

From: Interim Board Secretary [mailto:secretary@obcinterimboard.org]  
Sent: 10 April 2011 10:09  
To: Monks and Lay Ministers  
Subject: Working Group on Lay Sangha Communication and Dialogue

This email has been sent to senior & transmitted monks and lay ministers. In order for this communication to reach as many members of the lay sangha as possible, we request that temple heads forward it to their congregations, and that lay ministers and meditation group monks forward it to the members of their meditation groups and anyone else in the sangha with whom they are in contact. With grateful thanks for your help with this.

To senior and transmitted monks and lay sangha,

The interim board has approved the establishment of a new group working on lay sangha communication and dialogue. We are inviting you to submit your name if you would be interested either in joining this working group, or in providing support in other ways. In addition to monks, we encourage committed lay trainees and lay ministers to come forward to help with this work. An initial working group will be formed of up to six lay sangha and two or more monks, providing good representation and balance from both N.A. and UK/Europe. In addition to the working group itself, we are looking to identify local 'facilitators' who can organise, co-ordinate and report back on discussions held with local lay sangha groups. We are also interested in hearing from you if you just have a general interest in this initiative and perhaps have suggestions as to other ways that your time and skills could be put to use. We expect that working group members will need to commit to being involved with the group for at least six months. Local facilitators, in contrast, may be involved to a greater or lesser degree according to their availability. Monks are assumed to have checked their availability with their temples, as needed, before responding. Please respond by April 30th via email to Rev. Alicia, secretary of the interim board ([secretary@obcinterimboard.org](mailto:secretary@obcinterimboard.org)) with your interest, indicating how you may like to be involved and, in terms of time and effort, to what extent.

The purpose of the working group is to widen refuge taking across the lay sangha by pursuing different means of encouraging communication and dialogue among the lay sangha including face to face, organized meetings of laity; identification of people to facilitate local discussions; development of a mechanism for reporting of local sangha discussions and events of interest to others; development of communication networks which include committed long term laity who are not lay ministers; continued development of [brightmoon.org](http://brightmoon.org) providing forums for more open, free discussions, and the identification of a brightmoon website support team.

A report from the conclave lay ministers who have been working on the lay initiative is attached. We thought it would also be helpful to have more background on why this particular new working group is being established by the interim board. The idea behind the working group originated through discussions concerning the wider lay initiative. An overview of those discussions is below, and a longer narrative, written up by Andrew Taylor-Browne (for and on behalf of the lay ministers who attended the 2010 conclave) is also attached.

*When we consider what the lay initiative might look like as we move forward, our sense is that: there is too much covered by the original idea of a 'lay initiative' for us to gain widespread agreement on a specific way forward; and there is probably too much for one group of people to do; some of the topics covered by the 'lay initiative' involve monastics to a great degree (for example, how meditation groups work effectively is of great concern to those refuge monks with close relationships to the meditation groups); others may*

*involve monastics to a lesser degree; it would be good to use the wide ranging skills of the lay sangha as effectively as possible, and indeed to involve as many experienced members of the lay sangha as possible.*

*As a result we feel that it would be good to identify a number of distinct working groups within the overall 'programme' of a 'lay initiative'. Initially these could include any or all of the following:*

*a working group looking at meditation groups - their form and operation, new ideas for what may be done in/with/by groups, resolution of conflicts within groups, maximising the benefits of relationships between groups and monks;*

*a working group, or more probably a sub-group of a wider Order working group, looking at ethical standards from the lay perspective, linking closely with wider initiatives within the order looking at ethical guidelines;*

*a group looking at the long term possibility of a lay wing of the Order, what would its purpose be and how would it operate, its membership and organisation, perhaps comparing what we have with what has been established in other western Buddhist traditions;*

*a working group considering the ongoing education and development of lay practitioners, including support, mentoring and training for those taking on roles within meditation groups, with external organisations (for example in chaplaincy roles, working with schools, working with interfaith groups); perhaps including training in how to perform certain ceremonies and provide support in emergency situations.*

*This list has been prompted by the early discussions held with members of the lay sangha - it is likely that other topics for working groups, and people interested in working on them, will arise as we move forward and more people become engaged with the discussion of what is possible and what may be good.*

*We realised, however, that there is a fundamental obstacle to the development of effective working groups for the lay sangha - namely that there is no process or structure in place across the lay community to enable wide ranging dialogue and consultation on what would be good to do. It is possible that a website such as Bright Moon could serve to generate an amount of discussion on what may be good to do; however, how could this discussion be managed to have a positive outcome? Equally, there is widespread agreement amongst many of the lay sangha that such a web forum approach would not be sufficiently inclusive of all members of the lay community, and may not be conducive to the kind of dialogue that would lead to effective changes and building of support. It seems that face-to-face meetings would be more effective, and yet how could these be organised? how could the results of such local meetings and their discussions be fed through to any Order-wide dialogue?*

*Without some effective structure and process for dialogue and refuge taking across the lay sangha, any working groups such as those suggested above would be in danger of reflecting just the views of the small number of people on the working group. It would then be difficult to see how any working group could gain sufficient support to introduce real change. At the same time, the other initiatives being facilitated by the Interim Board really require some effective means of consulting with the lay sangha. Emails are possible but leave much to be desired - they are acceptable for communication but not very effective for dialogue.*

We hope that some of you will be interested in stepping forward to help with these early efforts at developing the potential of the lay sangha. We also well realize that this kind of involvement doesn't suit everyone. If you would like more information please feel free to contact Andrew Taylor-Browne ( [andrew@obcinterimboard.org](mailto:andrew@obcinterimboard.org)) or Pam Hunter Johnson ( [pam@obcinterimboard.org](mailto:pam@obcinterimboard.org)), the lay members of the interim board.

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