



## **Sangha Harmony Guide**

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## Introduction

*A Sangha is a community of friends practicing the Dharma together to bring about and maintain awareness. The essence of a Sangha is awareness, understanding, acceptance, harmony, and love. When you do not see these in a community, it is not a true Sangha, and you should have the courage to say so. But when you find these elements are present in a community, you know that you have the happiness and fortune of being in a real Sangha.*

*Friends on the Path, Thich Nhat Hanh*

In our tradition, in addition to the teacher and the teachings (the Buddha and the Dharma), great importance is placed on the practice of community, or Sangha. Thich Nhat Hanh has said that spiritual friends are the most essential element of our practice, and that it is difficult or even impossible to practice without a Sangha. He writes that the essence of Sangha is "... awareness, understanding, acceptance, harmony and love. A true Sangha should be like a family in which there is a spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood."

Our name – the Florida Community of Mindfulness (FCM) – has a deep intentionality to it. Together, we aspire to realize our vision to create a community, and eventually a world, where principles of loving-kindness, generosity, and selflessness result in global peace, environmental sustainability, and the cessation of suffering for all sentient beings.

In support of this vision, FCM's mission is to offer Buddhist teachings that are relevant to the realities of day-to-day life and lead to personal transformation. FCM realizes its mission through the creation and nourishment of a healthy and active Sangha community, a jewel and refuge where teachings and other practice opportunities are shared in an environment of mindfulness and loving-kindness.

In other words, FCM aspires to be true community. We practice mindfulness, understanding, acceptance, love, and generosity to create a community living in harmony and awareness — a community supporting transformation and healing of our fear, our suffering, and our feelings of isolation and separation. Both through our individual actions and together, we create a community in which it is safe to be open and vulnerable; a refuge that supports our path to liberation from suffering; a supportive, harmonious and safe environment where everyone can practice freely and realize their Buddha nature.

FCM's core values are the essential principles that underlie, motivate, shape, and guide us in realizing our mission and vision.

- *Awakening:* Through the practices of mindfulness, deep understanding/wisdom, and compassion, we grow personally, heal psychologically, and transform our suffering into the flowering of an awakened being. We use Buddhist meditative practices to rediscover eternal

truths about reality through direct investigation and experience, rather than through blind faith in dogma.

- *Non-Denominational Buddhism:* While practicing within the Mahayana Zen tradition, we take inspiration and guidance from the full breadth of Buddhist teachings. We are creative and experimental in our forms since we desire to be relevant and accessible to American culture, issues, and vernacular. We apply the Buddhist teachings based on their appropriateness to the individual(s) being taught and practice skillfulness in their application.
- *Community:* Having the support and personal connection with a Sangha/community of spiritual friends and caring for each other are key elements of our Buddhist practice. We seek to live our path with the support of a harmonious practice community. Sangha-building is, in itself, a meaningful and deep practice which embodies interconnection instead of separateness.
- *Inclusiveness:* Our community is open to anyone who is dedicated to following this path. We respect and encourage diversity.
- *Mindful Living:* We practice an engaged form of Buddhism, i.e., a Buddhism that is relevant to the lives of our members and the society we live in. We primarily utilize the broad traditional teachings and practices of Buddhism, applied in the context of modern life. As a community of lay practitioners, we learn how to live an awakened life in the midst of our relationships and everyday activities. We are dedicated to living a meaningful, open and joyful life, guided by the Five Mindfulness Trainings of the Plum Village tradition.
- *Service:* We help bring joy and reduce suffering by being of service to our families, our communities, and our society. We practice selflessness and “love in action” and give generously of our time and resources to those in need. When engaged in activities to benefit and heal our world, our actions are based on selflessness, mental and emotional calmness, non-violence, compassion, and deep acceptance of what is.
- *Deep Sharing/Deep Listening:* We create trust within our community of practitioners to encourage speaking from our hearts and listening to each other without judgment.
- *Direct Transmission:* Our teachers have received their authorization from within the continuous lineage of the Buddha. The direct personal relationship between teacher and student is central to the true Dharma transmission within the Buddhist tradition.

While aspiring to be true community, a Sangha wherein all dwell in harmony and awareness, FCM also recognizes that our Sangha is comprised of human beings who are not yet fully awake, enlightened, or perfect practitioners. We collectively aspire to realize FCM’s vision and mission, to live in accord with FCM’s core values, to practice understanding, acceptance, and love. We do our best, yet disharmony may arise.

