

Scottish Sangha Newsletter

No. 8 – January 2026

Welcome to the eighth edition of the newsletter for all who practice in the Plum Village tradition in Scotland



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Welcome

Dear Friends,

As I write this editorial, the world outside is white, still, at peace. It's welcome. A time to pause, hunker down, and coorie in, before we embark on the next year and move into the increasing light and warmth. Margot Henderson spoke to me once of the positivity of winter, the invitation to retreat, hibernate, recharge. Her poems feature in this Newsletter, as they have done in previous editions.

It's heartening to see three Scottish Retreats so far this year. No doubt there will be others as the year unfolds. And such joy to see that the first Retreats at the Being Peace Centre in Abenhall are now being advertised, with bookings starting on 14th January. It's a long way to go for a Retreat and yet I guess many of us will make that journey over the next few years. We'll create a kent path.

It's also heartening to read Susanne's description of her participation in a European Retreat for lay dharma teachers. I would have liked to have sat in on all the affinity groups she describes, in order to deepen my understanding of the complex issues that the group titles encompass.

In these challenging times – *are they ever not challenging?* – we need our own Sanghas for sharing, holding, affirming. I was touched by Christine Stevenson's description of the loss of a dear member of her Glasgow sangha. And I did as Patricia asked and created a space to listen to the music she wanted to share with us. And wept a little. And also went and walked in trees draped by snow and was grateful for all that the earth gives us. No comings, no goings.

I appreciated Christine's description of the ups and downs in the life of her Sangha. It made me reflect on the importance of the commitment we make to just being there each time our own Sangha meets. Like our regular personal meditation practice, each time is different. And each time is the same. We can never step into the same Sangha gathering twice, to paraphrase a Chinese proverb. We hold that space, as Christine describes, however many or few people turn up. We keep that candle burning.

Goodness, the world needs the light we can so create right now.

Roland Spencer-Jones
Compassionate Service of the Heart

What's Coming Up in Scotland? Events open to all

Saturday February 7th 2026

The *Edinburgh Wild Geese* have a Day of Mindfulness on the first Saturday of each month. Further details will be on our website (wildgeesezen.org) nearer the time. Also, keep an eye on our social media websites. People can sign up to receive our emailing list here: <https://wildgeesezen.org/contact-us/>.

Wild Geese Sangha have a programme open to everyone with regular weekly meetings on Thursday evenings and Friday mornings



Saturday March 7th - Edinburgh Wild Geese have a Day of Mindfulness. See February for details.

Sunday March 29th - Edinburgh Wild Geese also have a mindful walk at the Botanics.

Retreats

February 26 – March 1 2026 at Burgie House, Moray. Organised by the North of Scotland Sanghas it will be led by UK Dharma Teacher **Dene Donalds**. The theme will be: ***Breathe, you are alive – the joy of impermanence.*** We hope to offer transmission of the Five Mindfulness Trainings during the weekend.

The Retreat is now fully booked, with a waiting list. If you'd like to go on that List, please contact johnfinch@mac.com



May 7 - 10 2026 at Wiston Lodge in the Borders:

Walking in the World: Navigating through difficult times. The Retreat will be led by **Cliff Brown**, a US Dharma Teacher.



Well known to the Scottish sangha as Brother Phap Vu, Cliff was a monastic dharma teacher in the Plum Village tradition for 13 years. He has recently returned to lay life.

During this retreat we will enjoy dharma talks from Cliff and we will sit, eat and walk together as a sangha – strengthening our mindfulness practice in order to embrace the challenges of our lives with clarity, peace and joy.

Booking will open early in the New Year. Details will be available through your local sangha, the Scottish email list, and at <https://plumvillage.uk/>



October 9–12 2026 at Wiston Lodge in the Borders:
Deepening our Practice: Exploring the Threefold Training

Dharma Training Retreat with Dharma Teacher Susanne Olbrich and Aspirant Dharma Teacher Lindsay Lumsden. Rooted in the Plum Village teachings, the Threefold Training offers a simple yet profound path: concentration, ethical conduct, and insight, interwoven and interdependent. This retreat will explore how these teachings can help us deepen our practice, leading to greater happiness and freedom.



Sad loss: a much-loved Sangha member

Christine Steverson of Dear Green Sangha, Glasgow writes...

