**Ekoji Buddhist Temple**

**EDC Annual Report—October 2020**

**Activities and Focus in January – March 2020**

Ekoji’s Board of Directors at the start of the year chose three main areas of focus for 2020: Outreach to bring in new visitors; In-reach to ensure that Ekoji provides a “spiritual” home to our sangha community; and continuing and adding to our existing Shin Buddhist education offerings, working hand in hand with Rev. Hayashi and the minister’s assistants.

* **Outreach.** Our outreach initiatives focused on smarter use of our existing social media platforms and website. We aimed to add an educational aspect to many of our planned social media efforts, starting with a Shin Buddhism “word of the week” to explain Buddhist terms and humanize Ekoji’s sangha to outside viewers. Our goal was to post three thoughtful/intentional posts each week on our social media platforms to create conversations and build an online community.
* **In-reach.** The Board stood up Ekoji’s stewardship group system in January, recognizing that creating a sense of “home” requires creating opportunities for our members to connect with each other on a personal level, while also helping everyone understand that we collectively “own” and are responsible for maintaining our physical environment. We see this system as key to creating opportunities to connect and to give everyone the know-how to help care for our temple and each other. We also planned quarterly themed after-service presentations on life topics applicable in and out of our temple walls, including: estate planning; safety and awareness; nutrition and wellness; and mental health.
* **Continuing/enhancing our Shin Buddhist education offerings.** We revived our monthly book discussions and were in the process of scheduling Buddhism 101 and other seminars when we decided to close the temple in March.

**Activities from March – October 2020:**

The Board and Rev. Hayashi decided to close our temple doors as of 12 March. **We immediately pivoted to a robust slate of virtual programming and a series of sangha check-ins, keeping our focus on education, outreach, and in-reach.**

**Education and Outreach**

* We began posting **weekly virtual services** as of Sunday, 15 March, to our website and social media platforms. Rev. Hayashi and Ekoji co-President Andrea Chapman worked to pre-record several chants and individual parts of the virtual service, and Rev. Hayashi recorded a new Dharma talk each week.
  + We began virtual **Dharma Talk Watch Parties** in September, scheduled for the first Sunday of each month. We use these as informal Dharma discussions and as a forum to engage with virtual visitors who have been watching our weekly virtual services and other educational offerings.
* Rev. Hayashi, Andrea, and our Minister’s Assistants worked to record several **periodic educational video series**, usually published on Wednesday nights. The series thus far has included topics on: “Buddhism for You and Me,” an introductory course on Buddhism from Sidddartha to Shinran; “Beyond Temple Walls,” which focused on creating a religious space in our homes; and “Reflection on the Pure Land.”
* We continued our **monthly book discussions** via Zoom.
* We stood down on our **children’s Dharma School** during the spring as our teachers and students adjusted to full Zoom schedules and online learning. We resumed Dharma School in October, shifting to a monthly joint all-ages virtual class, a pre-recorded family-focused Dharma message from Rev. Hayashi, and optional age-appropriate downloadable assignments. All Dharma School activities and assignments focus on a new theme each month.
* Although we cancelled Dharma School classes, we continued virtual meetings throughout the spring for our three students enrolled in our **Metta-Padma award program**. The students successfully completed the program in June, at which point we held a virtual awards ceremony. Mr. Robert Tanaka, Chair of the BCA National Buddhist Committee on Scouting, virtually participated in the ceremony and provided the official certificates and medals.
* We continue to **update our website**, having added specific “Learn and engage” and “Watch and read” sections in line with our outreach and education goals.

