

2008 Annual KCC Leadership Retreat Report to the Sangha
March 13 - 17

Each year, KCC leaders meet as a group to see how we are doing, and what adjustments need to be made in the coming year to help us work better and support each other more in our jobs at KCC. Participants primarily include Lama Michael, board members, rural operations staff, program council members, and members of the finance, development, design & construction, volunteer support and membership committees. This year we had a few leaders who could not attend due to health and family issues. Altogether, we were 17 people, including our cook, Susan Geise, and our facilitator, Deborah Hill.

While knowing that it is a goal without end, KCC is committed to continuously improving communication among sangha members. This year, the board elected to devote the entire annual leadership retreat to communication skill building. From Thursday evening to Monday morning, we left aside our day-to-day committee work and spent over 10 hours a day for the three main days, primarily engaged in training activities.

As a joyous historical note, the entire meeting was conducted in our retreat cloister facilities at SCOL. Our first activity there was meditation in the new shrine room, where the Goldendale spring sky made a continuous display through the rows of windows at the top of each wall. The tall, stately walls and exposed-beam ceilings gave a sense both groundedness and spaciousness. Even though there was a light dusting of snow on a couple of mornings, we sat comfortable on the gently heated floors of the shrine room complex.

Owing to the right-up-to-the-deadline diligence of several people on the land, we met, cooked, ate, slept and showered in our new retreat compound. There was plenty of room to spare. Each day began and ended with sitting practice. The meeting was facilitated by Deborah Hill, an experienced Buddhist practitioner and therapist from Sonoma, California. Deb is a long-time friend and professional colleague of Lama Michael's. She led us through a three-day series of carefully planned exercises on a single, 3-step communication method designed to facilitate clear, open and feeling-responsive communication between individuals and groups in times of conflict or potential conflict. The schedule was balanced with work, plenty of breaks, practice, fun and continuous dialogs.

The training ended with a party in the "yoga room" celebrating our progress on the SCOL project and our mission and vision in general, on behalf of all beings. We plan to make some the training we received available in small groups or by individual coaching to any KCC volunteer who is interested. We hope it will help us bring continuous dharma practice and open-heartedness to all our work.

We asked meeting participants to send along a brief comment about their participation, and have included them from everyone who responded. We hope these personal remarks will give you a sense of what happened; the general spirit of the meeting, and a

sense of what it means to take on the responsibility of volunteering as a leader at KCC.

"I received any number of gifts from this my first leadership retreat but what stands out is an enhanced sense of genuine connection with the other retreat participants, and by extension to the KCC community at large. I also felt tremendous support for the committee work I do, a deep appreciation for the work that others do, and a renewed sense of optimism towards the projects ahead." --Peg Swift, Design and Construction Committee

"For me personally the leadership retreat was transformative, inspiring, and healing of old issues. My sense is that Deborah conveyed to us a group process that brought all of us closer together at the same time transmitting the tools that will allow us to carry the potential continuation of the experience back to KCC as a whole. I feel profoundly grateful." --Lynn Eleanor, Finance and Volunteer Support Committees

"For me, the retreat brought a new level of closeness to each person who was there. The technique we practiced also gave me a safe avenue to voice my feelings and opinions. I feel it will be a very valuable tool for our center, and for myself." --Pat Parker, Volunteer Support Committee, Bookkeeping Team and Puja

"The divine smell of food cooking in the kitchen marked the transition from making to using. Inhabiting the north wing is a profound pleasure, like welcoming a newborn after the intense labor, weariness and bruising of the birth process. The communication tools we learned helped to unveil each person's unique, complex perspective in a constructive, positive and loving manner." --Karen Nelson, Rural Operations Manager, Development and the Design and Construction Committee

"Walking to my room after dark under a starry sky one night, I realized we've done it: there's a usable cloister finished at SCOL. I felt grateful to the whole community and all others who made it possible and who will make it possible, in the future. I feel hopeful we will succeed in our efforts to make our work and informal practice indistinguishable." --Julia King Tamang, Program Council and KCC Kids Program

"With the rush of getting last minute preparations for the leadership retreat, it took a while for the impact of coming together to practice and share the weekend in our brand new north wing to really sink in for me. With the simple act coming together in the new shrine room we were breathing the vitality of practice and community into the facilities that we have been working on for so long. Taking the time to listen deeply to each other in that space was transformative." --Bill Spangle, Program Council, Design and Construction Committee

"The leadership retreat exceeded my expectations in regards to Deborah's skill in facilitation (looked so effortless that it was nearly possible to think she was just being lucky), and in the willingness of participants to engage the methods honestly and openly. All this, mixed with spending time in our new facilities was so wonderful and exciting and I won't even try to say more about it here.

Now that we've put that time and energy into the learning of the method, I hope that each committee will take the time to master the methods so that we can move our culture in the direction of improving our communication at this critical level." --Michael Conklin, Resident Lama, Program Council and KCC Development Committee

"This is not a typical retreat, more of a workshop in my mind. It was valuable though whatever you name it as a time of growth and introspection for me, not with out some inner struggle, as I along with everyone else learned ways to help us work together in a more unified and effective manner. I am grateful for this experience." --Mary Woods, KCC Board and Omze Committee

"This was my first time going to the leadership retreat and I had no idea of what to expect. I took a lot of stress to the retreat and was surprised when this quickly melted away. I think one of the reasons for my stress reduction was freedom from emails - and we got to talk about how we use email at KCC which was one of my communication concerns. The greatest gift, however, for me was the magic of the land and the beauty of the people present which helped me deepen what had been a somewhat flagging practice. I am very grateful." --Michael Davis, Membership Committee

"For people on the committees who attend this meeting, volunteer work at KCC can often exceed 10 hours of effort a week. The leadership retreat is the one time during the year where we can come together and connect in a more personal, supportive way. It is an opportunity to experience the sense of "sangha" more deeply, and it carries me through the year. This year, sitting in our new facilities, I had a sense of what all of our activity is leading to--such an inspiration!" --Jeff Alworth, KCC Board President

Written and posted by Julia King Tamang, on behalf of Board President, Jeff Alworth, and the KCC Leadership group