

Branching Streams

Survey Report. How Is the Pandemic Affecting Us?

- 56 Sanghas out of 65 from the US and abroad participated in the recent Branching Streams Survey to see how the pandemic is affecting us.
- Most of the centers are in urban areas (73.2%) with 10.7% in rural areas.
- 44.4% own their space, 40.7% rent it, and 14.8% share it with other groups.
- Of the 40.7% that are renting, 25% decided not to renew their leases and 9.1% are considering not to renew leases but haven't made a decision yet.

- More than half of the centers (55.6%) have seen an increase in participation, while 29.6% said that participation is "about the same" and 14.8% have seen a decrease.
 - Revenue has stayed about the same for 46.3% of the centers, decreased for 38.9% and increased for 14.8%.

- Online activities have attracted non-local participants, remote participants in places like rural Montana, students who moved away and even attracted a "surprising" international participation. That is the case of Mill Valley Zen Center (California).
- Despite its benefits, Zoom and online participation also pose many challenges. People who don't relate to online practice are no longer present, sangha members are missing the intimacy of face to face communication and not being able to meet in person makes teaching more difficult. Decrease in revenue has been a problem for some sanghas.

Practice is Mainly Virtual but Not Always So...

Online zendos became a place of support and practice this year, the place to get “together.” Still, the need to meet in person is growing. Sanghas are finding that outdoor spaces are a safe place to do so. Below we share information about the few centers that have reopened, activities outdoors, ways we are supporting each other and successful online programs.

CENTERS THAT HAVE REOPENED

1. Akazien Zendo (Berlin, Germany)

“We are allowed to open with 6feet distance between mats; so we can seat 14 participants.” **Protective measures:** Physical distancing, Masks, No chanting, no social gatherings after zazen.

2. Montaña Despierta (Veracruz, México)

“Zazen and short Dharma talk.” **Protective measures:** Physical distancing, Masks, Pre-registration for events.

3. Mountain Rain Zen Community (Vancouver, BC)

“We just reopened our zendo for practice period opening retreat with limited numbers and concurrent Zoom. The plan is to continue with three weekly practice sessions, but is delayed due to wifi problems.” **Protective measures:** Physical distancing, masks and pre-registration.

4. Ashland Zen Center (Oregon)

“Sewing, special ceremonies.” Physical distancing, masks, no distribution of chant books or other printed materials. **Protective measures:** Pre-registration for events, sanitizing hands/surfaces.

5. Austin Zen Center (Austin, Texas)

“Nothing is open to the general public, but we have been holding memorial services in the zendo, with family members present (masked and distanced).”

PRACTICING OUTDOORS

These are some of the things sanghas have been doing outdoors:

- Meditation in nature
- Zazen
- Practice discussion
- Half-day sittings once a month
- Weekly outdoor zazen and kinhin at a local city park
- Gardening
- Service
- Classes
- Sesshin
- Jukai, lay entrustment, other ceremonies
- Saturday coffee meeting
- Contemplative walks
- Planted a Welcome Garden at a sangha member's house as part of a food justice initiative and also to allow for an opportunity for physical practice

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER

Sanghas are supporting its members and the wider community in many different ways:

- Grocery and errand assistance when members have needed to quarantine
- Psychological support
- Interfaith work
- All programs made free of charge
- Online dokusans, sesshins, Dharma talks, ceremonies, classes
- Online happy hours, online movies
- Recovery groups
- Buddy systems to identify members with needs
- Texting and calling people to see how they are doing
- Informal support groups within the sangha
- Sewing masks
- Covid groups and volunteers to provide help to those in need
- One on one physical meetings with the teacher with masks and physical distance

MOST SUCCESSFUL ONLINE PROGRAMS

- Interfaith meetings
- Social justice zoom gatherings
- Study groups
- Breakfast with poetry
- Dharma talks
- Practice period on Eihei Koso Hotsuganmon and the practice of vow
- Sunday with Senseis (Weekly Q&A and Study of Paramitas)
- Thich Nhat Hanh “Understanding Our Mind” Study Groups
- Discussion on “The Book of Equanimity”
- Events with speakers to address racial injustice
- Online sesshins
- Mindfulness workshops and trainings
- Black, Indigenous, and People of Color weekly sitting/meetings

And... ‘Is there anything else you would like us to know?’