This FCM Sangha Harmony Guide has been developed to support our Sangha’s aspiration to be true community dwelling in harmony and awareness. It presents guidelines and expectations around how we aspire to be with each other, and how we can practice to resolve conflict and disharmony. It is intended for all participants in our Sangha: members and non-members, teachers and students, staff and selfless-service volunteers, brothers and sisters both local and geographically distant. It is grounded in the Five Mindfulness Trainings of the Plum Village tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh.

## Guidelines for Practicing the Five Mindfulness Trainings in Our Sangha

The Five Mindfulness Trainings represent the Buddhist vision for a global spirituality and ethic. They are a concrete expression of the Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, the path of right understanding and true love that leads to healing, transformation, and happiness for ourselves and for the world. To practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings is to cultivate the insight of interbeing, or Right View, which can remove all discrimination, intolerance, anger, fear, and despair.

If we live according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we are already on the path of a bodhisattva. Practicing these Trainings together as a sangha can help us to create a community, and eventually a world, that is aligned with our aspiration to bring peace and freedom from suffering to all beings.

The Five Mindfulness Trainings are guiding lights for our practice. Our deep and personal reflection on each Training can reveal many subtleties and opportunities for deepening our awareness and practice.

### First Training: Reverence for Life

*Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to support any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life.*

In addition to the grosser types of destruction that might be obvious, this Training also invites us to consider the more subtle ways that we can work to protect all types of life, from cultivating a peaceful mind to seeking ways to work mindfully with everything in our world. For example, we can gently catch and relocate insects where possible and avoid the use of chemicals that may harm the environment. We can seek to minimize the destruction of life through the food we choose to consume and share. And we can practice reverence for life by treating all beings with respect through the actions of our body, speech and mind.

### Second Training: True Happiness

*Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to cultivating loving kindness and learning ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I will practice generosity by sharing my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others, but I will prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on earth.*

Because it helps us let go of the self-cherishing that brings so much suffering, the practice of generosity is the path to true happiness. FCM especially encourages and supports the generosity of sharing our time, talents, and energy—a practice which we call “Selfless Service.” Through our practice of Selfless Service, we learn that there is much joy in letting go of our attachments to

preferences and open-heartedly embracing whatever type of service will benefit the sangha as a whole. We experience the happiness that comes from joyfully practicing the Bodhisattva path.

### Third Training: True Love

*Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families and society. I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment. To preserve the happiness of myself and others, I am determined to respect my commitments and the commitments of others. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct.*

While understanding that all humans are equal in our inherent Buddha nature, hierarchies of role, seniority, power, and authority inevitably exist within the Sangha. These hierarchies can influence interpersonal relationships and define appropriate boundaries within those relationships. Sometimes power differentials are clear, as in Teacher-Student relationships. Sometimes power differentials are less clear, as in relationships between long-term Sangha members and newer members, or between mentors and mentees. Given these complexities, considerable care and discernment must be taken when FCM members and friends consider engaging in romantic or sexual relationships with others in the Sangha. In order to avoid harm to individuals and the community, FCM is committed to the following guidelines regarding expression of our sexual energy within the Sangha:

1. To protect the safety and integrity of all beings and the Sangha as a whole, we follow the law and work to comply with FCM policies specifically prohibiting harassment or discrimination on the basis of race, religion, creed, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ancestry, physical or mental disability, genetic information, marital status, or any other classification.
2. To protect the safety and well-being of minors, we refrain from all forms of sexual activity with minors and commit to reporting known or suspected violations of this policy to appropriate Sangha leadership. As required by law, incidents of child physical or sexual abuse will be reported to the appropriate authorities including Child Protective Services and law enforcement.
3. We commit to refraining from all forms of sexual harassment, including continued expression of sexual interest toward another after being informed that such interest is unwelcome.
4. To help prevent harm to couples and families, we refrain from inviting, cultivating, or participating in sexual relationships with those in the Sangha who are presently in long-term, committed relationships.
5. Dharma Teachers, Dharma Leaders, Mentors, Sangha Leaders, Board members and others who find themselves attracted to and considering a romantic or sexual relationship with a Sangha member or friend should be mindful of potential inequalities of status or power and bear in mind the importance of gaining clarity around role and appropriate boundaries. Such leaders commit to seeking guidance from the Dharma Teacher, senior leadership, or the Harmony Committee about appropriate and wholesome ways to proceed.

