

## President's Report for Fiscal Year 2020 – 2021

Dear Friends,

Last year saw Zen Center Philippines enjoying new forms of grace while facing dramatic challenges. Covid-19 touched our lives and our beloved Zen community in ways that will forever change various elements of our practice. Although most people who do not practice the way of enlightenment may disagree, some of us are now realizing how much of blessing the pandemic has brought. Because of the terrible loss of lives, the massive economic upheaval and an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, so many people are now starting to look for a deeper meaning in life. For those already steeped in the practice, this pervading atmosphere has acted like a spur, encouraging us to practice more intensely.

Perceptions of reality have changed. Practice took on a new flavor. Although most of us decry the absence of physical community Zazen and face-to-face Dokusan, the Dharma has clearly shown us that it is not limited by conventional forms. We have also realized that while technology can be abused, it also is also the instrument by which the seed of the Way can be strewn farther and wider than what was possible without it. More important, this new environment of partial or almost total isolation has given us more time to practice – more time to sit, more time to do our mindfulness exercises. In this sense, the lockdown and its reason for being can be perceived as positive stimuli.

For a growing number of people outside the Sangha, the search for respite, solace and genuine peace of mind is beginning to take on an urgent priority. During the past fiscal year, we conducted no less than four Zen Orientation Workshops, one more than those held in previous years. All of them were held virtually. These workshops yielded 19 new members who were accepted into the sangha on March 31, 2021.

We held four full-length sesshin in the 12-month period between April 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021. All of these were carried out through the magic of Viber and Google Meet. Through the same means, the limitations of time and space were shattered, particularly with regards to Teisho given by international Masters and Teachers of SanboZen International. We enjoyed the wisdom and compassion of Berta Meneses, Valerie Forstman, Migaku Sato, Bruce Harris, Reinhard Busmann, Paul Shepherd, Sr. Kathleen Riley, Arno Hess, Sr. Sonia Punzalan and Nenates Pineda through their teisho in the same time period.

We undertook standard Zen ceremonies like the Yaza, Kanzeon and the reception of new members online. We even started a new improvisation: Zazen de Gallo. In the 9 days preceding Christmas day, readings from the venerable books of sacred traditions were held as part of the regular dawn sits.

While the above litany of highlights is truly encouraging, perhaps the biggest change in our practice can be seen in two areas. The first is the area of regular zazen and dokusan. Because

of virtual sitting, the opportunities for zazenkai are much greater. With daily sits at dawn and in the evening, members can now sit as a community for as much as two and a half hours a day. If they participated in the zazenkai of the Swiss sangha to which our members are always invited, the total zazen time available per day is four hours. This aggregate time is for daily sits, quite apart from sesshin. As regards dokusan, the opportunities for members to see their teachers is no longer limited to weekly or bi-weekly schedules. As you have heard from some of the teisho, monks of old usually spent most of their time doing sesshin throughout the year. These were not four- or five-day sesshin. They usually lasted throughout the entire season. With four seasons in a year, it was thus possible for a monk to live in an environment where everything was pure undiluted practice. With the lockdown, it is now possible for a lay person to emulate and approximate the life of a monk. In fact, one of our senior members commented that life is turning out to be one continuous sesshin.

The second is in the field of dharma relations. Through virtual practice, the gaps and boundaries between different sangha have crumbled. We now have shared zazenkai and teisho with other sangha, including those from foreign countries. Masters, associate masters and Zen teachers, most of them from other countries, have and will share their wisdom with members of Zen Center Philippines through their teisho. Compassion and genuine love is also growing between and among different sangha. This is particularly true when we held the first international Kanzeon Ceremony last year. Through this as well as simultaneous zazenkai and sesshin, the old walls of fear and mistrust have been replaced by bridges of understanding, compassion and love.

No doubt that life, each being, and everything in between, is perfect and complete just as they are. Yes, everything, even challenging situations. Nothing has presented quite a challenge as the massive flood brought about by Typhoon Ulysses last November. Although the level of the floodwaters that inundated our Marikina Zendo was slightly lower than that of the Typhoon Onday flood, the devastation wrought by Typhoon Ulysses was the same if not more serious. However, in spite of the pandemic and the lockdown, members of the sangha rose to the occasion splendidly. Some of you, notably Tina dC, Dave Aguila and Carol Gaw, braved the mud, the dirt and the flies to salvage what could be saved from the piles of soiled cushions, sitting paraphernalia, books and documents. Mang Miguel, our ever-dependable caretaker and his family performed the yeoman task of cleaning the zendo, salvaging the cushions and sorting out which items could be rehabilitated from those that have to be discarded. Within a month, the mud had been cleared and the house was ready for final cleaning. However, the damage to the structure was significant and will require a substantial amount of funding. Dave diligently made sure that our insurance agent was on the ball and we expect to have a small amount in 2021 to help defray the rehabilitation of our beloved Zendo.

Aside from adapting and refining elements of the practice to respond to the unique circumstances brought about by the pandemic, the financial management of the sangha also underwent a much-needed overhaul. A new accountant-bookkeeper was contracted. The sangha's cash flow and disbursement system was streamlined and synchronized with BPI's BIZLINK online fund management system. By late March all the groundwork for converting our

cash flow management online was in place. We owe Je-el Constantino no small amount of gratitude for initiating and following through these time- and effort-saving measures.

2020 will always be seen as a watershed year for Zen Center Philippines as well as the Dharma. The limitations of forms are eroding and the constraints of institutional structures are coming apart. But the essence of the Dharma is truly subtle, mysterious and alive. Without a shadow of a doubt, the Sangha will rise out of the darkness of the pandemic and the slime of the flood. Like a magnificent lotus, we will bloom anew, nourished by the nutrients offered by the humble mud, the water, and the earth. The mud, the water, and the earth – the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha... The Three Treasures are alive and well!

Thank you.

Deep bows,  
Rollie del Rosario  
Yuu-un Ken  
25 June 2021