**In-reach**

* Right after closing the temple, we initiated a **weekly Zoom meet-up with Ekoji’s senior citizens**, who we assumed might be the most isolated of our sangha members during the pandemic stay-at-home orders.
* We used our Stewardship Group make-up to organize **phone trees**; each Board member was asked to call and/or email each of their group members. We also used this system to offer gift cards to local grocery stores that had previously been donated to the temple for sangha support.
* We **initiated Dharma Echoes, a** **periodic publication**, to share sangha members’ perspectives and life experiences in the new pandemic “normal.”
* In reaction to our virtual weekly services, we started to see donations from newer visitors and previous Ekoji sangha members who had moved to other locations, and we realized the potential for a new virtual membership category. Our Sangha voted this summer to **update our by-laws to add a new virtual associate member category**. Our first virtual member signed up in October.
* We held a **virtual seminar for sangha members on retirement and estate planning** with a local lawyer, continuing with our planned life topic series.
* Our informal **Ekoji ladies’ group** has been holding monthly socially distanced meetings at a local park. They pick a book or article to discuss at the meeting and also use the time to socialize.
* We held a **virtual Happy Hour** in the spring as an additional means to check in with sangha members.

**Continuity of operations**

Our Board has continued to meet monthly via Zoom and held quarterly virtual retreats. Many of our meetings focused on COVID-19 trends in our region and potential criteria we should use to determine if and when to re-open our doors. Rev Hayashi has also continued to meet the spiritual needs of our community, conducting several virtual memorial services and one in-person service at a local funeral home. Ekoji is using this time of having closed doors to address facility renovations and maintenance, including our ongoing kitchen renovation, removing a buried oil tank no longer in use, and servicing our Garden of the Three Treasures. We remain extremely grateful for the unwavering support and partnership of our benefactor, Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai (BDK), which has helped to sustain Ekoji’s financial operations even amidst national economic turmoil.

**Re-opening Decisions**

* When COVID trends in our region seemed to stabilize in a downward trend during the summer, we decided to hold a socially distanced **in-person Obon service**. We created safety protocol documents in informal consultation with two of our sangha members who work in the epidemiological field. Our safety protocols included: robust cleaning before and after service; RSVPing for service; wearing masks at all times while on campus; temperature screening and health questionnaires before entering the temple; one-way entrances and exits; socially distanced reserved seating; no chanting, singing, or incense burning during service; and much more. **The support of our volunteers and the willingness of our attendees to abide by our safety protocols allowed us to successfully execute the in-person service.**
* After the in-person service, the Board and Rev. Hayashi **decided to schedule in-person services on the first Sunday of each month**, adding time between services as an additional safety layer. However, after the July in-person service, we observed an uptick in COVID trends in our region, and the **Board has subsequently voted each month to cancel the in-person services**. We continued to discuss and vote each month on whether to hold the following month’s in-person service.
* We **conducted a sangha online survey** in August to better gauge our sangha members’ needs and individuals’ comfort with returning to in-person services. The results indicated to us that most of our temple members are not yet ready to return to the temple in person but are benefitting from viewing our virtual offerings. This **led us to determine that our sangha is better served by having Rev. Hayashi’s and Board efforts focused primarily on providing our virtual content for now**.

**Fundraising.** With the cancellation of our second annual Arts Fair and our annual Obon festival, we lost all planned fundraising income for 2020. After attending BCA webinars and hearing of other temples’ successes in holding virtual fundraisers, the Board decided to hold a **weekend-long virtual fundraiser** in October.

* The fundraiser planning committee decided on **“Spreading Only Compassion”** as the theme for the weekend and met every Friday evening for two months. We used our previously scheduled *Eitaikyo* service as a hook to focus Friday activities on Ekoji’s past, Saturday’s line-up on Ekoji’s present, and Sunday’s events on Ekoji’s future. The weekend included: a Founders’ Panel; a cooking demonstration with Rev. Michael Endo; a virtual walk/run; a panel discussion on Contemporary Buddhism; a special address from BCA Bishop Harada; Ekoji trivia night; a Dharma discussion focused on the movie “The Harp of Burma”; the *Eitaikyo* Sunday Service; and a message on Ekoji’s future by co-President Maya Horio. The weekend culminated in an evening candlelight ceremony in honor those who passed before us, and in solidarity with lives lost to the COVID pandemic and as a result of social injustice. Participants included local sangha members, previous sangha members who had moved to other parts of the country, and new sangha visitors. **We were proud to exceed our fundraising goal of $21,000,** which mitigated the loss of our Obon festival income. We plan to use this fundraising model for virtual fundraisers in 2021.

Respectfully submitted,

In gassho,

Maya Horio

Co-President

Ekoji Buddhist Temple