#### Fourth Training: Loving Speech and Deep Listening

*Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am determined to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy and hope. I will not spread news that I do not know to be certain and will not criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I am determined to make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.*

The Sangha is a wonderfully safe and caring laboratory for the practice of this Training. With the support of our FCM sisters and brothers, we learn to listen deeply and to speak with honesty, affection, appropriateness, and an aspiration to benefit all with our words. We also learn the value of practicing noble silence and simply being present for each other. Should our speech create hurt or divisiveness, we seek to heal our unskillfulness through conflict resolution and the practice of Beginning Anew, as explained below.

#### Fifth Training: Nourishment and Healing

*Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I will ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being, and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicants or to ingest foods other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films, and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society, and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion in myself and in my society by practicing the Four Nutriment for myself and for society. I understand that mindful consumption is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society.*

FCM aspires to support the nourishment of the community by providing a model of wholesome living at its campuses, which are free of alcohol and other intoxicants, tobacco products, and animal or dairy products. We do our best to procure and use environmentally friendly cleaning and gardening products, to recycle and compost, and to minimize the use of plastic and disposable or one-time use products, such as plastic utensils or paper plates. We support programs and organizations that are in alignment with our aspirations to promote physical, psychological, and spiritual wellbeing.

### Informal Conflict Resolution

Despite our emphasis on welcoming everyone with an open heart, treating each other with understanding and compassion and love, and practicing the Five Mindfulness Trainings, conflict can still arise. We may encounter people or interactions that annoy us or trigger the stronger negative reactions of anger, fear, envy, or dislike. We may seek to minimize the possibility of such conflict by trying to avoid certain people, or even consider leaving the Sangha as a way to avoid confrontation.

The good news is that such reactions and the interpersonal conflict that can arise from them are viewed in our Sangha as a normal and useful part of practice, an opportunity to learn more about ourselves and potentially experience transformation of difficult relationships. We view conflict as a disturbance in the balance and harmony of the Sangha, and the goal is always to practice understanding and compassion in restoring that balance and harmony. Conflict resolution is not about determining “guilt or innocence.” Rather it is a process engaged to facilitate the healing and transformation of suffering.

When a conflict arises for us because of disagreements or misunderstandings, or we observe conflict in the Sangha that disturbs us, we are encouraged to seek resolution by engaging in the informal process of self-reflection and Beginning Anew described below. If a conflict involves or threatens violence or abuse, the more formal grievance procedures involving the Dharma Teacher and/or the Sangha Harmony Committee should be engaged immediately.

### Step 1: Self-Reflection

Before engaging another person in the Sangha about your felt conflict with them or negative reactions to something they have done or said, take some time to discern how serious the matter is for you. Ask yourself the following kinds of questions:

1. Is whatever I’m telling myself about the person or what happened or the perceived conflict true? If you answer yes, ask yourself, “How do I know?”
2. What difficult emotions is this situation bringing up in me? How can I take care of these emotions before engaging with others?
3. How can FCM help me to resolve this? Who might I take into my confidence? Might it help to consult the Dharma Teacher, Harmony Committee, or other trusted leader in the community?

Appendix A, which describes our Beginning Anew practice, offers additional questions that may be helpful for self-reflection.

### Step 2: Beginning Anew

The health and happiness of the whole community depends on the harmony, peace and joy that exists between and among all who participate in FCM. When you feel it is important for you to deal with a conflict or potential conflict directly with another person in the Sangha, the formal process of Beginning Anew in the Plum Village Tradition provides help engaging skillfully with others to restore harmony.

To begin anew is to look deeply and honestly at ourselves, our past actions, our own speech and thoughts in order to create a fresh beginning both within ourselves and in our relationships with others. The practice of Beginning Anew helps us to develop skillfulness in speaking kindly and listening compassionately. We can practice Beginning Anew everyday by expressing our appreciation for our fellow practitioners and apologizing right away when we do or say something that hurts them. We can politely let others know right away when we have been hurt as well.



With deeper or more long-lasting disturbances, Beginning Anew can be practiced more formally at a pre-arranged time and place, with or without a neutral facilitator or guide. In doing so, it is important to remember that Beginning Anew is a process, not a technique. It can't be applied as a "fix." If we rush into the ceremony with our anger or resentment or other "hot" emotions still fresh and alive in us, we are not really practicing "Beginning Anew" with ourselves or others. To begin anew, we must first take care of our own "hot" feelings so that we can be fully present during the process, sharing openly and listening deeply with compassion and understanding.

Appendix A in this Sangha Harmony Guide includes a complete description of the Beginning Anew process. If you are new to this beautiful practice, please take the time to review and reflect on this helpful information so that you and others will reap the many fruits available when we enter Beginning Anew practice wholeheartedly.

