

2025 Annual Report

Soto Zen North America

Our mission is to cultivate a North American Soto Zen denomination that stewards the lineage of Shakyamuni Buddha, as transmitted through Dogen Zenji and Keizan Zenji, with shared purpose, mutual responsibility, and a commitment to ongoing connection with our roots in Japan.

Our initial objectives:

- Create and maintain opportunities for solidarity for Soto Zen Buddhists, leading to mutual support and identity with the organization.
- Create and maintain the organization as a spiritual resource for North America with associated temples and kyoshi who are authorized, skilled, and trustworthy.
- Create and maintain a mutually beneficial connection to the Sotoshu denominational leadership in Japan.
- Create and maintain a sustainable organizational structure for the Soto Zen NA denomination.

Board of Directors

Hoko Karnegis, President
Kenzan Seidenberg, Secretary
Kotoku Crivello, Treasurer
Doshin Johnson, At large

Denominational Council

Shumyo Kojima, Chair
Eido Carney
Konjin Godwin
Ejo McMullen
Teijo Munnich

Guiding Kyoshi

Koun Franz

From the Guiding Kyoshi

So much of this moment can feel unstable, unsafe. We should remember, it has always been this way—all who came before us were also subject to the violence of storms, the whims of leaders, distrust between nations. But unlike so many of our ancestors, we carry the deep understanding that our choices directly impact the entire planet, including the parts and the people we cannot see. Democratic government and a global economy invite us into a different level of personal responsibility, one in which the item we buy or the person we vote for has ramifications not only for our community, but for strangers and for future generations. Each of us carries the weight of the world.

The teachings we receive through our shared Soto Zen tradition do not tell us what to do in this moment, or in any moment. We may look to the precepts for answers, but if we seek sincerely, we come away with questions. The questions invite us into the mind of not knowing (*fushiki*), and that mind becomes the intimate mind of *shikantaza*: the mind of no resistance, of openness to things as they are. *Shikantaza* does not show us what to do. Rather, it shows us how to do it.

The posture of *shikantaza* is the posture of vow. We choose, with every breath, to hold ourselves upright, to meet this moment without falling into it and without

backing away. We remain still, unflinching, even in moments of discomfort. And perhaps most important, we simply remain—we hold ourselves in this way until the bell rings, or until the moment changes, or perhaps forever. By not moving, the bodhi tree made it possible for Siddhartha to approach and sit, and for the Buddha to stand and walk away. In this stillness, others find safety. There is no need for righteousness there—ours, or others’.

When all around us is turbulence and chaos, may we offer this: this stillness, this resolve, this openness. In this moment, wherever we are and whatever we face, may we offer ourselves up as trustworthy, as the ones who will remain steady, no matter what. May we offer it in our homes, to the ones we love; may we offer it in our temples and communities, to each other. And may we offer it collectively, as unshakeable bodhisattvas, to all beings in the ten directions. In this breath and the next, may we stay steady as the bodhi tree, offering a place for the world to awaken.



2025 Milestones

Changed the pre-existing list of directors from ASZB that had been filed with the state of California during the incorporation process to the actual list of functioning directors.

Clarified the path to legal status as a denomination.

Established nonprofit corporate checking account at Bank of America and deposited initial donations from members; balance now stands at \$3700.

Finalized description of the rank of Supervising Kyoshi, began accepting applications from the membership, and appointed nine.

Held election among the membership for the first Denominational Council, which began meeting monthly.

Finalized and adopted bylaws.

Produced two e-newsletters as well as remaining in contact with members via listserv and direct email.

Updated website with *Departures* page for deceased members as well as current information about the organization as it was finalized.

Held joint meeting with the Board of Directors of the Association of Soto Zen Buddhists to establish a strong working relationship.

Denominational Council formed a nominating committee to fill the position of Guiding Kyoshi and proposed three candidates; the council interviewed the two who were willing to go forward and ultimately appointed Koun Franz.

On accepting the position of Guiding Kyoshi, Koun stepped down as board president but remained a director; Hoko was appointed president.

Developed and adopted a mission statement and initial objectives.

Presented status report at annual Sotoshu conference at Zenshuji in October and conducted an election to replace Gyokei Yokoyama on the board; Doshin Johnson was elected.

Directors agreed to staggered terms such that only one or two directors would be new to the board at any given time.

Board of Directors and Denominational Council held their first joint meeting to clarify their relationships and discuss work priorities.

Denominational Council began work to finalize an ethics policy for the organization as well as regulations for priests, temples, training and vestments.

Began construction of records infrastructure such that Soto Zen NA can collect and maintain membership information and incorporate member records shared by Sotoshu.

Proposed production of a book of teachings as part of Sotoshu's events recognizing the 750 memorial of Koun Ejo, with chapters to be contributed by supervising kyoshi in response to translation of *Komyo Zammai* and commentary by Shohaku Okumura.

For more information, visit our website at <https://sotozennorthamerica.weebly.com/>