

# Compassionate Ocean Zen Center

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[www.oceanzen.org](http://www.oceanzen.org)

*Remember that a flower is not just a flower, it is the start of a whole garden.*

— Eddie Jaku, Holocaust survivor, from his book *The Happiest Man on Earth*

Dear Friend,

**Compassionate Ocean's 25<sup>th</sup> year is drawing to a close.** At this time, we acknowledge with deep gratitude all whose generous support and whole-hearted effort have made the Center what it is today.

Throughout the past quarter-century, **Compassionate Ocean has offered many doorways to mindful and compassionate living.** These have included almost 200 Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction courses, involving over 2,000 people; over 100 Buddhist Studies classes, reaching 665 people, many of whom have taken multiple courses; monthly Sesshins; weekday meditation and chanting services; Sunday and Friday meditation and Dharma talks; one-to-one consultations with teachers; and special events like concerts, workshops, and guest and visiting teachers.

2025 has been a significant year for us as we hosted four special events to celebrate our anniversary: a guided tour of Asian Buddhist art at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the "Flowing Like a River" evening of poetry and music at the Center, the "Zen of Oz" presentation and screening at the Heights Theater, and our culminating Celebration Banquet at the Center.

**The efforts of many people have made these offerings possible.** And it is through the generosity of its many supporters that Compassionate Ocean will go forward with strength into the future.

How are we able to provide the financial underpinnings for all that we do? In recent years program fees make up about a quarter of our normal income; an additional small percentage comes from special fundraising events; but most of our support comes from donations—Sustaining Membership and appeals. In particular, our Year-End Appeal typically provides almost 20 percent of our total income for the year. **The goal for our 2025 Appeal is \$35,000.**

So, as Compassionate Ocean's 25<sup>th</sup> year ends, **we invite you to help us sustain a firm foundation** as we continue our life as a Center and a community. Please consider donating at this time to help us continue to offer teachings of generosity, upright action, patience, and mindfulness.

**Thank you** for considering this request. May we all be filled with mindful awareness and loving kindness.

With appreciation,

Lisa Ben

Lisa Boesen and Ben Durrant

Board Co-Chairs



*Compassionate Ocean's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Banquet, October 2025*

Donations can be mailed in the enclosed envelope, or you can contribute online at [www.oceanzen.org](http://www.oceanzen.org).

Compassionate Ocean Zen Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Donations are tax deductible as allowed by law.

# Compassionate Ocean at 25 Years

In the year 2000, Facebook, Wikipedia, the Euro, and iPhones did not yet exist. The 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Great Recession, and Covid-19 were still in the future. But in January Compassionate Ocean was incorporated in the state of Minnesota.

*Compassionate Ocean* refers to the ocean of reality that is always holding and embracing us and all beings—making everything possible.

The fledgling organization initially led a nomadic existence, borrowing or renting space for its activities around the Twin Cities. At the start of 2001, fundraising began to buy a building to use as a permanent home. The building search took two years, but in the fall of 2003 a building in northeast Minneapolis was purchased. Major remodeling was needed, which required raising considerably more money. Demolition started in February, 2004, and the hard work of renovation began—an effort that took ten more years. In November 2014, Compassionate Ocean Zen Center opened its doors as a community center for Zen practice.

The renovation proved considerably more extensive and expensive than originally estimated, and required multiple fundraising campaigns as well as a great deal of volunteer labor. But through the efforts of a very dedicated and supportive sangha, the needed money was raised. Capital Campaign chairperson Diane Benjamin related that one person even mortgaged their home to free up money for the Center. Now, a special accomplishment as we celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary is that all building loans have been paid off and Compassionate Ocean owns the building, free and clear.

## **Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR)**

Our building is a treasure; its creation is an important part of our organization's history. But what happens inside the building (and beyond) is what forms the core of our practice and our identity.

In 1994, guiding teacher Joen O'Neal had begun informally sharing lessons about mindfulness, but wanted to offer something more comprehensive. She participated in a training course led by Jon Kabat-Zinn, and felt that using his MBSR curriculum would be an effective method of sharing these teachings. Soon teacher Michael O'Neal also attended Jon Kabat-Zinn's

course. Since then, Joen, Michael and other Compassionate Ocean members have offered MBSR and follow-up mindfulness classes in Minneapolis, Saint Paul, Stillwater, Mahtomedi, Minnetonka, Chaska, and Northfield. Since Compassionate Ocean was incorporated we have offered approximately 200 MBSR courses, reaching over 2,000 students. For many, this course has been life-changing.

## **Buddhist Studies**

Buddhism offers deep and extensive teachings in ways to live our lives with less suffering and more peace. Since its incorporation, Compassionate Ocean has offered 114 Buddhist Studies classes on 108 topics, with 14 teachers reaching 665 students, many of whom have taken multiple courses. Drawing from the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, Dainin Katagiri Roshi, and many more, class topics have included mindful speech and deep listening, the eightfold path, karma, Buddhist psychology, and the practice of generosity. Typically, four 8-week Buddhist studies courses are offered each year.

## **Sesshins**

From its beginning Compassionate Ocean has valued extended periods for formal practice, called *sesshins*. For 25 years the Center has offered weekend or week-long sesshins almost every month, either at our Center or at retreat centers in southern Minnesota and northeastern Iowa. Every sesshin is a precious opportunity to touch the depth of human life.

## **And More**

Compassionate Ocean also offers ongoing meditation and chanting services, Dharma talks, workshops, community gatherings, guest teachers, and much more. Still, the heart of Compassionate Ocean is our sangha—our community. None of this could happen without the sincere practice and devoted efforts of many. May we continue to strengthen and deepen together, offering support to all.