Patricia Mayborne, member of Dear Green Sangha Online and Pyjama Sangha, passed away on 8th December. After a brief stay in hospital, she found out that the cancer from 5 years ago had returned and she went home to be cared for her by her daughters and await her treatment plan.

Sadly, she passed away just a couple of weeks later. She was at home surrounded by her daughters. There was music, candles, flowers, and sweet smells.

She wanted us to know she appreciated the sangha and all the friendships. Some of the wider Scottish Sangha may know her from retreats at Wiston and at Holy Isle.

For us at Dear Green Sangha, she was a facilitator in the Online Sangha and at the Pyjama Sangha. Her beautiful smiling presence was a joy. Her passing is keenly felt.



She didn't want a big funeral but did want to be held in peoples' thoughts. She asked that we share [this piece of music](#), and hoped that we would each save it for a moment we can truly sit and feel it, and think of her. Instead of attending a funeral she wants us to take time outside amongst trees and think of her.

Tears

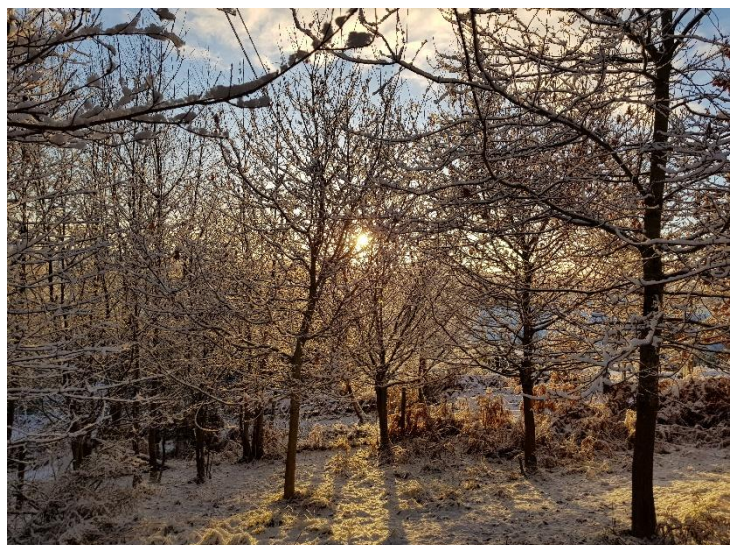
Don't ask me what these tears are for
they are falling on their own
I simply let them fall

I let them take their own
meandering course
down my cheeks and chin

I simply let them find
their own way down
wherever they are going

They make me smile
trickling and tickling my skin
like a feather
or a blade of grass

They clear my eyes
they help me see
even my sorrow cannot last



Margot Henderson

New Beginnings for Dear Green Sangha, Glasgow

1st December was a significant day for our Sangha, as it was when we had our first meeting in the new premises, the Mango Studio in Berkeley Street, Charing Cross, Glasgow. See to the right.

I am mindful of our Sangha's very rich heritage. Over 20 years ago (I am not good with exact dates) our founders had a vision to start a Glasgow Sangha.

They rented the small garden room in Kague Samye Dzong and came every Monday to practice and simply hold the space with the intention of starting a Plum Village Sangha. For a very long time it was just a very few of them - Anna and Colin (a different Colin to our present facilitator) and another who's name I forget. Other people came occasionally, but gradually over several years a small core of people came regularly. The sangha has met in the KSD building ever since until now, as KSD are moving to their new home in Lochwhinnoch.



When I joined, around 2006 two of the founders - Anna and Colin – remained; and they along with Jane, Ronni and Lyndsay Lunan were the facilitators.

Eventually as the sangha became established, we needed a name and various names were suggested but the one which resonated with us all was Dear Green Sangha as the early name for Glasgow was Dear Green Place.

As more people came forward to facilitate and give the sangha more structure, Anna and Colin pulled away to leave the rest of us to take the Sangha into the next phase.

This dedication from those early founders was inspired by Thich Nhat Hahn and the very rich lineage of the Plum Village tradition. Thay is our immediate spiritual ancestor, and he has a very rich Vietnamese lineage from his Root Temple in Vietnam. This is our lineage, our heritage, our spiritual ancestry.

