



# SFM NEWSLETTER

February 2019

## KATHINA SUCCESS!!

First off, the SFM Board would like to thank everyone who contributed to and participated in various ways for a successful Celebration of the Kathina at the temple last year. Generous contributions and donations resulted in total of \$26,465.03 (net). As always, the energy and dedication of our devotees and friends will be the cornerstone of the continued success of the SFM.



Great turnout at our 1<sup>st</sup> Kathina.

With this February newsletter, we intend to share status of the Sarasota Forest Monastery (SFM) and planned activities for the year.

## MONASTERY BUILDING CONSTRUCTION

Preliminary estimates to construct the Monastery on the Stewart Street property as planned are on the order of \$600,000.

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*Environmental and site preparation activities (including permitting) that need to precede any building constructions (including Kutis) are expected to be about \$400,000. Our current budget of under \$200,000 does not permit us to take on that challenge at this point.*

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While continuing our fundraising activities, we intend to delay construction work until sufficient funds are raised. Of note, there will be platforms in the wooded area for meditation by the Monks. We are hopeful that we will reach our goal but do not want to start activities until we are on a strong financial footing. We intend to discuss our plans to delay the construction with the county while keeping the permits they already approved.

In terms of the Monks' residency, we're leaning towards purchasing the 520 Lewis Street property. We are in the process of reviewing background information. We understand that, under the forest tradition, the Monks' residence should be serene at all times and should not be used for gatherings, etc. As such, we are discussing how we make sure that the Monks' independence and reverence are honored while we perform our duties, including food offerings.

## Resident Monk(s) for the SFM

Bhante Thiep's decision to leave the SFM for an indefinite period was somewhat unexpected. Bhante, who practiced high-end Buddhist doctrines intensely, has been an ardent leader of the SFM. We all know the sleepless nights he spent studying Thripitaka and meditating. We also appreciate how well he conducted Dhamma discussions with us. While guiding us laypeople, it is not a secret how tirelessly the Monks of the Forest Tradition practice Buddhist doctrine to achieve the ultimate goal of Nibbana. So, with all due respect, we recognize Bhante's decision to move on where he can fully focus on the four Noble Truths along with Samma Sathi and Samma Samadhi. Thank you, Bhante, for your unwavering kindness to us and dedicated service to the SFM!

In terms of finding a resident monk(s) and/or an Abbot, we are looking into both short-term and long-term solutions. Obviously, our objective is to find a monk(s) who follows the Buddhist Forest Tradition along with the applicable Vinaya codes. Other qualities we are looking for include a scholar on Buddhist teaching/discourses, fluent in sermons, and one who can effectively guide us through meditation practices. Yes, those are very high goals but we believe all our devotees deserve the best. Bhante Thiep emphasized several times the importance of finding the 'right' monk/abbot.

As for the short-term, we would like to have (visiting) monks who would respect the codes of forest traditions to come and stay on for shorter durations to conduct sermons, practice, and provide some guidance to lay practitioners. Please note that these are temporary stays. In this regard, we have been exploring possible such visits with some monks in Florida, including monks visiting the US from Thailand and Sri Lanka for short-term missionary work and meditation retreats, and those who live in other states. SFM has been fortunate to have forest monks coming to visit over the past several years including Phra David from Dhammasala Forest Monastery in Michigan, Phra Robert from Forest Dhamma Monastery in Virginia, Bhante Thiep from North Carolina, and Phra Ron from a monastery in San Diego. In addition, during 2018, SFM was been blessed with visits from several senior Ajahns (teachers) including Luang Por Tong-In from Thailand, Tan Chao Khun from North Carolina and Tan Chao Khun from Kissimmee. Visits from all of the venerable monks have helped to inspire and uplift the community, to provide cherished opportunities to hear the Dhamma and practice with the example of masters.

