

**FINAL
REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF
THE JOINT COMMITTEE
September 2012**

INTRODUCTION

For the past four years the Board and the Elders Council, separately and together, have been examining issues relating to the structure of San Francisco Zen Center abbatial leadership.

The current bylaws provide that there shall be two Abbess/Abbots. The term is 4 years with a possible 3-year extension. Normally, an Abbess or Abbot will serve no more than seven years consecutively. An Abbess or Abbot who has served seven years or less, but left in good standing, may be reappointed after a hiatus of at least three years.

The Joint Committee is recommending a change in the bylaws that would allow up to three Abbesses/Abbots. (See below for wording of bylaw change.) The abbatial leadership shall normally consist of a Central Abbess/Abbot, an Abiding Abbess/Abbot at City Center, and an Abiding Abbess/Abbot at Green Gulch Farm. The phrase “normally” is used to allow maximum flexibility. Various considerations, such as the lack of an appropriate candidate, change in workload or organizational needs, or financial issues, might cause the Elders Council to recommend and/or the Board to appoint less than three Abbesses/Abbots in a particular year or not fill a vacancy because of unusual circumstances. It is the intent of the Joint Committee and the understanding of the Elders Council that absent unusual circumstances there will be a Central Abbess/Abbot and an Abiding Abbess/Abbot at City Center and at Green Gulch Farm.

It is the intent of the Joint Committee that the religious leadership of Zen Center be shared by the Abbesses/Abbots. The responsibilities of this shared leadership are set forth in Section 3 of Article VI, to which no change is recommended. The Central Abbess/Abbot will carry out these responsibilities primarily on an organization-wide basis; and the Abiding Abbesses/Abbots will carry out these responsibilities primarily at their respective temples.

The recommended change would allow an Abbess/Abbot to serve an initial term of four years with two possible extensions of three years each, for a total of ten years. It is anticipated that the Elders Council would usually, but not necessarily, recommend an Abiding Abbess/Abbot to serve in the subsequent position of Central Abbot or in the other position of Abiding Abbess/Abbot. If so, that person could serve up to a total of ten years in each position. The longer term is recommended to allow stability and continuity in the abbatial leadership and because it takes a considerable period of time for a new person to settle into the role. Allowing an Abiding Abbess/Abbot to move into the position of Central Abbot or the other position of Abiding Abbess/Abbot without a hiatus of time reflects our belief that someone who has first served as Abiding Abbess/Abbot at

one temple would normally be most appropriate and qualified to serve as Central Abbot or as Abiding Abbess/Abbot at the other temple. However, a current Abiding Abbess/Abbot who has served 10 years at one temple may not be appointed for another term at the same temple without a hiatus of at least 3 years.

The current procedure for appointing Abbesses/Abbots is not changed. The Elders Council makes a recommendation, and the Board appoints. The Board has the final decision-making authority about whom, if anyone, is appointed or reappointed to a particular position. Such appointment power is exercised only upon a recommendation from the Elders Council.

There would be no change with regard to membership of the Abbesses/Abbots on the board. All three would be voting members.

There would be no change to the spiritual leadership responsibilities of the Abbesses/Abbots, to the Abbesses/Abbots' Council, or to the Abbesses/Abbots' Group.

When the Board authorized a trial period for the restructured abbatial leadership, it also approved job descriptions for the Central Abbess/Abbot¹ and Abiding Abbesses/Abbots,² as well as a document entitled "Decision-Making Table."³ These documents provide more detail about the roles and responsibilities of the Central Abbess/Abbot and Abiding Abbesses/Abbots, but it is not the intention of the Joint Committee that these documents be incorporated into the bylaws.

The Joint Committee had extensive discussions about Tassajara Zen Mountain Center leadership. A job description for the "Abiding Teacher at Tassajara" was agreed upon. It was decided that this position should not, at this time, be included in the bylaws.

