

Proposal for a Compassionate Action and Service Committee

Seeing the immensity of the world's anguish has raised in my mind questions about the future prospects for Buddhism in the West. I've been struck by how seldom the theme of global suffering—the palpable suffering of real human beings—is thematically explored in the Buddhist journals and teachings with which I am acquainted. It seems to me that we Western Buddhists tend to swell in cognitive space that defines the first noble truth largely against the background of our middle-class lifestyles: as the gnawing of discontent; the ennui of over-satiation; the pain of unfulfilling relationships; or, with a bow to Buddhist theory, as bondage to the round of rebirths. Too often, I feel, our focus on these aspects of dukkha has made us oblivious to the vast, catastrophic suffering that daily overwhelms three-fourths of the world's population.

*Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi
“A Challenge to Buddhists”*

We have gathered this committee, The Compassionate Action and Service Committee (CATS), from the Engaged Buddhism Study Group and are joined by several new members of the Sangha. Our intention has shifted from study of different perspectives of Engaged Buddhism to a desire to serve the Sangha in ways that are specific in the application of the Dharma to the suffering in the world. Since our inception, we focused our study on Engaged Buddhism and how it could shine a light on the Fifth Aspiration of the Albuquerque Vipassana Sangha: Compassionate Action through Service. We believe and hope that we have much to offer our Sangha.

Within the Sangha Dharma nights' presentations, we feel that there is an opportunity to cultivate Metta for world and local community suffering that would be enriching for the Sangha. Many of our community talks now lean to the more intellectual and structural teachings – that are greatly desirable and needed – yet may not leave us with a sense of an “in-the-world touchstone” of the outer world of suffering that we all share. The Compassionate Action and Service Committee hopes to serve the Sangha by providing and stimulating more dialogue, experience and direction for engagement with the world of suffering just outside our door. Through the implementation of this proposal, we hope to further our individual practices and the bonding of Sangha in bringing inner and outer transformation of practice together as one.

Based on the intentions of Engaged Buddhism and our commitment to be of service, we propose and request the following:

1. To serve the Albuquerque Vipassana Sangha (AVS) in the status of a Standing Committee and to be known as the Compassionate Action and Service Committee.
2. That we begin a new service of consistent Metta practice of current issues of suffering as they arise, such as: for the miners in Chile; for the state fires; for the Gulf wildlife as the oil gushed out; for the mass killings in an office building this summer; or for the flood victims in Pakistan. This would entail a brief statement (one-two sentences) before the Dharma talks and that would request that Sangha members send Metta to the situation/persons in crisis. It would not have to be every week, but could be. It also could be a statement prepared ahead and given to the speaker(s) for the evening. The focus would be on a specific crisis of suffering in the world. The intention would be to bring loving kindness to the world's cares within our shared practice on those evenings.
3. Believing that sharing information stimulates the development of community, we would bring/post to the table or standing easel beside the table: a corkboard for flyers that announce activities of peaceful action that are taking place on behalf of suffering – including animal, earth and human. (“Compassionate Action Board”)
4. We would be responsible for between 3 and 4 Dharma night presentations annually. Topics would be presented to the Education Committee beforehand.
5. We will ask a teacher or one of our Community Dharma Leaders (CDLs) to serve as our sponsor.
6. A Board Member will be designated as our liaison, with whom we would consult and report.
7. We are included at some level when the Board approaches Compassionate Action and Service ideas and planning. An example might be: we would coordinate a special study group with Arinna when she is here for the Diversity Retreat on White Privilege; a potluck or meet; or to meet with her separately for guidance as the CATS group.
8. We will be responsible for a films series (3-4 nights annually and could be associated with a potluck) on topics related to Engaged Buddhism but not limited to that topic.
9. We will be responsible for one or more special events a year. Examples might be: Asking the Sangha to join another Sangha in an effort for a candlelight vigil; or asking the Sangha to donate books for immigrants being held in a border prison.

10. We will maintain a current Engaged Buddhism Mailing List of AVS Sangha members who are interested in Engaged Buddhism and/or CATS.

11. We serve the Sangha as a clearinghouse for requests from the community or our own Sangha members representing peace and justice organizations or activities. We would ask that groups/persons submit a one-page proposal of their request at least two weeks prior to the event. If we recommended their proposal for approval, we would pass it to our liaison AVS board member. We would need to have a process by which the request could be fully approved in a timely fashion. This approval would be for sponsorship of AVS or just sponsorship by the Compassionate Action and Service Committee of AVS.

12. We will have some budgetary direction/definition from the AVS Board for reasonable expenses such as supplies.

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As a new group implementing these many ideas, it would probably take 6 months to a year to get all the functions up and running.

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We welcome dialogue with the AVS Board re this proposal. We could come to the appropriate board meeting for discussion. Please feel free to contact us.

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