



Growing the Sunday Sits

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The SIMS Sunday Morning Sit, now in its sixth month, has been a long time in the making. Offering a sit that would accommodate families had been a goal for years. When the Sangha Life Committee was created in 2016 with the purpose of strengthening the vitality of the SIMS community, one of its goals was to increase participation by providing a greater variety of offerings to the sangha. In addition to meeting the needs of families, the committee wanted to offer more opportunities for social interaction and creating community. The idea for our new Sunday Sit came out of this committee's exploration of the question, "How can SIMS be more welcoming to more people?" Several years ago, Sunday morning had been identified in a parent survey as a popular time for families. A weekend time seemed to have additional appeal, given Seattle's weekday evening commute issues. Sunday morning it would be! Now the question was, what would it look like and how could it be more welcoming — not just to families with children and not just to those wishing to avoid traffic?

A group of four SIMS Local Dharma Leaders, Sooz Appel, Lyndal Johnson, Danielle Sewell, and Lauren Wilson, along with Guiding Teacher Tuere Sala began planning in the spring of 2017. They wanted to provide a balance of noble silence and social engagement. They wanted to welcome first time meditators as well as those with meditation experience. They wanted to add some mindful movement and music. And they wanted the sounds of children's quiet activity to be a part of the welcoming environment. After much reflection and with some wise counsel and inspiration from Carol Geil, facilitator of the SIMS Dharma and Children Group, they came up with a schedule of activities as well as a community statement to be read at each gathering:

As we enter this hall, let us remember that we are entering a sacred space: a space for being in the moment with whatever is present. We recognize our deep connection with one another where each of us is welcome just as we are. Freeing our minds of greed, hatred and delusion through this practice offers the opportunity for others to do the same, and reduces ignorance and hatred in the world. It is with gratitude, we practice together.

The team of teachers for the Sunday Morning Sit shares in the responsibility for leading the sits with dharma talks that follow the Tuesday Night dharma themes and for offering guided meditations for children and those new to meditation. A unique feature of the morning's dharma talk is the sharing of a story, often a children's picture book, to illustrate the talk's theme.

Since January an average of 25 sangha members including children have been meeting Sunday mornings from 10 - 11:30 (except on nonresidential retreat weekends). Activities are offered in shorter chunks: 20 - 25 minute dharma talks and meditations, with a 5 minute guided meditation for children at the beginning of each sit, as well as some time for movement, conversation and discussions. Parents have helped Sunday Sit teachers develop guidelines and expectations for the kids. Now kids who are "regulars" help show the way for newcomers. Parents appreciate that the activity area where kids can play quietly with toys, draw, or read is in a shared space with the meditation area. Young and old alike get the opportunity to learn: to develop respect for silence or to relax when silence is interrupted, as the case may be. As one person said, "Kid noise is great for practice!" At 11:30 the last bell of the morning is rung, usually by one of the children, and everyone is invited to gather in the kitchen for tea, treats, and conversation. Won't you join us?