RECOMMENDATION⁴

The Joint Committee unanimously recommends that Article VI of the San Francisco Zen Center Bylaws be amended as follows:

Section 1. The religious leadership of Zen Center shall be shared by the Abbesses/Abbots. The abbacy shall normally consist of a Central Abbess/Abbot, an Abiding Abbess/Abbot at City Center and an Abiding Abbess/Abbot at Green Gulch Farm. The responsibilities of that leadership are set forth in Section 3 below. The Central Abbess/Abbot shall carry out these responsibilities primarily on an organization-wide basis; the Abiding Abbesses/Abbots shall carry out these responsibilities primarily at their respective local temples.

¹ See Attachment 10.

² See Attachment 11.

³ See Attachment 12.

⁴ For ease of reference, the current version of Article VI of the bylaws is included as Attachment 1. Attachment 2 tracks the recommended changes from the current wording. Substantive changes are recommended in Sections 1 and 2. The recommended changes in Section 3-5 are solely for the purpose of uniform use of the title "Abbess/Abbot."

The Abbesses/Abbots shall be appointed following the procedure outlined herein. The terms shall be staggered so that they do not begin or end in the same year as one another.

Section 2. Each Abbess/Abbot shall be appointed or reappointed by the Board by unity, and, failing that, by a vote of at least 2/3 of the entire Board of Directors. The candidate(s) for Abbess/Abbot considered by the Board shall be proposed by the Elder's Council. Should the Board reject such candidate, the Elders' Council shall reconsider and either send the same name again or a different candidate. Should the Board reject a candidate twice, the Elders' Council shall send the name of a different candidate. This process shall continue until an Abbess/Abbot is chosen.

The first term of any Abbess/Abbot shall be four years. The Board, after consultation with the Elders' Council, may reappoint an Abbess/Abbot for an additional three year-term, and may reappoint for a second additional three-year term. Normally, an Abbess/Abbot will serve no more than ten years consecutively in any one of the three abbatial positions. An Abbess/Abbot who has served for ten years in any one of the three abbatial positions, or who left in good standing, may be appointed by the Board, after recommendation by the Elders, to serve in another abbatial position for no more than ten years. An Abbess/Abbot who has served for ten years, or who left in good standing, may be appointed to the same abbatial position after a hiatus of at least three years.

The Board may remove an Abbess/Abbot with or without cause by a vote of 2/3 of the entire Board but only if all Directors are notified in writing of the proposed removal at least 30 days in advance and only if 2/3 of the entire Elders Council has approved the removal after like notice. The Abbess/Abbot who is the subject of removal shall be heard but shall not vote at the meetings of the Board and the Elders' Council. Any vacancy in the position of the Abbess/Abbot shall be filled through an appointment by the Board of Directors, in the manner set forth herein.

Section 3. The Abbesses/Abbots shall have primary responsibility for the teaching of Soto Zen at San Francisco Zen Center. They shall be voting members of the Board of Directors. Upon the request of an Abbess/Abbot, the Board shall reconsider any decision, except the removal of an Abbess/Abbot, and shall bring it to a second vote at the next regular Board meeting. The Abbesses/Abbots, with the advice of the Abbess/Abbot's Council, Elders Council and of the Abbess/Abbot's Group, is responsible for encouraging the spiritual well-being, growth, and ethical conduct of the San Francisco Zen Center Sangha; for cultivating San Francisco Zen Center's relationship with the wider religious community; for supporting and developing teachers and practice leaders at San Francisco Zen Center; for appointing Tantos, Inos and other practice leaders; for appointing the preceptors (advisors) of the training program; for developing the Abbess/Abbot's schedule; for coordinating the practice calendars of the three centers; and for standardizing the forms of San Francisco Zen Center.

Section 4. Abbesses/Abbots' Council. The Abbesses/Abbots shall appoint an advisory Council which would include administrative and practice leadership of Zen Center and would serve at the Abbesses/Abbots' pleasure. Such a Council may be composed of the Abbesses/Abbots, the Tanto and the Director of each of the three practice locations and the President of Zen Center. It may review Zen Center personnel to consider what is best for each person in terms of practice, training and the functioning of Zen Center as a whole.

Section 5. Abbesses/Abbots' Group. The Abbesses/Abbots' Group shall consist of the current Abbesses/Abbots along with all former Abbesses/Abbots and will be chaired by the current

Abbesses/Abbots. It will meet periodically to discuss matters usually under the care of the Abbesses/Abbots Department, including but not limited to priest ordination, liturgy, forms and overall religious policy as well as to offer peer support to current Abbesses/Abbots and to one another.

