



The Dialog Begins

International Ligmincha Reps Share Perspectives From Summer Retreat

As Gabriel Rocco noted in his letter in this issue, Ligmincha Institute has begun the process of bringing all its worldwide centers and sanghas into a single sustainable organization. Many international Ligmincha representatives responded to Ligmincha's invitation to gather at the 2012 Summer Retreat at Serenity Ridge. Two international representatives—Lidia Castellano of Ligmincha Italy and Oliver Wirtz of Ligmincha Germany—share their perspectives and experiences surrounding this groundbreaking event.□

'A Stronger Feeling of Belonging'



My first impression in arriving at Serenity Ridge has been one of being in a sacred place, the same feeling I have when I have visited our Bonpo monasteries of Menri or Triten Norbutse. Sacredness and the vibrant presence of the lineage amid the beautiful Virginia's forests! And I have felt excited at finally seeing our beloved Rinpoche's "home."

I have found a lot of warmth, not just the climatic one, and openness. In all this, the thrill of meeting face to face with people who had been only names or voices till then. It made the word "sangha" become substantial, warm, alive.

I have brought home with me a stronger feeling of belonging, and I really hope more people from my country will be able to share and feel the same.

—*Lidia Castellano, Rome, Italy*

'A Tremendous Shift'—an Interview With Oliver Wirtz, July 30, 2012



VOCL: What did you anticipate when Rinpoche invited you and other international Ligmincha representatives to come to Serenity Ridge?

Oliver Wirtz: I was happy to be invited and represent the German sangha and be in contact with all the other sanghas. My first impression on seeing the agenda was, this is going to be a very busy week. But there was no better way than to be busy, in order to reach the goals we reached. It was perfectly set up.

VOCL: Did you feel that you came away from this gathering with any new ideas?

Oliver: We have been having informal monthly Skype meetings in Europe to share experiences and ideas. So the meetings at Serenity Ridge were more of a confirmation rather than about finding out new things. However, I feel a tremendous shift is now coming from Ligmincha in its

structure for communicating and networking. It is reconfirming that Ligmincha is setting protocols and assembling a contact list of all participants, for example. There is a sense of flow. I see that something is being well worked out that supports Rinpoche in a way that he can concentrate on giving teachings, instead of continually overseeing the development and management of worldwide centers and sanghas.

The value of this emphasis on networking is that different centers and sanghas no longer must find solutions on their own to the same types of challenges, again and again. It is very important for the future that we have a flexible system for supporting the varying levels of growth among different sanghas. For example, Costa Rica has more or less a practice group, whereas a single city in Mexico may have as big a sangha as in all of Germany.

VOCL: What are your hopes for the future, as a result of this initial dialog?

Oliver: My hope is that the use of the Internet will enhance our networking, not only through use of an international public website, but also through an internal password-protected area with opportunities for various coordinators, board members and council members to privately share and benefit from each other. My biggest hope is definitely that we can come to support each other with no dependency on Rinpoche, so he can save his life energy for the teachings.

All of the international Ligmincha representatives will need to take responsibility not only for coming up with ideas for meeting these larger goals, but also for delivering some output. In my mind, a challenge will be for all of us to keep this larger vision in the forefront and to be patient, flexible and open-minded about solving our smaller day-to-day issues. If we can maintain our focus on the larger goals, I believe solutions for many of our smaller challenges will be found in the process.

VOCL: The annual Summer Retreat in Buchenau, Germany, has just concluded. How did it go?

Oliver: We were very happy for Rinpoche's offering during those six days. Particularly remarkable was something that transpired as an extension of our previous international gathering. At Serenity Ridge, Rinpoche shared with us his thoughts about establishing a European retreat center, a home for Ligmincha in Europe. It will be a place for residential

retreats, where we can host two resident lamas, and where we can support personal and spiritual development and also host training seminars of The Three Doors Program.

At Serenity Ridge, Rinpoche honored this European center with a formal gift of a thangka of Sherap Chamma and a Zhang Zhung Nyen Gyü text. I brought these back with me, and we placed them on the shrine at the Buchenau Summer Retreat. In response, the European sangha spontaneously gave financial contributions toward its own, formal gift of a Tapihritsa statue. This was a way for sangha members to express their gratitude and give something of their own toward the new center.