### Step 3: Mediation

If self-reflection and/or Beginning Anew practices do not bring a felt sense that a conflict has been satisfactorily resolved, then mediation may be appropriate and useful. Either party may request that the Dharma Teacher or Sangha Harmony Committee provide such mediation. Another senior member of FCM who is mutually acceptable to both parties may also be invited to witness and/or mediate/facilitate an informal conflict resolution process. The Sangha Harmony Committee is available to assist all parties in preparing for mediation with information on how mediation works and the roles of the mediator and participants.

## Formal Grievance Procedures

When the informal conflict resolution steps described above do not satisfactorily resolve the conflict or breach of harmony in the sangha, or are not appropriate given the particulars of the situation, the FCM member or Sangha participant should consult the Dharma Teacher or the Sangha Harmony Committee. The Dharma Teacher may assist with further informal conflict resolution processes to restore harmony, advise consultation with the Sangha Harmony Committee, or encourage or instruct the person(s) to initiate a formal grievance procedure with the Sangha Harmony Committee. Please see Appendix B to this Guide for a full explanation of these Formal Grievance Procedures.

## Sangha Harmony Committee

The FCM Sangha Harmony Committee, comprised of members of the FCM Elders Council, assists Sangha participants in dealing with conflict or the potential for conflict in order to maintain FCM as a community of refuge and safety. Together with the Dharma Teacher, the Committee facilitates interpersonal communication within the Sangha in order to support harmonious resolution of conflict while creating opportunities for transformation, healing, and the cessation of suffering.

The Committee's role is not to determine and administer punishments for "bad" behavior, but to assist in resolving disturbances to harmony within the Sangha. It aspires to facilitate resolution of conflicts and disagreements in a way that transforms disharmony into opportunities for growth and connection. Please visit [floridamindfulness.org/Elders](http://floridamindfulness.org/Elders) to see the current committee members.

## Appendix A: Beginning Anew

As described above, the formal process of Beginning Anew in the Plum Village Tradition can help us to engage skillfully with others to restore harmony. We practice Beginning Anew by first deeply reflecting on the situation, as suggested below. When we have calmed our anger, hurt, or other afflictive emotions, we are then ready, with an open heart and aspiration for harmony, to invite the other to meet for the Beginning Anew Ceremony, where we follow the four steps described below. If we feel it would be beneficial, we might also invite a trusted third person to help guide or facilitate the process. The Dharma Teacher or members of the Sangha Harmony Committee may be invited to fill this role.

### Reflections Before the Ceremony

Before deciding to engage in Beginning Anew as part of a conflict resolution process, we need to nurture both calmness and understanding within our own minds. When our minds become disturbed in conflicts, we have a tendency to become very self-focused and not to see the situation clearly. So it can be very helpful first to calm and clear the mind a bit through a period of sitting meditation before reflecting as follows:

- What is the suffering that I am really experiencing? For example, anger is often an outward manifestation in conflict, but is there something beneath the anger, such as hurt, sadness, or fear? Take your time to look deeply into this, reflecting on the causes and conditions that have created your suffering. What might you have wanted from a situation and what did you experience instead? And how might your own actions of body, speech and mind have contributed to whatever disturbances have arisen?
- Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes and see the situation from their point of view. What causes and conditions might they be operating from in this situation? See the other person through the eyes of compassion, reflecting on their good qualities and all you may appreciate about them.
- With a mind of greater understanding and compassion, identify any hurts or difficulties you feel need to be shared directly with the other person.

Doing these reflections may sometimes give us a very different perspective on the disturbance and how we might best move forward to restore harmony between ourselves and the other person.

### Inviting the Other to Practice Beginning Anew

Once we have touched this greater calmness and understanding in our own minds, we are ready to invite the other to practice Beginning Anew with us. Suggest a place and possible times to meet. It is lovely when we can meet in person in front of the Buddha, sitting serenely in meditation with a small flower between us. This flower can be held when speaking, and then placed back between us when we are done speaking. We want to allow plenty of time for the process to proceed calmly and thoughtfully, without rushing. If someone has agreed to facilitate, also be sure to tell the other person the facilitator's name, and to make sure the other person feels comfortable with this choice.

### During the Ceremony

Beginning Anew is a lovely opportunity to practice deep listening and kind, loving speech. We take our time to move through all four steps of the process in order, as described below. We remain mindful of our intention to create harmony with this dear other and not to become lost in our thoughts or self-interest during the practice.

