the temple's spiritual leader. In Thailand, he received his B.S. at Bangkok University and later studied Buddhism under H.H. Somdet Phr Nyanasamvara. And it was Phrakru Buddhamonpricha, the temple's abbot, who selected Wat Carolina's location. It opened its doors in 1988 as North Carolina's first Theravada community, and the temple has grown to be one of the major Theravada Buddhist centers in the Southeast. Average weekly services draw from fifty to a hundred devotees, with holidays attracting almost a thousand faithful.





The congregation is predominately Thai. However, there are a significant number of European-American converts. The temple leaders work hard to welcome and integrate those converts into the congregation: monks give sermons in both English and Thai, and the monastery holds instructional seminars after the Sunday services on the basics of Buddhism and meditation. The regular worship services consist of Thai chanting and seated meditation, which is followed by a dharma talk. Holiday services are elaborate celebrations that draw the largest crowds, with devotees traveling from as far away as New York. The center also takes part in numerous charitable efforts, which has helped it find its place in the wider community.

Currently, the monastery serves as a teaching facility for Asian monks who live at the temple for roughly a year as they study Buddhism and English. Future plans for the temple include further expansion of its sprawling structure to accommodate larger training centers and living areas for monks from Thailand and around the world.

*CL, DP, and CG*



# Wat Mungme Srisuk

**Address:** 1919 NC 24, Cameron, NC 28326

**Phone:** (919) 499-0567

**Fax:** (919) 499-6268

**Lineage:** Theravada

**Newsletter:** Way of Happiness. Circulation: 700.



Down a winding country road in the small town of Cameron sits Wat Mungme Srisuk. Wilert Pavattasiri founded this traditional Thai temple in 1997, and Amporn Campala took over as spiritual leader two years later. In 2000, Wat Mungme Srisuk moved from nearby Spring Lake to its present location in Cameron, where devotees congregate in a trailer. But construction of a permanent temple is expected to be complete by the end of 2001.

Sunday services are attended by a predominately Thai congregation of fifty members, while religious holidays draw larger crowds of nearly five hundred Buddhists from all over the state. The temple houses Thai monks who travel to the United States to study both Buddhism and English. The monks hold to traditional practices as much as possible, such as receiving food donations from the local lay Buddhist community. However, they find that some monastic rules





uch as the traditional prohibition against touching money, must be broken to complete daily chores. Although it was only recently established, the temple already is important for the local Thai community. And when the new building complete, Wat Mungme Srisuk will serve as one of the two major Thai Theravadin centers in North Carolina.



# Zen Center of Asheville

(Daishinji)