HISTORY OF PROCESS LEADING UP TO THESE RECOMMENDATIONS

In January 2008 the Board asked the newly constituted Governance Committee to look into spiritual/administrative decision-making issues at Zen Center. The Board was concerned about overlapping authority between the two Co-Abbots and the lack of clarity of decision-making authority between the Co-Abbots and the President. These combined to make decision-making at Zen Center cumbersome and unnecessarily slow. During the ensuing year, the Committee investigated the nature of the problem by interviewing current and former Abbesses/Abbots, current and former Presidents, and other current and former leadership. Literature about governance in different kinds of religious organizations was reviewed. Decision-making and governance structures in other Buddhist and non-Buddhist religious organizations were examined.

The Co-Abbots and the Elders Council had for several years been concerned about the co-abbots' increasingly unmanageable workload, making them less accessible to students.

In early 2009 the Board communicated to the Elders Council the problems from the Board's point of view and posed three questions⁵:

1. Should we continue with the two-abbot model or should we have only one abbot?
2. What should be the scope of authority of the president and of the abbots? When do they overlap; and, when they do, how should that overlap be managed?
3. If there are two abbots, how should they work together?

The Board invited the Elders Council to explore these issues with it.

As a result, the Elders Council began to have its own discussions about the structure of abbatial leadership and to develop various proposals that would meet the concerns of the Board, the Elders and the Co-Abbots. In May 2009 the Elders Council informed the Board that it proposed to create a more functional decision-making process by changing the abbatial structure to a "Chief Abbot" and "Abiding Abbots" at Green Gulch Farm and at City Center, and by giving real authority to various people and groups (such as the proposed Chief Abbot, Abiding Abbots and Teachers' Group, and to the Abbots' Executive Group). It invited input and questions from the Board.⁶

⁵ See Attachment 3.

⁶ See Attachment 4.

On June 6, 2009 the Board approved the establishment of a joint committee of the Board and the Elders Council to work together on proposals for abbatial restructuring.⁷ The committee consisted of three representatives of the Elders Council,⁸ three members from the Board,⁹ the Co-Abbots,¹⁰ chair of the Board,¹¹ and the President and Vice-President.¹² The Joint Committee was charged with discussing how, if at all, to restructure abbatial leadership and then to submit a proposal for Board consideration and action.

In September 2009 the Elders Council informed the Board that it appreciated the work of the Joint Committee on the restructuring of the Abbacy and recommended that Steve Stucky and Paul Haller provisionally begin to act as Zen Center Abbot and City Center Abiding Abbot respectively. If the Board agreed with proceeding in this fashion, the Elders Council would make a recommendation for GGF Abiding Senior Teacher for the Board's approval.¹³

In October 2009 the Board asked the Joint Committee and the Elders Council to clarify the responsibilities of and relationships among the central abbot, abiding abbots and President. The request was that these issues be resolved within the next four months.¹⁴

In April 2010 the Board approved draft job descriptions for the Central Abbot¹⁵ and Abiding Abbots at City Center and Green Gulch Farm¹⁶. The Board received from the Joint Committee a Decision-Making Table dated April 2010¹⁷ which reflected work done on clarifying who has authority for what decisions and how these positions interrelate. The Board then approved a resolution authorizing a trial restructuring of the abbatial leadership that would consist of a Central Abbot (to be filled by Steve Stucky), an Abiding Abbot at City Center (to be filled by Paul Haller), and an Abiding Senior Dharma Teacher at Green Gulch Farm whose job description would be the same as the Abiding Abbot at City Center. The trial would go through July 1, 2011. The Board would assess the trial period thoroughly, communicate with Zen Center members, and decide whether the bylaws should be amended to provide for this restructured leadership.¹⁸ In June the Board invited Linda Ruth Cutts to be Abiding Senior Dharma Teacher at Green Gulch Farm.¹⁹

⁷ See Attachment 5.

⁸ Gil Fronsdal, Leslie James and Linda Ruth Cutts.

⁹ Mary Morgan, Norma Fogelberg, and Jordan Thorn.