#### Step 1: Flower Watering

Begin by watering the seeds of the other person's positive qualities, behaviors, or specific actions. Speak words of appreciation, mentioning specific instances such as, "I deeply appreciate how well you listen to me and others" or "Thank you for all you do to take care of our Sangha's garden."

This step allows us to shine light on each other's strengths, positive qualities, and contributions to the Sangha. It helps us to recognize and nurture positive qualities in ourselves and others. And by generously watering the positive seeds in others, as well as by hearing words of appreciation from others ourselves, we naturally water seeds of happiness within both parties.

The practice of "flower watering" not only nurtures the development of good qualities in each other, but also weakens difficult qualities or seeds such as speaking angrily or being critical of others. As in a garden, when we "water the flowers" of loving kindness and compassion in each other, we also take energy away from the weeds of anger, jealousy, and misperception.

#### Step 2: Sharing Regrets

Here we acknowledge our own shortcomings and lack of skillfulness in actions of our body, speech, or mind. Again, being as specific as possible helps. For example, "I'm sorry that I snapped back at you last week when I felt criticized for being late to host the zoom meeting," or "I regret arguing with you about whose view of what to serve for Sunday tea was right," or "I regret assuming that I knew what you meant before allowing you space to clarify what you said at lunch."

#### Step 3: Expressing Hurts

Here we acknowledge our own vulnerabilities, sharing how we felt hurt by the other's actions, speech or thoughts, being careful to avoid blaming or accusatory language and to take responsibility for own reactions and responses. For example, say "I felt angry and hurt when you said 'I'm always late for evening meditation' in front of our teacher." Do NOT say something blaming like, "You hurt me when you criticized me for being late in front of Fred."

While the person speaking is expressing hurt, the other person listens silently, trying to understand the speaker. Even if the person who is speaking says something that has resulted from a misperception, or that the listener holds to be untrue, no effort to interrupt or correct the other should be made. Beginning Anew is not a debate or discussion; it is a deep listening and sharing practice. If hurts or regrets arise during the course of the ceremony, however, it may be best to allow for a second round of sharing to complete Steps 2 or 3 before moving on to Step 4.

#### Step 4: Sharing a Long-term Difficulty and Asking for Support

At times we all experience karmic challenges, difficulties, suffering, and pain arising from seeds in our storehouse consciousness and habit energies rooted in the past and surfacing in the present. Step 4

affords each person the opportunity to share such vulnerabilities and ask for understanding and support in their own process of healing and transformation on the path. For example, one person might share “I tend to get scared whenever I’m not sure how things will work out. When I’m scared in that way, I try to control things to make it come out the way I want. Please understand that I don’t want to be controlling and help me to notice when you see me behaving in ways that feel controlling to you or others.”

Sharing in this way helps to deepen understanding, appreciation, and compassion for each other, and to respond in ways that feel truly supportive of each other’s practice and challenges on the path.

If the process does not feel complete for either party at the completion of Step 4, plans may be made to meet a second time in the near future. At such time, we move again through all four steps, recognizing the importance of watering flowers in each other and sharing any regrets before moving into any unresolved hurts and long-term difficulties.

## Appendix B: Formal Grievance Procedures

FCM's Sangha Harmony Guide presents guidelines and expectations around how we aspire to be with each other, and how we can practice with each other to resolve conflict and disharmony. When informal conflict resolution procedures fail to restore harmony, the Dharma Teacher may assist with further informal conflict resolution processes to restore harmony, advise consultation with the Sangha Harmony Committee, or encourage or instruct the person(s) to initiate a formal grievance procedure with the Sangha Harmony Committee. Generally, the Dharma Teacher should be consulted before proceeding with formal grievance procedures, unless the grievance involves the Teacher.

The formal grievance procedure can be activated for a number of reasons, and should generally be activated when any of the following apply:

1. When the parties have tried unsuccessfully to come to a resolution themselves using the informal conflict resolution procedures, and have consulted with the Dharma Teacher, and there is still no mutually satisfactory resolution or restoration of harmony
2. When engaging the informal conflict resolution process or consulting the Dharma Teacher directly feels too threatening — for example, when the Dharma Teacher's conduct or behavior is a subject of the complaint
3. When the conflict involves illegal or egregiously unethical behavior, such as sexual harassment and abuse, racial harassment and discrimination, physical violence or threat
4. When the conflict involves illegal or unethical behaviors between individuals of unequal status, power and authority, such as between someone in the Teacher role and someone in the Student role
5. When FCM receives information from outside the Sangha concerning Sangha members, Board of Directors members, Teachers, or other Dharma Leaders that may involve unethical or illegal behaviors

To initiate a formal grievance procedure, any FCM member or Sangha participant may approach any member of the Sangha Harmony Committee to discuss a concern or file a verbal or written complaint. The Sangha Harmony Committee will discuss the person's concern or complaint and conduct initial fact-finding. Within two weeks, the committee will decide if the complaint warrants the initiation of the Formal Grievance Procedure.

