

I. ETHICS GUIDELINES

SILENT THUNDER ORDER

Revision 120627

INTRODUCTION

The communal life of the Sangha is an integral part of our practice. Its conduct is based on the Noble Eightfold Path as well as the Sixteen Soto Zen Bodhisattva Precepts, and the Six Paramitas, along with the great body of foundational Mahayana teachings. In recognition of the difficulty of refining this way of living, we take Refuge in the Three Treasures of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. *Sangha*, for purposes of this document will include all Clergy, Members, Residents, Students, and Guests (denoting guest clergy and teachers.) Special cases, such as Residents (live-in Students contributing tuition and internships), as well as Tenants (businesses whose managements sublease commercial space), will be treated in separate agreements detailing the policies governing their relationships to the Board of Directors (BOD) and Abbot/Abbess Advisory Council (AAC).

Buddhist underpinnings of ethical conduct include, but are not limited to, the following.

1. Eightfold Path

Ethical or “right” conduct comprises those dimensions of the Eightfold Path that others can observe in one’s behavior: right *Speech*, *Action* and *Livelihood*. Right *Conduct*, however, stems from other dimensions of the Path not subject to direct observation, namely: *Discipline*—consisting of right *Effort*, *Mindfulness*, and *Meditation*; and right *Wisdom*—consisting of *View* and *Thought*.

This traditional tripartite division of the eight dimensions allows for a relatively simple analysis, suggesting that right Conduct is not really possible in the absence of right Discipline and Wisdom. Thus, any attempt to define or practice right Conduct in the absence of, or preceding, the genuine practice-experience of Discipline and Wisdom, is bound to be partial, and incomplete.

2. Bodhisattva Precepts

The observance of right Conduct is also predicated upon the observance of the Sixteen Soto Zen Buddhist, or Bodhisattva, Precepts. The Precepts are so intimate a part of Zen practice that they have traditionally been called the *blood vein* of the ancestral lineage.

The Precepts can be understood and interpreted at many levels. They can be understood as supports for the practice of awakening, as the arena of that practice, and as the expression of awakening itself. Mahayana Precepts can be understood from differing points of view—the relative and the absolute, for example—indicating that the Precepts are never fully accomplished, or that they are always fulfilled. However we interpret them, Zen practice cannot exist separately from basing one’s actions on the sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts.

In order to foster a supportive, harmonious and safe environment for the Sanghas’ benefit, below you will find an outline of the salient and significant ways in which Buddhist teachings guide and inform our community life; and under Conclusions, implications and expectations that follow.

A. THE THREE REFUGES

The Three Refuges are inseparable from the foundation and orientation of our taking up the Zen life; we take refuge in them in light of the ongoing difficulty of living up to the Precepts and other teachings:

1. Taking Refuge in Buddha

We acknowledge the Buddha Nature of all beings, and practice to recover our own. We acknowledge the central role of zazen in this effort. While there are different levels of spiritual and administrative authority within the Sangha, we recognize that fundamentally every being is a manifestation of Buddha Nature. Buddha nature is actualized through right Discipline.

2. Taking Refuge in Dharma

We acknowledge the wisdom of the Buddhist Dharma, and that compassion is the Bodhisattva way of life. It is through the living truth of this Dharma that we embody, express and make accessible the teachings of Zen Buddhism, as conveyed through the lineage of the Soto Zen School by the [STO] founders. Realizing that our understanding and practice of Soto Zen is one of many approaches, we also acknowledge and respect all other genuine expressions of buddha-dharma. Dharma is revealed through right Wisdom.

3. Taking Refuge in Sangha

We acknowledge the crucial supporting role that the [STO] community life has in our practice. As part of taking refuge is the offering of refuge, we aspire to create an inclusive Sangha for all to engage the Bodhisattva Way. We affirm and respect differences and similarities in gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and political belief, as well as physical abilities and appearances. Sangha is realized through right Conduct.

B. THREE PURE PRECEPTS

The Three Pure Precepts are inseparable from Zen practice. They represent the aspiration and way of life of a Bodhisattva, and as such are the starting point for Buddhist ethics.

1. Doing No Harm

Refraining from causing unnecessary or excessive harm to oneself and other beings; to the soil, waters, atmosphere, and the Earth itself; and to the biosphere and ecosystem in general.

2. Doing Only Good

Acting from the loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity of our awakened nature. In our effort to live ethically, we embrace and rely upon the time-honored Mahayana practices of confession, repentance, atonement, and reconciliation.

3. Doing Good for Others

Endeavoring to help to free all beings before oneself. Supporting others in their efforts to discover their Buddha nature. Facilitating this opportunity we recognize the importance of maintaining balance between individual negotiation of the Way, and collective spiritual and institutional needs of Sangha. When perceived conflict arises, the process of ethical resolution is one of "freeing all beings."

C. TEN GRAVE PRECEPTS

The Ten Grave Precepts are inseparable from both the individual Buddha Nature and its actualization in our social relations with each other. They describe the way of life of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, as well as all Sangha members. All followers of Buddhism aspire to the following.

1. Abstaining from willful unnecessary taking of life while cultivating and affirming life.

Expressing intention to live as harmlessly as possible. When understood in its broadest context, not killing can also be understood as not harming, especially not denying the Buddha nature of other sentient beings.

We also acknowledge our role, either directly or in complicity with others, in the killing of other forms of life. As a Sangha, when institutional questions of killing animals, plants and insects arise, we must carefully consider our real needs and Bodhisattva-inspired responsibility to work for the benefit of all beings.

2. Abstaining from taking what is not freely given while cultivating generosity.

Expressing the aspiration to live from a generous heart free from an avaricious mind. At a personal level, avaricious behavior harms the person who steals. On a community level, stealing can harm or even destroy the opportunity and the environment for Zen practice.

Those who handle Sangha funds or other assets also have a special responsibility to take good care of them through due diligence, and avoid their deliberate misuse or misappropriation, both of which are institutional forms of stealing.

In addition, the misuse of authority and status is a form of taking what is not given. Within the complex life of the Sangha, various hierarchical levels of authority and seniority can be determinative. It is particularly important that individuals in positions of trust do not misuse status or authority as a way to achieve special privileges and consideration, or otherwise control or inappropriately influence others.