- “It has been really helpful to have access to tech savvy sangha members.” --**San Antonio Zen Center (San Antonio, Texas)**
- “We have been working hard to increase connection: We started a chat-app (Discord), hosted Conversation Cafés, held break-out sessions after each Dharma Talk, Undoing White Supremacy study group, and a Sangha News section on our website.” --**Austin Zen Center (Austin, Texas)**
- “More newsletters, emails.” --**Bamboo in the Wind (Sunnyvale, California)**

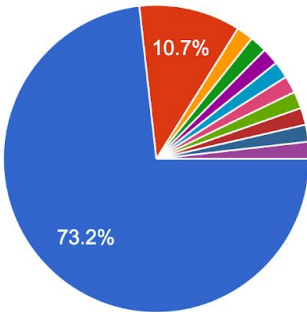
- “Participating in the Election Retreats offered by members of Berkeley Zen Center have helped us feel connected to more people. We have encouraged our Sangha members to participate.” --**BACK Porch Zendo (Sebastopol, California)**
- “We intend to continue online teaching even when we feel safe meeting in person again to include more members who may not live close by or able to drive here.” --**Twining Vines Sangha (Old Greenwich, Connecticut)**
- “Interest in Jukai has increased and we are responding to those with that interest.” --**Valley Streams Zen Sangha (Sacramento, California)**
- “Federal Prison (about 6,000 inmates) nearby is not allowing religious volunteers where we have led zazen/Buddhist services. I was invited to provide a Buddhist Post as part of a wider Religious Post that inmates can access on-line.” --**Chapel Hill Zen Center (Chapel Hill, North Carolina)**
- “Our sangha is strong despite the loss of physical meeting space.” --**Bozeman Zen Group (Bozeman, Montana)**
- “We have been lead organizer of multiple street protests, rallies, and walking meditations in our city since June. This is one of the rare and precious times we have seen each other in a larger group. We collectively decided not to return to physical formal practice until there is a vaccine.” --**Zen Center North Shore (Beverly, Massachusetts)**

“We have maintained “live” chant ceremonies via Zoom with roles distributed. Doshi offers flowers on camera, doan rings bells, kokyo chants as all others are muted but chanting on their own. This I think has increased engagement and a vivid feeling to our meetings. Although the forms are much modified--bells are reduced, floor bows are offscreen or absent, only the kokyo's voice is heard during the chanting, the quiriness of it all is a feature, not a bug. Cracking or breathless solo voices, Zoom glitches, missing bells, a screen full of tiny faces--all this is the texture of our shared pandemic experience.”

-- Richmond Zen Center

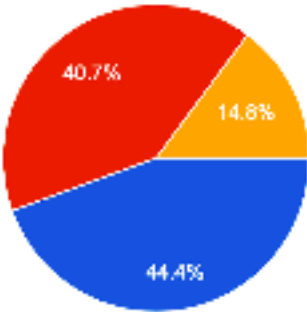
Some Visual Highlights from our Survey

5. Location
56 responses



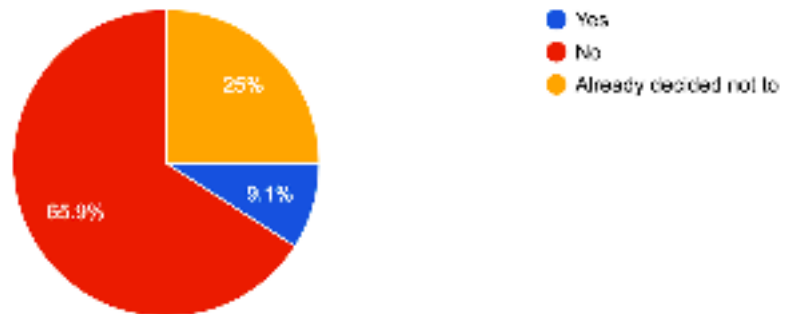
- Urban
 - Rural
 - Small Town
 - In town in a rural area
 - Online
 - Suburban
 - both urban and rural
 - Urban center with retreat place in the...
- ▲ 1/2 ▼

6. Meeting space is
54 responses

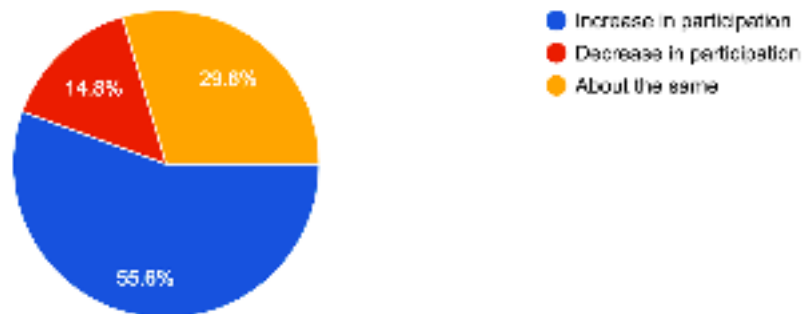


- Owned
- Rented
- Shared with other groups

7. Group is considering not renewing lease
44 responses



9. With online activities have you noticed
54 responses



14. Has your revenue

54 responses