**Address:** 295 Hazel Mill Road, Asheville, NC 28816

**Phone and Email:** (828) 253-2314; [zca@main.nc.us](mailto:zca@main.nc.us)

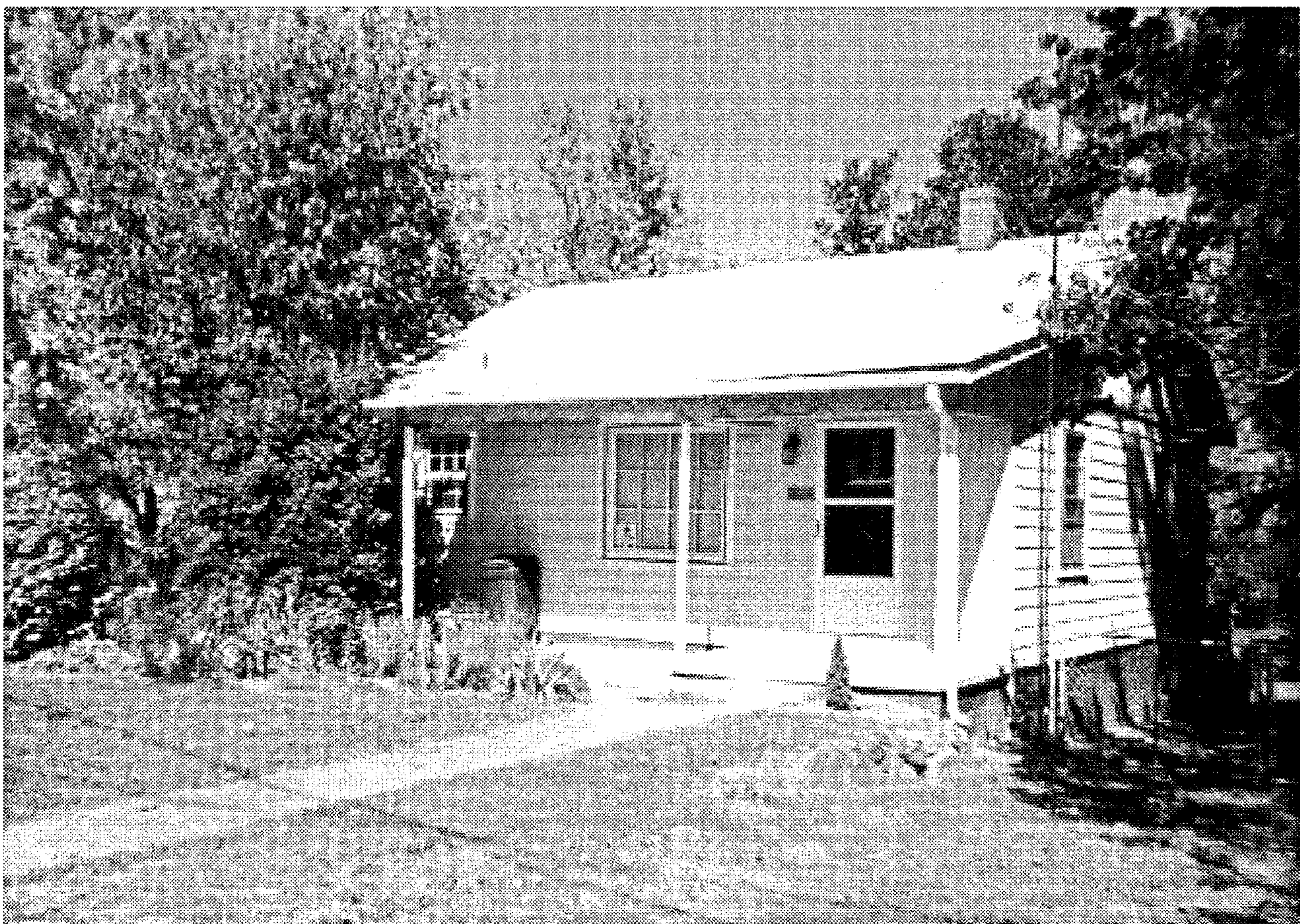
**Contact:** The Reverend Teijo Munnich

**Lineage:** Soto Zen

**Affiliation:** Minnesota Zen Meditation Center (Ganshoji)

**Website:** <http://www.main.nc.us/zca/>

**Newsletter:** Zen Center of Asheville Bulletin. Circulation: 400.



At six o'clock on Saturday morning the world outside is quiet. Most Asheville residents are in their beds, recovering from a long week of work. But in a modest house on the city's west side members of the Zen Center of Asheville are already awake and sitting zazen. The center was founded in 1995 and moved to its current location the same year. (During the preceding two years members had met in private residences.) The current congregation consists of both Buddhist converts as well as sympathizers who also practice Christianity or Judaism. Members range from young adults to senior citizens, and they are from several different ethnic groups—European-American, African-American, Korean, and Japanese. The average attendance at a zazen session ranges from five



o ten people; however, all-day sittings often attract more.

The Center offers both morning and evening practice five days a week. Special services and lectures are also offered regularly. A typical meditation session consists of one 10-minute session of kinhin in between two forty-minute periods of zazen. After sitting and walking meditation, participants chant the Heart and Robe Sutras and perform a series of prostrations.

The Reverend Teijo Munnich is the guiding light of the Zen Center of Asheville. She was introduced to Zen practice at the San Francisco Zen Center in the early 1970s. There she met Katagiri Roshi, whom she followed to his center in Minnesota in 1975. She received formal training under Katagiri Roshi, who died in 1990, and also studied in Obama, Japan, and at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center in California. At the Zen center that Teijo Munnich leads in Asheville residents of North Carolina's mountain region gather—sometimes before most of the city has stirred—to incorporate an ancient practice into their daily lives.