3. Abstaining from indulging in sexual misconduct while cultivating and honoring the body.

Expressing acceptance that sexuality is as much a part of the arena of practice as any other aspect of our daily lives. Acknowledging and honoring sexuality supports an environment conducive to cultivating mindful and compassionate relationships.

Special care must be taken when people of unequal status or authority wish to enter into an intimate personal relationship. Inappropriate forms of intimate relationships can lead to great confusion and harm. They are considered a misuse of sexuality within the Sangha:

a. Adult-Minor

It is considered a grave misuse of responsibility and sexuality for an adult within the Sangha to engage in sexual behavior with any minor. Full responsibility for avoiding such relationships lies with the adult. This policy applies equally regardless of gender.

b. Teacher-Student

It is considered a misuse of authority, responsibility and sexuality for Sangha Teachers to engage in sexual behavior with Students. This is true independent of which person instigates the relationship. The responsibility falls upon the teacher until and unless a resolution determines otherwise. This policy applies equally regardless of gender.

Particular care must be shown toward a new Student. It requires on average six months to a year for a beginning Student to establish a foundation of practice, let alone to understand the complex nature of inter-relationships within the Sangha.

No doubt some teacher-student relationships are navigated responsibly and blossom into long-term, loving partnerships. But this in itself is not acceptable as rationale to assert that anyone in Sangha, particularly a Teacher, has a right to a consensual relationship with just anyone else. As history has shown, more often than not, Teacher-Student relationships turn out to be detrimental to both partners as well as to the Sangha. Accepting a Teacher position implies a higher responsibility to Sangha, especially to the Student, sometimes at great personal sacrifice.

c. Peer-Peer

It is considered beyond the purview of these guidelines to govern actions of consenting adults beyond the premises of [STO] and its events. Such behavior is covered by Federal, State, and local Municipality laws, ordinances and statutes. However, all members are encouraged to hold themselves and others within the Sangha to a higher standard than simply what the law will allow. When a serial set of short-term relationships becomes apparent Sangha within the Sangha, it will be regarded as predatory, especially if a Teacher, Guest, or Resident is party to the relationships.

d. Harrassment

It is considered key to Sangha integrity to maintain an atmosphere in which any form of intolerance, coercion, or harassment, including especially discrimination on the basis of sex or sexual orientation, has no place. Any insult to the dignity of others is an impediment to spiritual growth, and thus a breach of this social compact.

Harassment usually occurs when one person enjoys some degree of authority over another, even if be more apparent than real. Harassing behavior includes unwanted advances, requests for sexual or other favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a suggestive or intimidating nature.

We also recognize the danger and repulsive nature of forms of harassment that are non-sexual in nature, including those motivated by ideology; envy or jealousy; greed or avarice; race, ethnicity or national origin; class; education; age; and marital status; as well as gender or sexual orientation.

Sexual harassment in any context is reprehensible, especially so in a spiritual community in which people are bound by spiritual interdependence and trust.

Sexual harassment of a Student by the Abbiss/Abbot, Priest or Disciple is a flagrant violation of the foundation of trust on which all such Sangha relationships are predicated. It is also a violation of the trust of other members of the Sangha or party to the relationship in question.

Harassment can also involve other authority figures such as Affiliate Practice Leaders, Seniors and Juniors with assigned to roles and responsibilities within the Sangha. Teachers and others in positions of authority must be especially careful to avoid comments that discriminate on the basis of sex or sexual orientation. However, we acknowledge that leaders sometimes need to discuss matters of sexuality with Sangha members and each other.

4. Abstaining from speaking falsehoods while cultivating and manifesting truth.

Expressing allegiance to the truth of Dharma. While ethical transgressions can involve transgression of any of the Precepts, many would not arise, were there not an element of deceit involved. Lying—to oneself, to another, or to one's community—obscures the nature of reality, and hinders the intention of Zen practice. Within Sangha life, lying can also entail the deliberate withholding of information.

Open and direct communication is essential in our work and practice together. We are each entitled to straightforward, complete information when we request feedback regarding our behavior, standing, or performance within the community. We can expect, upon request, for this to be given by appropriate persons in the spirit of honesty and compassion.

Sangha members should feel that they can explore the Dharma and study the self in an atmosphere of trust. In the collaborative teaching process within the Sangha, personal dialogs will generally be held in confidence. Consultation among teachers regarding matters that are not strictly confidential may from time to time be deemed appropriate. Those engaging in such consultation should make every effort to ensure it is done in a sensitive, fair and respectful manner.

5. Abstaining from selling or indulging intoxicants while cultivating proceeding clearly.

Expressing the value of clear presence and mindfulness, a state of mind that not distorted by intoxicants of any sort. When enough lack of clarity it is all too easy to break the other precepts.

Furthermore, it is our intention for the Sangha environment to support those who are attempting to recover and live without intoxicants.

Alcohol or drug intoxication within the Sangha is usually regarded as inappropriate, may be cause for concern, and possible intervention. When any member of the Sangha is involved in abusive or addictive use of intoxicants, it is important to remember that release from all attachments lies at the heart of Buddhist practice. Because denial is frequently a symptom of addiction, the Sangha is encouraged to help addicted persons recognize their need for help.

6. Abstaining from discussing the faults of others while cultivating seeing one's own faults.

Expressing personal humility and the social effort to foster harmony and understanding. Personal attacks or malicious assertions about Sangha are acts of alienation from oneself and others.

Consequences of slander include self-loathing, pain and divisiveness in the community. Where an intention to slander arises, efforts to understand its roots are an expression of this Precept.

7. Abstaining from praising oneself or slandering others while cultivating self and other as one.

Expressing that rejoicing in one's wholesome qualities and deeds is a time-honored Buddhist practice, but praising oneself or seeking personal gain at the expense of others arises from misunderstanding the interdependent nature of self.

Within the dynamic of Sangha, it is sometimes necessary to criticize the actions of certain individuals or groups. When doing so, one should pay particular attention to one's own motives, to the specific content of what is said, and to whom it is said.

8. Abstaining from begrudging Dharma or materials while cultivating generosity.

Expressing the truism that all positions of authority within Sangha, including Abbess/Abbot, are dedicated to the support of Sangha practice and awakening. Neither the resources of STO nor any position within STO are the possession of any one person.