In terms of ongoing efforts to invite monastics to come stay, SFM board members and other lay supporters have continued to network with other monasteries. Matt has visited several monasteries here in the US over the past year and discussed the current status of SFM with monks and lay supporters at various temples, including Temple Forest Monastery in New Hampshire. (Temple Forest Monastery is monastery in the Thai forest tradition, Ajahn Chah lineage.) Monks from Temple Forest Monastery offered encouragement for the ongoing efforts for Sarasota Forest Monastery's project. SFM has formally invited the monks to come visit, although they are currently in the middle of their winter retreat. Another lay supporter from Tallahassee (Alex) recently also successfully made contact with Forest Dhamma monastery in Virginia with an open invitation to the monks staying there. In addition, Wick has been in touch with some monks, including those in Florida and Forest Tradition monks in Sri Lanka. For those who may not know, Forest Tradition prevails primarily in

Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Burma with limited practice in India; monks from those countries maintain good inter-monastery (between countries) relationships. In the meantime, we have initiated a fund to support the visiting Monks' travel, primarily within US. SFM welcomes any donations to travel fund for visiting monks.

John and Daeng Raab, while here in Florida and now in Thailand, have been working tirelessly to identify a long-term solution. There have been visits to both Wat Metta in San Diego ([www.WatMetta.org](http://www.WatMetta.org)) and Wat Abhayagiri ([www.abhayagiri.org](http://www.abhayagiri.org)) in Redwood Valley, California. Invitations to both Ajahn Geoff at Wat Metta and Ajahn Karunadhammo were extended to come for as much time as their schedules will allow.

In Thailand, visits were made to Wat Nong Pah Pong ([www.forestsangha.org](http://www.forestsangha.org)), Wat Pah Nanachat ([www.watpahnachat.org](http://www.watpahnachat.org)) in Ubon Ratchathani province and Wat Marp Jan ([www.watmarpjan.org](http://www.watmarpjan.org)) in Rayong province. Ajahn Anan, Abbott of Wat Marp Jan is currently helping us identify some solutions. His assistance may require several trips to SFM to determine the strength of practice in the SFM Community.

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**Finding a well-practiced  
monk(s) under Forest  
Monastery Tradition who is  
proficient in English as well as  
understanding the customs and  
background of the native lay  
community is like finding a  
diamond in the rough.**

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In the entire world there are only a handful of people who fit these requirements. It's important that both the monastic community and the lay community, who depend upon each other for support, have a chance to get to know each other. A long-term relationship, like a marriage, requires time to become familiar on the part of both parties. Both parties need patience and forbearance during the search phase.

In the interim, all members of the SFM Community are encouraged to establish and maintain good relationships with monks who are well-practiced.

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*We also encourage practicing members to continue to meet and study ways the Lord Buddha's teachings can be applied to our lives.*

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We invite you to attend the SFM fundraising dinner – Thai Spring Festival on March 30 (Saturday) in Venice.



*Thai Traditional Dancers – 2018 Fundraising Dinner.*

Several senior monks in Thailand have praised lay organizations such as Nalanda Institute in Malaysia ([www.nalanda.org.my](http://www.nalanda.org.my)) and Paccaya Foundation ([www.paccaya.org](http://www.paccaya.org)) in Thailand, where lay people come together to learn about and practice Dhamma in their daily lives.

Please let us know if there are other ideas or if anyone is able to explore further options regarding visiting monks or resident monks. Please remember to emphasize our mission and objectives while talking to the monks.

## FUND RAISING

As we mentioned earlier, we need a much larger fund than what we have in order to embark on constructing the SFM buildings on the Stewart Street property. We also want to be mindful about long-term maintenance of the SFM following construction, which can be a significant budgetary commitment. We are not certain whether we have such continuing commitments yet.

With all that in mind, we will continue to organize fundraising activities. Our near-term effort is to have the fundraising dinner as part of the Thai Spring Festival on March 30 (Saturday) in Venice (Flyer attached). Any other volunteers and fundraising ideas are welcome.

***With Metta,***

### The SFM Board

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**SFM Fundraiser**

**Thai Spring Festival**

**Information**

**Date:** Saturday 30 March 2019

**Time:** 5.00pm-10.00pm.

**Place:** Venice Gardens

406 Shamrock Blvd., Venice, FL 34293

**Ticket Info Call:** 941-914-7504

**Includes Thai-American Buffet, Thai Dance, Live Music & Dancing**

★ **Cash Bar, 50/50 Raffle** ★

**Ticket Price: \$25.00 #001**