*LA*



# Appendices



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<b>Buddhist Organization</b>	<b>Year Founded</b>
Mountain Zen Group	1992
Durham Meditation Center	1993
Charlotte Community of Mindfulness	1994
Valley of the Moon Sitting Group	1994
Zen Center of Ashville	1995
Community of Mindful Living (UUFR)	1996
Wat Mungme Srisuk	1997
Sandhills Zen Group	1998
Seidoan Soto Zen Temple	1998
Cloud Cottage Sangha	1998
Community of Mindful Living—Durham	1999
Healing Springs Community of Mindful Living	1999
Cape Fear Tibetan Buddhist Study Group	2000



# Appendix B

## Temples and Centers Listed by Geographical Location

Year  
Founded

### The Piedmont

#### The Triangle (Raleigh/Durham/Chapel Hill)

1992	Buddha Light International Association (Chapel Hill and Cary)
1993	Chua Van Hanh (Raleigh)
1994	Durham Insight Meditation Center (Durham)
1994	Shambhala Meditation Center (Durham)
1995	Piedmont Zen Group (Raleigh)
1996	Chapel Hill Zen Center (Chapel Hill)
1997	Brooks Branch Zendo (Pittsboro)
1998	Soka Gakkai International-USA (Raleigh)
1998	Durham Karma Thegsum Choling (Durham)
1998	Eno River Buddhist Community (Durham)
1999	Kadampa Center (Raleigh)
1999	Community of Mindful Living—UUFR (Raleigh)
2000	Community of Mindful Living—Durham

#### The Triad (Greensboro/High Point/Winston-Salem)

	Greensboro Buddhist Center (Greensboro)
	Cambodian Cultural Center (Lexington)
	Chua Quan An (Greensboro)
	Salisbury Community of Mindfulness (Salisbury)



## **Charlotte and Vicinity**

Cambodian Buddhist Society (Charlotte)

Chua Lien Hoa (Charlotte)

Charlotte Community of Mindfulness (Charlotte)

Charlotte Zen Meditation Society (Charlotte)

## **The Southern Piedmont**

Wat Mungme Srisuk (Cameron)

Sandhills Zen Group (Southern Pines)

Healing Springs Community of Mindful Living (Red Springs)

## **The Inner Coastal Plain**

Greenville Karma Thegsum Choling (Greenville)

## **The Tidewater (Or Outer Coastal Plain)**

Wat Carolina (Bolivia)

Cape Fear Tibetan Buddhist Study Group (Wilmington)

## **The Mountain Region**

Zen Center of Asheville (Asheville)

Mountain Zen Group (Asheville)

Seidoan Soto Zen Temple (Boone)

Southern Dharma Retreat Center (Hot Springs)

Valley of the Moon Sitting Group (Burnsville)

Cloud Cottage Sangha (Black Mountain)



s Listed by Type and Tradition

**Immigrant and Refugee Temples**

1 Buddhist Society  
1 Cultural Center  
3 Buddhist Center  
na Buddhajakra Vanaram  
ne Srisuk

ght International Association of North Carolina  
Hoa  
t An  
Hanh

**Asian and African-American**

JA/INSIGHT MEDITATION SOCIETY  
ham Meditation Center  
ley of the Moon Sitting Group

IAT HANH’S COMMUNITY OF  
LIVING  
Community of Mindfulness  
age Sangha  
/ of Mindful Living—UUFR  
/ of Mindful Living—Durham.  
rings Community of Mindful Living  
Community of Mindfulness

nch Zendo



Chapel Hill Zen Center  
Charlotte Zen Meditation Society  
Mountain Zen Group  
Piedmont Zen Group  
Sandhills Zen Group  
Seidoan Soto Zen Temple  
Zen Center of Ashville

NICHIREN

Soka Gakkai International—USA

#### VAJRAYANA: TIBETAN CENTERS

Cape Fear Tibetan Buddhist Study Group  
Durham Karma Thegsum Choling  
Greenville Karma Thegsum Choling  
Kadampa Center  
Shambhala Meditation Center

#### NON-SECTARIAN OR ECUMENICAL CENTERS

Eno River Buddhist Community  
Southern Dharma Retreat Center



## Appendix D

### Estimating the Number of Buddhists

No one knows for sure how many Buddhists live in the United States, or in North Carolina, since the U.S. Census does not ask questions about religious affiliation. One scholar has estimated that there are four million U.S. Buddhists, and about 800,000 of those are European American or African American converts. For North Carolina, we can make informed guesses based on several factors, including the U.S. Census statistics on ethnicity and foreign-born residents, as we also refine that by appealing to estimates of the national Buddhist population.