It is not appropriate for Sangha members, especially Teachers, to use their relationship to STO for personal gain or fame at the expense of the Sangha, or to the detriment of the practice-intention of its members. (Reasonable compensation and dana contributions as outlined in the by-laws of the BOD not indicated here.)

9. Abstaining from indulging anger and hatred while cultivating harmony.

Expressing that harboring ill-will is poisonous for individuals and for Sangha. Even more corrosive is harboring desire for revenge.

Conflict or tension with others, or with decision-making bodies, should be resolved directly if possible, with the parties involved, in a spirit of honesty, humility, and loving-kindness.

10. Abstaining from defaming the Three Treasures while cultivating intimacy with all things.

Expresses that the Three Treasures are inseparable from one another, and from our lives. *Buddha*, insight or awakening in *zazen*, clarifies *Dharma* study, and *Sangha* life. *Dharma* study fosters *Sangha* life, and *Buddha* insight. And *Sangha* enriches *Buddha* insight and *Dharma* study. To neglect or abuse any one of the Three Treasures diminishes or harms the other two.

Acknowledging transgressions, seeking reconciliation, and renewing commitment to the Precepts, is the working of Buddha Nature, and re-establishes a safe place in the Sangha. When Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are completely integrated in practice, the Triple Treasure manifests.

II. ETHICS POLICIES

SILENT THUNDER ORDER

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INTRODUCTION — POLICY CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For most practitioners of Zen, any conclusions regarding personal and social behavior drawn herein from the Ethical Conduct Guidelines will be largely self-evident, a matter of common sense and social skills. However, Sanghas often find the need arises to establish explicit policies for ethical conduct because the details of how relationships play out over time in a vibrant community can become quite complex. And there are those who join the Sangha who are ignorant of the basic Buddhist teachings, whether innocently or willfully, or are simply unwilling to abide by them. Thus, history repeatedly witnesses the development and revision of the rules of conduct (Skt. *Vinaya*; J. *Shing*), for monastics as well as for householders.

Right conduct is manifested, and practiced, within the “three actions” of body, speech and mind. *Mind*, consisting of View and Thought (Wisdom), is not subject to direct observation by others. But actions demonstrated by body and speech are. The fact that one’s speech and action do not always match may be an indication of implicit intent, hidden agendas, or simple confusion.

In any case, it falls to the leadership, consisting of both the BOD and the AAC, to take action when necessary to preserve harmony in the Sangha. Community harmony is a cardinal value of Buddhism in general and Zen in particular. It is the purview of the BOD, working with the AAC, to establish policies governing unacceptable behavior as the need arises.

Both speech and action are widely subject to interpretation, of course. Because of this, Sangha leaders are encouraged to watch for repeat patterns of behavior over time, rather than (over)reacting to single incidents. When patterns of actions become disruptive, leadership must react.

The accompanying Resolution Procedures—Informal and Formal—are offered to structure the process of clarification, negotiation, reconciliation where possible, and final resolution of conflicts and disputes. But some behaviors within the Zen community are traditionally proscribed, while others are encouraged. Some expectations of Sangha (herein understood to mean all Clergy, Members, Residents, Students, and Guests of STO) are outlined herein, but this document is not meant to be regarded as exhaustive.

Policies endorsed by STO regarding ethical conduct within the environments and atmospheres of Affiliate Practice Centers include but are not limited to:

A. COMMITMENT TO SOTO ZEN PRACTICE

It shall be STO policy that its Sangha is committed to the promulgation and propagation of Soto Zen praxis as transmitted by founder Master Dogen and the Matsuoka, Uchiyama and Suzuki lineages. This means all Sangha members must commit to:

1. Following the Schedule

Clergy, Members and Guests—and especially Residents—of the Sangha are expected to strictly follow the schedule of Zen meditation (zazen) to the extent possible. Attendance and diligence in pursuing zazen is the hallmark of any serious Soto Zen practitioner. It is also the main way that leaders inspire and encourage other members of the Sangha, by their example.

Conversely, anyone clearly not following the schedule, appearing to avoid zazen, can become a source of confusion and consternation in the community, which may justifiably wonder why they are present. If any Clergy, Member, Guest, or Resident becomes conspicuous by their absence in the zendo, it will become a cause for concern, and their commitment to zazen will be taken into consideration in any decision made regarding any allegations about unethical conduct. It is not

acceptable to skip scheduled zazen sessions unless one has notified the Practice Leader or Ino with a legitimate reason. It is acceptable to miss zazen sessions when performing functions of service to the Sangha such as Tenzo, Innkeeper, or Leading Teacher obligations during retreat.

2. Practicing Three Minds (Sanshin)

The Three Minds of Zen are *Magnanimous Mind*, *Nurturing Mind*, and *Joyous Mind*. Because these are not necessarily the normal state of mind, it is necessary to practice them with great intention. Joyous Mind will naturally result from cultivation of the others.

Practically speaking, this means it is the obligation of the Sangha to view the behavior of others in the best possible light, giving them the benefit of the doubt, and trusting that their original Buddha Nature is untainted.

It is unacceptable to defame the character of other members of the Sangha, and any such activity will be considered a violation of the individual's compact with STO. However, it is acceptable, and possible, to discuss the behavior of others without discussing their faults. This is best taken up with the Abbess/Abbot, e.g. in private interview (*Dokusan*).

3. Taking Good Care of the Practice Place

All Sangha members are expected to assume personal responsibility for the care and upkeep of the practice place to the best of their ability. Zen inculcates a do-it-yourself mentality and mutual ownership of the environment. When and where there is a problem with the facility or grounds that is beyond one's ability to manage, it should be brought to the attention of the leadership in an appropriate manner and/or forum.

This attitude encompasses the visual impression of the interior and exterior, suggesting that clutter, litter, trash and other eyesores be removed on sight. It also means that primacy shall be given to the quiet and peaceful atmosphere conducive to Zen meditation whenever there are any members doing zazen. We support the ideal of a 24x7 open zendo policy, so that members may practice zazen at any time, day or night.

It is acceptable to make a reasonable amount of noise in the execution of one's responsibilities, even if zazen is in session and actions cannot be postponed. It is unacceptable to make unnecessary noise or to create any other kind of needless distraction, especially while zazen is in session.