### Sexual Misconduct or Harassment

If the conflict is deemed dangerous or abusive, or if it involves sexual misconduct or harassment, the formal grievance procedure of written notification to the Sangha Harmony Committee should be followed. When a complaint of sexual or physical abuse or intimidation is made regarding a Dharma Teacher or Dharma Leader or Mentor, the Teacher-Student relationship will be suspended immediately. The Sangha Harmony Committee will request a written grievance and initiate preliminary fact-finding to determine the nature of the complaint. The Sangha Harmony Committee will gather enough information to decide whether to enlist the assistance of outside professionals to conduct an investigation and provide recommendations for resolution.

If the Sangha Harmony Committee's initial fact-finding determines a complaint of abuse has merit, the Committee may request that the FCM Board of Directors inform the Sangha in order to encourage other victims to come forward for a thorough investigation.

### **Process for Filing and Responding to A Formal Complaint**

#### **Step 1: Filing a Formal Complaint with the Sangha Harmony Committee:**

The petitioner should contact a member of the Sangha Harmony Committee to initiate the process of filing a formal written complaint. This committee is comprised of the members of the Elders Council, and a list of members can be found at [floridamindfulness.org/elderscouncil](http://floridamindfulness.org/elderscouncil). A formal complaint form will be provided for the petitioner to complete, providing relevant information about the situation.

At this stage, all material submitted will be treated with respect and remain confidential within the Sangha Harmony Committee, except for any disclosure mandated by law or in cases involving potential or immediate threat to health and safety. The Sangha Harmony Committee is responsible for ensuring that no one coming forward with a concern, conflict, or complaint will be subject to reprisal in any form.

#### **Step 2: Initial Response to Written Formal Complaints**

The Sangha Harmony Committee member who receives the complaint will forward the written document to the other members promptly, inform the person submitting the complaint that it has been received, and establish a time when the Sangha Harmony Committee will meet to review the complaint. The Sangha Harmony Committee may also make a written or verbal request for additional information from the person filing the complaint.

#### **Step 3: Investigation**

Within 7-10 days following the initial response, the Sangha Harmony Committee will inform the parties involved that a formal written complaint (grievance) involving them has resulted in a decision to proceed with Formal Grievance Procedures. This notification will state the committee's understanding of the issues involved and next steps.

The Sangha Harmony Committee is committed to ensuring that everyone involved in a Formal Grievance Procedure will have a full and fair opportunity to respond to the complaint. The committee will conduct fact-finding interviews with individuals named in the complaint or others having knowledge of the situation to hear their understanding of the conflict and suggestions for resolution.

#### **Step 4: Recommendations**

Once its investigation is complete, the Sangha Harmony Committee convenes to discuss the findings and reach consensus on their final determination and recommendations. Ideally, the committee will reach a decision and complete its written report within two weeks following the end of the investigation process. Findings and recommendations will then be presented to those involved in the

complaint. The FCM Board of Directors will also be informed of the conflict and the Sangha Harmony Committee's findings and recommendations.

The Board is responsible for ensuring that recommendations made by the Sangha Harmony Committee are carried out. At any point during the course of a Formal Grievance Procedure, the FCM Board of Directors may decide to make findings and recommendations public on a case-by-case basis, or recommend that portions of the final report be shared with relevant individuals and/or the entire Sangha. Otherwise, all documentation related to the grievance shall remain strictly confidential unless the Sangha is legally required to turn over documents.

*Step 5: Appealing the Sangha Harmony Committee's Findings and Recommendations*

Any of the parties involved in a Formal Grievance Procedure may appeal the Sangha Harmony Committee's findings or recommendations to the FCM Board of Directors. Such a written appeal must be delivered to the President of the Board within two weeks after the Sangha Harmony Committee report was received and include both the reason and the evidence for the appeal.

The FCM Board then notifies the Sangha Harmony Committee that an appeal has been filed and reviews the findings, recommendations, and appeal arguments. The Board decides by consensus either to uphold or to reconsider the Sangha Harmony Committee's findings and recommendations, possibly imposing other remedies.