I was feeling all of this on December 1st as we moved into a new chapter. This is what inspires me to hold the space. Sometimes Sangha goes through periods of very low numbers but, as our founders did, we hold the space. People return and leave as life happens. New people are always arriving. Sangha is a living entity.

Some of us facilitate, others support through their presence, we are all playing a part in sangha. We are one body.



As we approach the festive season, numbers sometimes were very small as people go away, some stay at home, and everyone can know that Sangha is always there. We never close, we hold the space for each other.

Pyjama Sangha met on Christmas morning and New Years Day. Everyone is always welcome.

*Christine Stevenson
Dear Green Sangha, Glasgow*

Building Sangha across Europe

By Susanne Olbrich, True Ever-Present Stability

Thirteen lay Dharma teachers from six countries came together at the Italian Avalokita Practice Centre in September. A two-hour bus journey from Rome took me deep into the Apennine Mountains in central Italy. On the bus, I already made friends with three Dharmacharyas from Spain.

The idea had been born at Plum Village four years ago — to strengthen connections among Dharma teachers across Europe, to practise together and learn from each other. Now the invitation goes out every two years to European lay teachers in the Plum Village tradition. Each time the gathering is hosted by a different country.

Avalokita is a beautiful Center in a magnificent location, embraced by mountains at 2400 feet. September was still warm and sunny, and teachers had come from Italy, Spain, Israel, Germany, France and the UK. Communication was happening through a funny mix of English, Italian, Spanish, hands, faces and hugs. Very quickly, a very loving and warm atmosphere developed.



For four days, we followed a retreat schedule with sitting and walking meditations, silent meals and sharing circles. We took turns in guiding practices, inviting bells, facilitating sharings, and taking care of the meditation hall. In daily walking meditations we were nourished by mountain views and the beautiful garden. One day included an outing into the woods with forest bathing and picnic lunch. In between the practice periods we enjoyed informal chats, getting to know each other better, and

hearing about the joys and challenges faced by the community in different countries.

For me, one of the highlights of the retreat were the affinity groups on two afternoons. They offered opportunities to come together in small circles and share about the topics on our hearts. Themes included “How to teach the Dharma in times of war”, “Building bridges with Wake Up”, “How to practise with ‘difficult people’ in sanghas”, “Collaborating with monastics” and “How to practise with aspects of the Mindfulness Trainings we don’t agree with”. It was valuable and refreshing to hear how things are done in different countries, and to learn from each other’s experiences.



Much gratitude was expressed for all the conditions that made our coming together in Italy possible. The energy of love, friendship and deep, joyful practice felt like a blessing that, I’m sure, will ripple out into the wider sangha.



Abenhall is Alive

Our Scottish link to the Being Peace Centre, Marcus Lindner, says...

... the "Education and Retreat Coordinators have been hard at work and have now released the retreat schedule from Spring 2026 through August. As you will see, there seems to be something for everyone. Please review what is on offer and plan your first visit to your new Plum Village UK Practice Centre!"

The weblink for the Being Peace Centre is [here](#). Bookings open on the 14th of January for all three Retreats this Spring. The very first retreat at the new centre is appropriately named Touching the Earth with Jane Coatesworth and Anthony Leete.

There are plenty of save the date and holiday gift opportunities. This is a very Happy Moment. Enjoy!

The Next Newsletter

Thank you, all those who have contributed to this Newsletter. It's heartening to see that much is going on in Scotland that keeps Thay's life, work and presence alive. He lives in us still and is manifest in all that we do, a contribution to the world that is so needed at the present.

Suanne and I would love to hear from you, and to bring your thoughts, news and creativity to the next edition of the Newsletter in January, yes, next year. Do get in touch. We will send out a reminder nearer the time.

If you would like to be on the Scottish mailing list so that you receive this Newsletter directly, do contact Roland by email: roland.spencerjones@gmail.com

We wish you peace, stability and joy in the practice over the coming months. We embrace the coming of Spring, new growth, new life.

Susanne Olbrich *True Ever-present Stability*
Roland Spencer-Jones *Compassionate Service of the Heart*



Snowdrop Sangha

Snowdrops sit in sangha
contemplating spring
each sounding its own bell
of mindfulness
for Earth's awakening

breathing in spring
breathing out spring

spring within
spring all around

gentle arising
from the ground

white and clear
deeply rooting
in the soil

of this present moment
here

Margot Henderson