B. COMMITMENT TO PRECEPTS

It shall be the policy of STO to reinforce the primacy of the Soto Zen Buddhist Precepts, the mother of which is Do No Harm. All other precepts are variations or versions of this for various contingencies. The practice of the Three Pure Precepts is the thread (sutra) running through these guidelines and policies. The third of the Pure Precepts captures the essence of Sangha practice, encouraging all to Do Good for Others. The Ten Grave Precepts relate directly to specific behaviors. Policies of STO and its Affiliates include:

1. Affirming Life

Protecting the wellbeing of all Sangha members and sentient beings within the grounds and buildings of our practice centers. We encourage practicing a healthy lifestyle, e.g. we serve vegetarian meals as our standard fare for retreats.

2. Being Giving

Fostering an atmosphere of generosity, openness and transparency with regards to assets— tangible or intangible—of Sangha and Practice Centers. We encourage perfecting the practice of dana, in the form of personal commitment, and psychological as well as material support, for the Sangha.

3. Honoring the Body

Acknowledging sexuality and other forms of treatment of the body of self and others as being subject to abuse, and that Sangha relationships are based on trust. We encourage all to strictly adhere to and respect the boundaries between individuals, especially the Teacher-Student relationship and age-appropriate discretion. Honoring the body also means honoring the mind. We encourage avoiding harassment or intimidation of any sort in inter-Sangha relationships.

4. Manifesting Truth

Inculcating a spirit of honesty and full disclosure in all transactions regarding the Sangha in the form of individuals and governing bodies, investigating the non-differentiated form of *dharma*. We encourage investigating the ultimate truth of Dharma, while perfecting the skillful means of not deceiving others.

5. Proceeding Clearly

Practicing moderation in indulgence of any and all intoxicating substances whether addictive or not. Intoxication also applies to non-substantive, mental and emotional pleasure-seeking such as pursuing fame and gain, wealth and power, as well as prestige and status within the Sangha. We encourage withdrawing from intoxication, including that of the senses and the aggregates of clinging.

6. Seeing One's Own Faults

Actualizing the magnanimous and self-reflective mindset of *buddha*, which reflects all insidious doubt and suspicion back upon the self. We encourage seeing what is good about other Sangha members, and to regard any negative behavior as a symptom of their personal form of suffering.

7. Treating Self and Other as One

Manifesting the nurturing and forgiving mindset of *sangha*, the true family that finds its provenance in the original Order. We encourage saying what is good about other Sangha members, refraining from harsh or undue criticism. While we recognize unique differences between us we remember the dictum that "the most we can say is not-two."

8. Sharing Generously

Recognizing that begrudging is the antithesis of sharing, the Dharma assets include presence, information, and merit that is immaculate between the giver and receiver, as well as material goods and services. We encourage sharing generously that which others give and receive freely and willingly. Finding resistance, we are under no obligation to share; they are under no obligation to receive.

9. Actualizing Harmony

Eradicating the three poisons of clinging/greed, anger/hatred and infatuation/delusion from the presence we bring to the Sangha. We encourage drinking deeply from the well of the community, and we should do everything in our power to avoid poisoning it. Its waters may be flavorless, but they are the life-blood of Buddhism.

10. Knowing Intimacy with All Things

Embracing the intimacy without defilement that is dropping off bodymind without relying on anything. When Buddha, Dharma and Sangha all come together in a unified way, this is the true and simple color of true practice, of the true mind of faith; of the true body of faith. We encourage entering into, accepting and maintaining Sangha practice, without relying on it.

III. SANGHA COMMITMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The rules of conduct (Skt. *Vinaya*) for the original Buddhist Order in India were apparently compiled incrementally, as incidents occurred and rules had to be instituted. As the monastic tradition spread through China and Japan, the regulations (J. *Shing*) were updated to meet new situations and to adapt to differing cultural norms. Now we are in a similar situation, as Soto Zen is becoming mainstream in America, largely as a lay practice, rather than monastic.

As in the countries and cultures of origin, the scope and application probably followed the arising of conflict, complaints, and grievances amongst the Sangha. People were people then, and are still today. Most of the policies and context contained in this document come from similar references published by other American Zen organizations. The rest is fleshed out based on experience at affiliated Zen centers.

Careful examination of this record of activity at local and remote practice centers reveals certain implications for behavior within the unique context of the Sangha. Behaviors that may be acceptable—even laudable—in other groups may not have their intended consequences. Competing rather than cooperating will not likely result in a promotion, for example. Outshining everyone in Dharma dialog may reveal one's ignorance rather than one's insight. While this kind of behavior does not rise to the level of lying or stealing, perhaps, it draws undue attention to oneself and drains the positive energy of the Sangha. In this way it can be a form of dishonesty and thievery.

Practice within Sangha is fraught with unintended consequences, especially when we attempt to graft successful coping strategies from other areas of our life, such as the home, the office, and recreation. Most of the standards for appropriate Sangha behavior amount to simple common sense, ordinary politeness, and development of people skills.

A Zen Sangha is first and foremost a learning community led by a disciple-teacher group, and intended to support a focus on buddha-dharma. In instances of distraction from that focus and divisiveness, emphasis should always reside in respectful disagreement, and the peaceful resolution of differences. It is absolutely prohibited to intentionally foster disharmony in the Sangha, for any reason. Those who are unwilling or unable to make a serious commitment to these social aspects of Zen practice should not waste their time further, not to mention that of the Sangha.

Examples listed below do not necessarily represent potential policies, but are offered for consideration. They are not placed in a hierarchy because they have no relative weight in terms of importance, urgency or priority. They are cases of behavior illustrating real-world situations that reveal the mind through the actions of mouth and body. Some of them do not readily fit under speech or body exclusively, as speech and action are often intricately intertwined, succinctly captured in the popular vernacular as *body language*. As we chant in the Repentances, we avow our past harmful karma through actions born of body, mouth and mind.

A. LOVING SPEECH

A slip of the tongue is difficult to avoid at times. Sanghas practice standards of discourse and dialog in which etiquette and respect for others are much more critical than in casual conversation.

Questioning

During or after a Dharma dialog, questions are typically taken, and answers given, within the constraints of time available. Usually, a lively exchange of ideas is encouraged. Guests, Sangha

members and Juniors should defer to Seniors in resolving any dispute or confusion that arises in discussion.

It is acceptable to question, or even challenge, any teaching for the sake of clarification, if done respectfully. It is not acceptable to argue or debate. Preaching or proselytizing dogmas and beliefs, in the guise of discussing spiritual teachings, is particularly offensive.