There are as few as 5,000 and as many as 20,000 Buddhists in North Carolina. If we take the most conservative route to estimating the total, we could use the self-reported information we have gathered about membership in the Buddhist temples and centers. That yields an estimate of about 5,000. Some of those persons who are claimed in that figure are nominal or luke-warm Buddhists, but there are still many more who remain uncounted in that lower figure. But how many?

To find out we can turn to the U.S. Census data for some help. First, Asian Americans in North Carolina who were born in four predominantly Buddhist nations—Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand—constituted 13.7 percent of the state's 1990 Asian American population (69,020), and if we adjust that figure downward to 10 percent (to allow for Christians in those migrant populations) we can begin to arrive at more reliable, though still uncertain, estimates. If we then conservatively estimate that one third of the 21,146 Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans in North Carolina in 1990 were Buddhists in some sense (they hailed from Buddhist families or engaged in some Buddhist practices), we arrive at the informed speculation that about 20 percent of the 1990 population of Asian Americans in North Carolina were Buddhists (13,804 residents). Further, if the estimated increases in the Asian American population between 1990 and 1997 yielded the same ethnic and national group proportions, that would mean the Tar Heel State was home to 18,407 Asian-American Buddhists in 1997.

But we can refine that figure still more. If we assume that the same proportion of convert to cradle Buddhists holds in the state as it does in the nation (approximately 4 to 1), and then adjust the figure to include the total number of convert members we were able to identify in our collaborative project (1,400), then the total number of North Carolina Buddhists, cradle and convert, is approximately 20,000.

But even this higher figure, if it is accurate, does not fully represent the



presence of Buddhism in the state. Some North Carolinians sign up to receive temple newsletters, occasionally listen to lectures or dharma talks, attend one or more centers irregularly, and read Buddhist books they stack on the nightstand at home. If we considered these night-stand Buddhists, or sympathizers, those with interest in the tradition but who have not formally joined an organization, the number of the state's Buddhists would be even higher. But even if we omit them because they are too difficult to identify and count, it seems that Buddhism now has a significant presence in the state.



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“Buddhism: The Middle Way of Compassion.” Delphi Productions. (1993).

Diana Eck, On Common Ground: World Religions in America. CD-Rom. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

### **Web Pages**

The Buddhism in North Carolina Project: <http://www.unc.edu/ncbuddhism>

Buddhist Worlds in the USA: [http://academics.hamilton.edu/religious\\_studies/rseager/buddhistworlds](http://academics.hamilton.edu/religious_studies/rseager/buddhistworlds)

Dharma Net International: <http://www.dharmanet.org>

The Pluralism Project: <http://www.pluralism.org>

Tricycle: The Buddhist Review: <http://www.tricycle.com>



# Glossary

**Amitabha** (Sanskrit): **Amida** (Japanese). In Mahayana Buddhism, a Buddha or enlightened being who presides over a “Pure Land” or paradise in the western part of the universe.

**Avalokiteshvara** (Sanskrit): Also *Kuan-yin* (Chinese), *Kannon* (Japanese), and *Chenrezig* (Tibetan). The bodhisattva of compassion. An important object of devotion in Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism.

**bodhisattva**: A living being who has made a commitment to follow the path leading to full enlightenment. A future Buddha who embodies wisdom and compassion and is devoted to liberating all beings.

**buddha**: The “awakened one.” A fully enlightened being. A title given to those who have attained the goal of Buddhism.

**Chenrezig**: See Avalokiteshvara.

**chua**: Vietnamese term for “temple.”

**dharma**: Sanskrit term with many meanings—truth, law, doctrine. Most fundamentally, it refers to the teachings of the Buddha.

**dharma transmission**: The passing of spiritual insight from teacher to student, who as the “dharma heir” now has the authority to teach.

**dokusan** (Japanese): The traditional private meeting or interview between a Zen teacher and student.

**ecumenical**: Non-sectarian. Not affiliated with any particular group or institution.

**Kathin**: A major festival in Theravada Buddhism when the lay followers offer new robes and other supplies to the monks.

