

Sangha Leader Guide

"The sangha is an island of peace". - Thich Nhat Hanh

Thank you for volunteering to facilitate the Community of Mindful Living Sangha. Leading the sangha is a noble task, deepening our practice while nurturing the collective energy of mindfulness. This guide is offered to support you in leading an evening of practice. Please use it as a flexible framework.

Suggested Format:

- Silent or guided meditation for 10-15 minutes
- Welcome and general announcements
- Dharma offering/reading, your selection of subject supporting the traditions of Plum Village
- Mindful sharing - Open the floor for sharing response to reading or other joys or concerns
- Short 5-10 minute break
- Continued dharma offering and sharing
- Closing meditation - optional 5-10 minute meditation if time permits
- Final 4 bells (using the small hand bell):
 - First bell to awaken our bodies,
 - Second bell to stand up behind your cushions or chairs.
 - Third bell to bow to each other and the Buddha within
 - Fourth bell to bow to the alter and all our teachers along the way

Note this is a guideline not a required format. You may choose to rearrange the outline or to include a song, walking meditation, video clip or other dharma sharing tools.

Preparing the Space:

- In the closet you will find an altar table, a statue of Buddha, a picture of Thay and vases if anyone brings flowers.
- Place the large and small bell in front of the facilitator or bell master.
- Arrange chairs and cushions in a wide circle including the video screen for Zoom participants.
- A preassigned member will set up video Zoom conferencing.

Guide to Sitting Meditation:

You may offer guidance such as...

- Let us become aware of our breath.
- Offer sitting posture suggestions: Allow the spine to be upright yet relaxed and rest your hands gently in your lap or beside you.
- You may close your eyes or lower your gaze softly to the ground in front of you.
- If at any time you feel discomfort, know that you may shift your posture with mindfulness.
- When your mind wanders, gently bring yourself back to your breath, back to the present moment.

Inviting the Bell:

There are two bells: the large singing bowl and the small handheld bell. The bell is a friend on our path of awakening. We invite it with care and presence.

- Before sounding the bell, bow in mindfulness and take a conscious breath.
- Lightly tap the bell to “wake” it. Then, invite the bell fully.
- Typically three invitations of the bell are offered at the beginning and end of Allow time for three breaths between each sound of the bell.

Welcoming the Sangha:

- Welcome everyone. Create a space and a heart open to all.
- The Community of Mindful Living is a lay-led sangha in the Plum Village tradition and the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh.
- More information about our sangha and some of the materials we use can be found at raleighmindfulness.org .
- There is a sign up sheet on the table if you would like to join our email listserv. There is also a basket for sharing a \$1-2 dana (donation) if you wish. Contributions support the use of our space, local charities, Plum Village monastery and general expenses.
- Let us take a moment to introduce ourselves by go around the circle, placing your hands in the form of a lotus bud and share our names. (Include Zoom attendees.)
- This is the ____ Monday of the month. The program for the evening will focus on ____.

Sharing Etiquette:

- Dharma sharing is an opening of our hearts. It is an opportunity to share what the dharma teaches us as well as any joys or concerns in our life.
- The community listens with a compassionate heart and without a response or cross dialog.
- If you would like to share, gently bow with your hands in a lotus bud and say, “This is (name) bowing in.”
- When you are finished bring your hands together again and say “This is (name) bowing out”.
- What is said during our sharing stays in our hearts and does not leave the meditation space.