Lecturing

Sangha attending Dharma dialog at a Zen center came to listen to the Guiding Teacher or Guest Speaker. Teachers and guest speakers are practicing charity by preparing and giving talks and other presentations of buddha-dharma.

It is acceptable to address the speaker for clarification of some point that may conflict with or contradict your understanding garnered elsewhere. It is not acceptable to address the audience, sharing with them your own view of the point being made.

Criticizing

Sangha members should appreciate the stewardship, management and care of the practice place. All areas of legitimate concern. No one sees the extent of the effort that goes on behind the scenes. The responsibility for taking care of the practice place is shared by all members of the Sangha, but its purview lies directly with the BOD.

It is acceptable to raise such issues in the appropriate forum (BOD), or to the appropriate person. If you do not know who the right person or forum is, ask. It is not acceptable to complain repeatedly to others about such things. When presenting a problem, wrap it in a solution.

Respecting Confidentiality

Many situations in Sangha practice call for confidentiality, both one-on-one transactions and in groups. These include Dokusan; practice discussion; BOD meetings; AAC meetings; even casual conversation and email messages can be sensitive. While Priest-Student discussions may not qualify as protected, Teachers should not disclose information they receive in dokusan or practice discussion. This is especially true when confidentiality is requested and agreed to, unless serious harm may result to individuals or to the Sangha if the information is not disclosed. Even when there is no specific request for confidentiality, such information is not to be shared casually under any circumstances by either of the people involved in the conversation.

It is acceptable to share confidential information under extraordinary circumstances or by permission. It is not acceptable to do otherwise, especially for purposes of gain, or malicious gossip.

Keeping Secrets

Secrets are fertile ground for the three poisons of greed, anger and delusion. But they don't ultimately work. Best-kept secrets fulfill the adages that the truth will out, and nothing is so obvious as that which is hidden. Often, a hidden agenda can be seen in one's body language. In some cases, a secret can be a skillful means of mitigating suffering. In others, a great source of suffering. It is particularly important that finances, decision-making structure, and minutes of major decision-making bodies (BOD) be made available to Sangha in accessible and understandable form.

It is acceptable to limit the dissemination of information on a need-to-know basis, particularly if the information is incomplete, or sensitive enough to embarrass a member of Sangha. It is not acceptable to deliberately withhold information that has substantial relevance to the issues under discussion, or that is of significant import to the general welfare of the Sangha.

Naysaying

In the spirit of non-possessiveness, decision-making bodies such as the BOD and its committees, advisory councils, et cetera, should endeavor to make decisions together in a cooperative and accountable manner, and with a wholehearted effort to consider all points of view.

It is acceptable in these forums to respectfully disagree with proposals and policies being discussed. It is not acceptable to occupy a preconceived position, e.g. playing the role of naysayer, no matter the item under discussion. Knee-jerk hypercriticism wastes the time of other Sangha BOD members.

Fomenting Factionalism

Sanghas can become divided, and divisive, over issues and concerns not within members' discretion. The style of teaching, protocols of service, even the apparent relative status of Priests and Disciples can become wedge issues in service of creating a separate following. Many people these days have prior experience, so it is natural that some members question such things from time to time.

Such concerns, however, are legitimately the province of a Disciple, one who has entered into the first formal stage of training under the supervision of the Guiding Teacher. Teaching and service protocols are the bailiwick of the Abbess/Abbot and Advisory Council. If something truly disturbs, take it up with them. But Zen is not designed to please everyone. Be prepared to live with whatever disposition ensues. If you find yourself obsessing, or becoming an inveterate critic, it may be time to move on to another Sangha.

It is often around such trivial distractions that interpersonal criticism arises, and factions form. Loyalty to those who happen to agree with you, and enmity towards those who do not, develop. As Master Dogen reminds us, one has to be "deaf and blind to be worthy of being head of the household." Meaning that most of this should roll off like the proverbial duck-riding water.

It is acceptable to question the form and organization of teaching offered to the Sangha, to a reasonable degree. It is not acceptable and detrimental to Sangha harmony to undermine their confidence in the teaching leadership and training staff.

B. HONORING THE BODY

Ch'an Master Lung-Ya said: In this life save the body, it is the fruit of many lives. Saving the body can mean practicing good health and hygiene, but also not misusing one's own body or that of another. Of course, in Zen mind and body cannot separate, so we aspire to honor the body-mind of buddha-nature. The body of the Sangha, as well as that of the practice place, is under our care as well.

Leaving no Traces

An Old Buddha used to say: I like to keep it empty around here. Sanghas practice cleaning as a matter of course, especially during retreats, but also on a daily basis. Nonetheless, various items are often left scattered about after a meeting, resulting in cluttering the visual space. This can be detrimental to the attention of the Sangha. The zendo, in particular, should always appear as if no one has been occupying it. The ultimate responsibility lies with the Facility Committee of the BOD, but all Sangha members should assume responsibility for cleaning up after themselves in a public space.

It is acceptable to accumulate a reasonable amount of clutter from time to time, in common areas as well as in closed rooms and offices. It is not acceptable to collect and store unused items, particularly in shared areas. It is most egregious when junk and clutter hinder the aisles, and access to storage areas.

Furnishing

The furnishings of a Sangha practice center are subject to the rising tide of clutter, as well as other problems. Members often offer to donate furnishings that they no longer need at home, resulting in the space becoming a hodgepodge of eyesores and navigational barriers. For this reason the BOD and Abbot/Abbess confer on furnishings and control their acquisition based on design intent of space utilization. This is always evolving, but is not at the discretion of any member to arrange as they see fit.

It is acceptable to offer furniture and furnishings, through proper channels; if approved, the item may be accepted and installed in the space. It is not acceptable to build or install furniture, decorative furnishings, or to build such items for use without express, advance permission. It is especially irresponsible to arbitrarily reposition existing furnishings without permission, and not put them back.

Socializing

Most of us do not belong to many truly harmonious groups that practice mutual respect, so a Sangha can seem a very welcoming place. But a practice center Sangha is not primarily oriented to community in the social sense. The *raison d'être* for a Sangha is to support its members in their practice of zazen and study of buddha-dharma. It is not intended as a place to recruit friends, business colleagues, potential lovers or spouses.