¹⁰ Steve Stucky and Paul Haller.

¹¹ Ed Sattizahn.

¹² Robert Thomas and Susan O'Connell

¹³ See Attachment 6.

¹⁴ See Attachment 7.

¹⁵ See Attachment 10.

¹⁶ See Attachment 11.

¹⁷ See Attachment 12.

¹⁸ See Attachment 8.

¹⁹ See attachment 9.

The trial period commenced July 1 and was supposed to conclude September 1, 2011. It actually continued well into 2012. Paul Haller stepped down as City Center Abbot and Christina Lehnerr assumed this position in February 2012. In February 2012 the Elders Council informed the Board that it would support a bylaw change about the Abbacy Restructuring, recommending flexible wording and a term up to 10 years.²⁰

After two assessments consisting of interviews with those persons most immediately impacted by the restructuring, meetings with residents and other Sangha members, and further discussions within the Joint Committee, the Governance Committee, and the Finance Committee, the Board adopted a resolution on July 18, 2012 stating its intention to amend the bylaws to reflect the trial restructure.²¹ A further report was received from the Elders Council explaining why it supported the bylaw change, the maximum 10 year term for each position, and the importance of stability as well as flexibility.²²

Pursuant to the request from the Board, the Joint Committee drafted the actual wording of the bylaw change and submitted it and this report to the Board.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDED CHANGES

The Board and the Elders Council spent considerable time looking into perceived difficulties in the current co-abbess/abbot structure. This inquiry revealed three main problems which needed to be addressed:

- unmanageable workload for two abbesses/abbots;
- insufficient time for abbesses/abbots to spend with students; and
- inefficient and untimely decision-making processes.

The assessments during the trial period, especially those of the persons acting as Central Abbot and Abiding Abbess/Abbot and the Abiding Teacher at Tassajara, indicate that the new proposed structure substantially addresses these problems, although additional refinement of the work priorities and relationships needs to be done.

There is an additional financial cost associated with having three abbesses/abbots. However, the most substantial increase in cost has to do with the stipend of an abbess/abbot who is not a current resident of SFZC. This would be true whether there are two or three abbesses/abbots. Given the constant need to expand the pool of qualified abbatial candidates and the increasing number of candidates who no longer live within SFZC, this increased cost will undoubtedly continue. The Joint Committee feels that while cost is an important factor and must be considered, it is not the dispositive factor.

The Joint committee feels that the workload of the abbatial leadership will continue to grow and will not diminish after the completion of the capital campaign.

²⁰ See Attachment 13.

²¹ See Attachment 14.

²² See attachment 15.

Indeed, taking better care of our affiliated sanghas, strengthening teacher training curriculum, increasing training opportunities for practitioners who do not live within SFZC, and generally widening the circle of offering the Dharma to more people in more ways will require more work, not less.

The Joint Committee believes that increasing the abbatial leadership from two to three persons and apportioning their responsibilities primarily between organization-wide and local temple issues and decisions represents an important investment of our resources in making the Dharma more accessible to more people. The capacity and strength of the abbatial leadership is increased. We believe this will result in improving the practice opportunities for the residential sangha and the even wider sangha, members of which do not live within SFZC.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Current Wording of Article VI of bylaws
2. Recommended bylaw revisions tracking changes from current bylaws.
3. Governance Committee's Current Thinking on Decision-Making, January 27, 2009.
4. Recommendations from Elders' Council to SFZC Board, May 28, 2009.
5. Minutes of SFZC Board Meeting, June 6, 2009.
6. Communication from the Elders' Council to the SFZC Board, September 11, 2009.
7. Resolution approved by SFZC Board, October 18, 2009.
8. Minutes of SFZC Board Meeting, April 21, 2010.
9. Minutes of SFZC Board Meeting, June 28, 2010.
10. Job description of Central Abbess/Abbot dated 4/19/10
11. Job description of Abiding Abbess/Abbot dated 4/21/10
12. Decision-Making Table, April 2010.
13. Message from Elders Council to Board dated February 26, 2012
14. SFZC Board resolution, July 18, 2012
15. Communication from the Elders Council to the Board dated August 2, 2012