**kinhin** (Japanese): Walking meditation.

**lama**: In Tibetan Buddhism, a teacher, or anyone regarded as a teacher because of spiritual attainment. Usually but not always a monk or nun, although not all ordained men and women are lamas.

**Lotus Sutra**: A Mahayana Buddhist sacred text dating from the first century of the common era.

**Mahayana**: “The Great Vehicle.” A name applied to one the three major traditions or branches of Buddhism in Asia—especially prominent in China, Korea, Vietnam, and Japan.

**metta**: “Loving kindness” meditation. The first of the four sublime moods or states of mind (*brahma-viharas*), in which active good will is extended to all beings.

**mindfulness**: The practice of attending fully to each moment.

**Nichiren** (1222-82): Japanese Buddhist leader who founded the sect that bears his name.



**prostration:** Ritualized bowing.

**Rinzai:** A Japanese Zen tradition based on the Chinese Lin-chi school of Ch'an Buddhism. Eisai (1141-1215) is usually regarded as the school's Japanese founder. This form of Zen relies not only on *zazen* but also *koan* (Japanese; or *kung-an* in Chinese), stories of question-answer sessions between masters and their disciples that pose paradoxical questions.

**rinpoche:** Literally "precious jewel." An honorific title in Tibetan Buddhism given to those who have been judged to be a *tulku*, or reincarnation of a deceased enlightened teacher.

**roshi:** The Japanese term literally means "old teacher" and is a respectful way to refer to an established teacher or senior monk in a monastery or temple.

**sangha:** Sanskrit term referring to the Buddhist monastic order or, more broadly, the community of all Buddhists.

**sesshin:** In Zen Buddhism, a period of intense meditation that lasts up to seven days.

**Soto:** A Japanese tradition of Zen based on Ts'ao-tung Ch'an Buddhism. It was brought to Japan by Dogen (1200-53). The school emphasizes the use of *zazen* or seated meditation.

**sutra:** A sacred Buddhist text that followers take as the teachings of the Buddha.

**sympathizer:** One who does not formally join or affiliate with a religion but expresses some interest in it.

**Theravada:** Pali term for "Way of the Elders." One of the three main surviving traditions or branches of Buddhism. The self-chosen name for the diverse Buddhist traditions found in Southeast Asia: Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon), Myanmar (formerly Burma), Kampuchea (formerly Cambodia), Thailand, and Laos. They were dismissed by Mahayana followers, who used the pejorative term *Hinayana*, or "the small vehicle," to describe them.

**Thich:** An abbreviation of "Thich-ca," Vietnamese for Shakyas, which is the name of the Shakyamuni Buddha's clan. So a title taken by Vietnamese monks to denote kinship in the spiritual family of the Buddha.

**"Three Jewels":** In a formal ceremony most Buddhists "take refuge in" these three foundations of the faith: 1) Buddha, the founder; 2) Dharma, his teachings; and 3) Sangha, the community of Buddhists.

**Unitarian-Universalism:** A liberal American denomination whose 1984 statement of principles acknowledges "wisdom from the world's religions" as one of the sources of their faith. There is no official affiliation with Buddhism, but the denomination sponsors the Unitarian-Universalist Buddhist Fellowship, and (as in North Carolina) often provides the space where



the smaller Buddhist groups meet.

**Vajrayana:** Sanskrit term meaning “The Diamond Vehicle.” Tantric Buddhism. One of the three main traditions or branches of Buddhism. Traditionally, it has predominated in Mongolia and Tibet, but all of Tibet’s four main schools of Buddhism—*Gelugpa*, *Kagyu*, *Nyingma*, and *Sakya*—have found their way to the West, and to North Carolina.

**zazen:** Japanese term for seated meditation.

**vipassana:** A type of “insight” meditation practiced in Theravada Buddhism.

**wat:** Thai term for “temple.”

**Zen** (Japanese): *Ch’an* (Chinese), *Son* (Korean), and *Thien* (Vietnamese). Mahayana sect of Buddhism that originated in China and spread throughout East Asia. In the United States, the sect is best known by the Japanese term.

**zendo:** Meditation hall. Japanese term for the place in a Zen temple or monastery where meditation is practiced.