It is acceptable to attend for purposes of finding a support group of like-minded people. And for them to welcome you to the community. It is not acceptable to attend only or mainly for the purpose of social engagement, and having a forum in which to express one's views or engage in idle chatter.

Dressing

Dress code varies widely from Sangha to Sangha. Most modes of dress at Zen centers lean toward dark and earth tones, such as black, brown, and greys, which are inoffensive. Moderation is the key and clothing choice is given a wide latitude in Zen circles, but conformity is good. In business, the saying is "I would love to listen to what you are saying, but your clothing is speaking too loudly."

Standards follow social norms of modesty and decency, e.g. eschewing overly revealing, skimpy outfits, beachwear, gaudy and clashing colors, including graphic message teeshirts and sweatshirts. These standards are meant to mitigate the effect that such clothing has on the perception of the Sangha, causing them to think about something they should not have to think about. Clothing is signal, and we encourage all to turn down the volume.

When leading a group in sitting zazen or especially conducting service, Priests and Disciples are expected to dress the part, wearing reasonably comfortable but suitably professional garb and vestments. This also applies to any member opening the door for others to join in zazen in the zendo. One slogan suggestion: Got a key? Wear the Gi!

It is acceptable to wear comfortable clothing to practice zazen with the Sangha. It is not acceptable to distract them by drawing undue attention to your outfit.

Offending

Presence within and effect upon Sangha is affected by speech and action, to a lesser degree by appearance, and even smell. Practitioners of zazen commonly experience an enhancement of their sensory sensitivity at some point in the process. Cleanliness and cleaning (*J. soji*) includes not only attention to the environment, but to personal hygiene as well. For example, wearing clean socks in the zendo, rather than going barefoot, protects the carpet from accumulating body oil and soil. Going barefoot outside or in socks and then returning to the zendo compounds the problem. Strongly scented deodorants and perfumes can offend and even nauseate others.

It is acceptable to practice a reasonable, healthy degree of personal hygiene in Sangha. It is not acceptable to allow your presence to become offensive to others.

Investing Emotion

In many forms of social and professional interaction, including working at the office or at home, there arises a phenomenon that for lack of a better term might be called "emotional debt." This is the underappreciated and overworked syndrome that often appears in relationships, including those in Sangha. Such behaviors as purchasing and providing and paying for paper goods, flowers, soaps and other necessary staples for maintaining the practice place may fall to individuals, particularly Tenants and Residents, to step up and take care of them. This behind-the-scenes activity may go unnoticed and unappreciated by the rest of the Sangha. Emotional debt may accumulate.

It is acceptable to perform such actions of dana or "hidden virtue" on behalf of the Sangha. It is not acceptable to feel unappreciated, or to harbor resentment over not being sufficiently appreciated. If this develops, simply submit all receipts to the BOD for reimbursement, or cease performing the service. Someone else will notice and step up to the plate. This is also generosity.

Substituting for Practice

Clergy in particular, but all other members of Sangha as well, are subject to a syndrome that may be called the *substitution effect*. When one takes on additional duties as a Disciple or Priest, it may gradually effect the practice of Zen, especially zazen. For example, it may result in attending only when one is scheduled to lead the session, rather than simply to sit. This contradicts the zazen focus of Sangha, and the dictum that one's greatest contribution is one's presence. Taking on a task in service to Sangha, such as sitting on the BOD or helping with outreach, is subject to the same syndrome.

It is acceptable to take on tasks and positions of service to the Sangha that are consonant with one's abilities and temperament. The Sangha needs all the help it can get. It is not acceptable to assume that one's role in Sangha is limited to those tasks or that position, or to allow those functions to take the place of one's personal commitment to practice, particularly zazen. It should be self-evident that one's ownership of the role, however rewarding, is impermanent and subject to rotation.

Consuming

Like any other public entity, a Sangha practice center should be operated as efficiently as possible. This applies to the consumption of energy, water, and such material items as paper goods. There are many ideas about how to best manage this, some of which may make sense, but others that represent false economies. Any radical change in procedures requires approval of the BOD.

Such simple things as turning off lights, fans, and air conditioning, when the space is unoccupied, and keeping settings at a moderate level of comfort, have a multiplier effect in terms of savings than when we do the same at home. Taking care to take brief showers, and efficient methods of dishwashing are other examples. All should strive for moderation.

It is acceptable to control one's own use of the assets of the Sangha center in sensible ways to achieve savings in consumption. It is not acceptable to dictate that others must use the facilities in a way that one devises, however well-intended. The supposed economy may turn out to be false.

Drinking and Drugging

When any member of the Sangha is involved in abusive or addictive use of intoxicants, it is cause for great concern. The freedom found in Zen is not license to flout the law. The Zen person has no problem following the sidewalks, as Matsuoka Roshi would say.

Anyone who engages in excessive or clandestine indulgence of drugs, alcohol, or any other addictive or controlled substance on the premises without the knowledge and express consent of the Sangha leadership, exhibits a profound lack of understanding of Zen, contempt for Sangha, a cavalier lack of concern for and willingness to jeopardize the legal status of the center's charter as a 501c3.

It is acceptable to engage in moderate consumption of legal intoxicants when expressly approved by the BOD and AAC on special occasions, events, and holidays. It is not acceptable to take this decision into your own hands. It is reprehensible to threaten the Sangha by breaking the law.

Seducing

Sexuality is embraced as part of karmic consciousness, and therefore a respected and cherished avenue for developing a deeper understanding of buddha-dharma. It has, however, been recognized historically as a potential threat to harmony in the Sangha, from the beginning of the original Order. This partially explains the predominance of celibacy in the arc of Buddhist monastic practice.

Ours is a lay practice, which embraces the household and family life, including sexuality and procreation, as a normal and complex dimension of Zen practice for everyone. However, this embrace does not extend to the misuse of sexuality as outlined in the prohibitions against age-inappropriate and teacher-student boundary-crossing behavior.

It is especially important for Priests and Disciples, and any member of the Sangha who enjoys a position of responsibility and respect, to avoid even the appearance of impropriety. This is especially germane in the welcoming and treatment of newcomers, who may be overly impressed by the appearance of status within the community. Some newcomers are in vulnerable condition, having lost a loved one or spouse, and looking for a way to deal with grief and loneliness. This is one of the reasons minimum grace periods of six months to a year are widely observed in Zen communities, before approaching another for dating purposes.

