

Statement on Community Integrity and Safeguarding

In Plum Village, we uphold a zero-tolerance policy toward all forms of abuse of spiritual authority, be it psychological, sexual, or financial. As a celibate monastic community, we are diligent and wholehearted in upholding our precepts (the monastic *Vinaya*), which we study and recite weekly. We are deeply aware that no one should ever be a victim of abuse within a spiritual community.

Since 2022, we have implemented a safeguarding protocol across all Hamlets, which we are actively committed to continuously improving. We take all safeguarding concerns and allegations extremely seriously, and respond to every situation brought to our attention. When any monastic is suspected of breaching our precepts or safeguarding code, immediate action is taken. This can include dismissal and exclusion from the monastic order and practice centers within the Plum Village tradition.

Responding to Recent Events

In the spring of 2024, a close relationship between a monastic and a lay practitioner in Lower Hamlet was observed; this led to inquiries which were met with firm denials from both parties involved. Our efforts to intervene and communicate were met with denials that any problem existed. In June, after the nun indicated that inappropriate physical contact had occurred, we conducted a deeper inquiry and gathered evidence. In a matter of days, the sister in question was removed from the monastic order and departed from the community.

Even though both parties stated at the time that they were consenting adults who had fallen in love and wished to embark on a lay life together—feeling very happy about this new chapter in their lives—we continued our inquiries to understand what had occurred, and to evaluate the situation from the community's perspective.

These enquiries revealed details that had been concealed by both the lay practitioner and the monastic during the preceding months. While close spiritual friendships are a feature of our practice, they must never cross the boundaries of our codes of conduct. Moreover, no teacher should ever demand secrecy regarding an emotional or physical relationship with another practitioner. Seeking such secrecy is a clear characteristic of an inappropriate situation and abuse of power.

To address the identified issues and further strengthen our safeguarding, we have implemented the following measures:

- **Dual Supervision:** All aspirants will be guided by at least two mentors and precept teachers.
- **Proactive Boundaries:** We commit to act immediately to enforce boundaries whenever unusual closeness or inappropriate attachment is observed between monastics, or between monastics and lay practitioners, regardless of any denials.
- **Expert Training:** We are expanding our safeguarding training and protocols with guidance from external experts specializing in victim advocacy and support.
- **Inclusive Safety:** We remain committed to ensuring Lower Hamlet is a safe and welcoming refuge for everyone and all communities, including the LGBTQIA+ community.

Our Path Forward

The monastic sisters of the Lower Hamlet continue to cherish our path of service and celibacy, which we believe is a meaningful response to the challenges of society today. We are committed to a life of simplicity, transformation, and healing, guided by our monastic precepts.

We acknowledge that our community is imperfect and that each of us is human. Every step of our journey is an opportunity to grow and learn from our shortcomings. As the saying goes, "The robe does not make the monastic." We remain monastics only by virtue of our practice of mindfulness, our precepts, and our shared code of conduct.

Plum Village Lower Hamlet Dharma Teachers & Safeguarding Team