It is acceptable to engage Sangha members for the sake of the dharma, in friendly and warm ways that may be difficult for them to distinguish from a personal interest. It is not acceptable to use the visibility and apparent respect accorded a position of honor in the Sangha to seduce Sangha members or newcomers one finds attractive. For a Priest to engage in such unbecoming conduct is predatory.

Stalking

Stalking is illegal behavior in most situation, but it may go unrecognized under the guise of friendship or supposed admiration, even expressed as reverence. Unwanted familiarity and uninvited appearances in the private zone of Sangha members is expressly forbidden, however lofty the motive.

It is acceptable to form friendly relationships within the Sangha. It is not acceptable to presume upon the good will of Sangha members to press an agenda of closeness that is not shared by both parties.

Violence

Needless to say, all forms of willful or intentional violence against another Sangha member, or oneself, constitute grounds for removal from the Sangha, and probable prosecution. Physical violence and abusive behavior (which includes physical threats, extreme displays of anger and maliciousness) are a kind of "killing" according to Buddhism. In keeping with the aspiration of harmlessness, all firearms and other weapons designed principally for taking life have no place within Zen practice places. The exception would be for purposes of martial arts demonstrations, but they would not be allowed to be stored on-site.

It is acceptable to embrace violence as part of Nature, and to resort to it in defense of life and safety or the Sangha. It is not acceptable to use it to exert one's will, or to achieve selfish goals.

IV. CONFLICT RESOLUTION

SILENT THUNDER ORDER

Revision 120627

A. INTRODUCTION

Our aspiration is to ensure that life within the Sangha supports our Zen practice and Bodhisattva intention. The Bodhisattva path is our heartfelt response to *dukkha*, the inexorable change that is built into existence. This seemingly unsatisfactory quality of life—that what we want to change we cannot; and what we don't want to change inevitably does—leads to human suffering.

As the Great Wisdom Perfection Sutra reminds us, “given emptiness, no suffering, no end of suffering.” Natural suffering of aging, sickness and death is unavoidable, and necessary. But unnecessary, self-inflicted suffering—and especially suffering inflicted upon others—can come to an end. Cessation of suffering comes about through wholehearted dedication to the training outlined in the Eightfold Path.

The establishment of a grievance process is an attempt to translate that aspiration into communal wisdom. Furthermore, avoidance of conflict and resolution is a condition for additional suffering. In fostering inclusiveness in Sangha, it is essential that we encourage open, ongoing communication among all Sangha members. Any ethical concerns or conflicts which arise should be fully heard and addressed by Sangha leadership in an appropriate forum.

Historically the most familiar forms of conflict calling for resolution have arisen around sexual indiscretion, and financial impropriety. A third, and likely far more common (but less salacious) category of conflict receiving less attention and publicity, revolves around issues of governance and leadership. This usually manifests as a divisive debate over such issues as qualifications to teach, competition for succession, and can devolve into factional infighting, both on the Board of Directors (BOD) and behind the scenes. Campaigns of character assassination through rumor and innuendo, clandestine meetings of factions with hidden agendas, are all-too-common violations of the Precepts. This, too, is human suffering.

Grievance procedure brings transparency to these areas so that there is an open channel to resolution, and there can be no excuse for back-channel maneuvering. Along with the policy of following sunshine laws for open meetings, one streamlined grievance process is offered for all areas of potential misconduct:

1. Social Misconduct

Social misconduct is the broadest and least specific category of behavior that can disrupt harmony in the Sangha. It can range from general prickliness and criticism of others to a vindictive vendetta against an imagined slight. Such behavioral symptoms may be indicative of a social disorder.

As mentioned in Ethical Conduct Guidelines, forms of harassment can be other sexual in nature. One may also bring a grievance if someone's behavior substantially interferes with one's spiritual practice, creates an offensive environment, or intimidates in any way, especially if clearly intentional.

2. Political Misconduct

A Sangha is not a polity, and a Zen center is not a political organization. Generally, politics, whether of the academic, business, or government variety, has no place in a Sangha. We have checks and balances without forming factions.

While this area of behavior may seem to come under the purview of the Teachers—Abbess/Abbot or guiding teacher, and/or their advisory council (AAC)—the BOD, as the only legally-constituted governing body, must establish policies concerning these kinds of conflicts and be prepared to hear and reconcile any such grievance that arises. The Abbot/Abbes has no such powers from a legal perspective, and may be forced to personally bring a grievance, when all else has failed.

3. Financial Misconduct

While most Sanghas do not have the luxury of significant financial assets to arouse concern that there may be some impropriety in how they are being handled, even in small communities avarice will occasionally raise its ugly head. And while we would hope that Zen practice would tend to mitigate greed of this sort, sadly it is not always the case. Thus, we have a policy of transparency, in that the books relating to the operation of the Sangha and its assets and liabilities are open to the BOD and any member who wishes to review them. Periodic financial reports are made to the Sangha as well as to the BOD. Any Sangha member who suspects, or has evidence, that any impropriety is being committed is encouraged to petition the BOD for a hearing and review, and if necessary, bring a grievance against the alleged offender.

4. Sexual Misconduct

Sexual misconduct is a bit more obvious; social mores and norms tend to define it more clearly than political or ideological differences. Inappropriate sexual conduct is proscribed outright, and if accompanied by a threat to one's continued involvement with the Sangha (e.g. maintaining membership, partaking in *Dokusan*, attending *Sesshin*, etc.), even more so.

The aggrieved is encouraged to bring a grievance against the perpetrator. An allegation of sexual harassment can be resolved, if possible, directly by the individuals involved; through the Abbess/Abbot and/or AAC; or through the BOD via the grievance procedure set forth below.

B. SUMMATION

Thus, when conflict, grievance, substantial dissonance, or violation of the Precepts arises in Sangha relationships, it is essential to attend to it fully. Personally, this involves waking up to our own contribution to the suffering in these situations—through understanding our reactions, emotions and attachments. Interpersonally, this involves taking the time to discuss the conflict with the other parties involved—in an attempt to clarify the actual causes, conditions, feelings and responses that come together in the situation.

What follows are guidelines and procedures for resolving conflicts and transgressions within the Sangha. It is our hope that such resolutions take the form of reconciliation between oneself and others. Whenever possible, disputes and disagreements should be resolved informally and directly between the people involved. There are many ways, including normal administrative and Sangha channels, that members may attempt informal resolution and reconciliation. In this document we offer some suggestions and basic guidelines for that preferred outcome.

We recognize that for certain grievances, informal resolution may not be possible. In this case we offer formal procedures, available through the Grievance Committee of the BOD, to resolve such situations. These can be used to resolve disputes concerning administrative decisions or actions, and for addressing perceived misconduct of Sangha members.

V. INFORMAL RESOLUTION

SILENT THUNDER ORDER

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INTRODUCTION

Although no fixed procedures for informal conflict resolution exist, the suggestions and procedures that follow are intended to give all persons involved in a dispute a chance to be fully heard, in an atmosphere of respect and kindness that reaffirms that our differences are not fundamental. However, if informal resolution is not possible, formal resolution to the difficulty should be sought.

A. Stating the Actual

A crucial aspect of conflict resolution, as in Buddhist practice itself, is discriminating between interpretations and opinions of an event, and how the event is personally experienced. In part, this means not making general statements, but rather sticking to the particulars of actual situations, and the emotions experienced. It is extremely difficult to have mutual understanding, when discussion remains at the level of interpretation and generalization.

B. Being Heard

It is important that everyone be given an opportunity to be fully heard. This means that everyone be given a chance to recount how they remember the history of a conflict, to state their feelings regarding the conflict, and to explain the goals they have for its resolution. Such statements should be neither defensive nor critical, since both approaches tend to preclude deeper mutual understanding. Much conflict arises and is perpetuated through a lack of mutual understanding. Taking calm, deliberate, and adequate time to listen to each other is often all that is needed for resolution.

C. Restating What Was Heard

To insure that everyone understands one another, it is useful for each party to briefly restate what the other has said, highlighting the main points. The other party then says whether the restatement is complete and accurate, and makes corrections.

D. Confession

Resolution and reconciliation is greatly facilitated if everyone involved reflects on how they may have contributed to a conflict, and then explains this to the other party. Even when one person is primarily responsible, self-reflection, confession, and apology on everyone's part can provide a safer, more trusting, and understanding atmosphere for everyone to be truthful.

E. Facilitation

It is often useful to invite one or more neutral witnesses or mediators to take part in a session of conflict resolution. Such a person may simply be a silent witness, providing a sense of calm and presence, or may be an active mediator, who helps ensure that each person is given uninterrupted opportunities to speak. This person might also point out the difference between statements of opinion and interpretation, and direct statements of how an event or feeling is actually experienced. Invited facilitators can be anyone whom both parties respect; e.g., friends, neutral acquaintances, practice leaders, directors, members of the BOD or AAC, or people within or outside the Sangha who are trained in mediation.

F. Seeking Advice

In addition to or instead of inviting a facilitator to participate, it can be useful to seek advice for working informally with a conflict. Such advice can be received from friends, practice leaders and members of the BOD and AAC.

VI. FORMAL RESOLUTION

SILENT THUNDER ORDER

Revision 120627

INTRODUCTION

This procedure applies to grievances against: Abbess/Abbot (or Acting); Novice or Transmitted Priest; Senior Teacher or Disciple; BOD member; Affiliate Practice Leader; Sangha Member; or Guest; concerning alleged ethical violation or violations. The BOD shall, by a majority vote of the entire BOD, designate a standing Formal Grievance Committee (FGC) consisting of three BOD members. The FGC shall serve at the pleasure of the BOD. The alternate members of the Committee shall be three other BOD members, any of whom may be designated by the President of the BOD to serve in the place of a Committee member who is disqualified, or otherwise unable to serve. A quorum of the Committee shall consist of two members.

A. COMPLAINT; ACTION BY GRIEVANCE COMMITTEE

Any member may submit a written complaint directly to the FGC or through the BOD or any individual BOD Member. The Committee shall afford the complainant, and the person complained of, the opportunity to meet with the Committee. The Committee may also consider such additional evidence, and conduct such additional investigation, as it deems warranted under the circumstances.

The Committee may dismiss the complaint without further action if it determines either:

1. There is insufficient evidence of the truth of the allegations to warrant the complaint's referral to the full BOD for consideration
2. Even if the allegations in the complaint were true, no sanction against the person complained of would be appropriate.

Otherwise, the Committee shall refer the complaint to the BOD without determining its merits.

B. ACTION BY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Upon the Committee's referral of a complaint to the BOD, or upon the Board's determination to consider a complaint as set forth below, the BOD shall meet to consider the complaint. The complainant and the person complained of shall have the opportunity to meet with the BOD. The BOD may also consider such additional evidence and conduct such additional investigation as it deems warranted under the circumstances.

The BOD shall then determine the merits of the complaint. If the BOD finds that a complaint has merit and that sanctions against the person complained of are appropriate, the Board shall have the authority to impose the following sanctions:

1. Private reprimand
2. Public reprimand or censure
3. Suspension from duties of office for up to one year
4. In the case of a person other than the Abbess/Abbot, removal from office
5. In the case of the Abbess/Abbot
 - a. Recommendation that a corporate meeting of the Members remove from office
 - b. Suspension from office pending a vote of the Members regarding removal

The affirmative vote of two-thirds of the members of the BOD shall be required to suspend or remove a person from office, or to put the question of removing the Abbess/Abbot from office to a vote of the Members at a corporate meeting. The BOD may also consider a complaint either:

1. Without preliminary action by the FGC
2. Despite the FGC prior dismissal of the complaint.

In addition, the BOD may, on its own motion, investigate the conduct of any person and act without the submission of a complaint.

C. DISQUALIFICATION FOR INTEREST

No BOD member shall participate, as a member of the FGC or as a member of the full BOD, in a proceeding under this grievance procedure if any of the following:

1. Such BOD Member is the complainant or the person complained of
2. If the BOD Member's personal relationship with the complainant or the person complained of would significantly affect the BOD Member's judgment regarding the matter
3. If for any other reason the BOD Member would not be able to render an impartial judgment regarding the matter

A BOD Member shall disqualify himself or herself if the provisions of the preceding sentence apply. Likewise a majority of the BOD, acting without the participation of the BOD Member in question, shall have the right to determine whether said BOD Member is qualified to participate in a grievance proceeding. However, the provisions of this paragraph shall not apply if their application would result in there being an insufficient number of BOD Members qualified to act under this grievance procedure.