

Summary of ZCO Independent Report on the Behavior of PIMC's Former Guiding Teacher

Summary written by the Board of Directors of Portland Insight Meditation Community
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On Sept. 23, 2024, Robert Beatty, the founder and guiding teacher of Portland Insight Meditation Community (PIMC), resigned from the organization under threat of termination by the PIMC board of directors.

This action came immediately following Beatty's disclosure to the board that he had engaged in a sexual relationship with KB Mercer, a student of Beatty's and longtime member of the PIMC sangha (in Buddhism, "sangha" refers to a spiritual community). Mercer died by suicide on Sept. 21, 2024 after departing early from a meditation retreat in Corbett, Ore. being led by Beatty.

In the days following Beatty's resignation, Jan Chozen Bays contacted the PIMC board with an offer to help with the difficulties resulting from these circumstances. Bays, a pediatrician, is co-founder of the Zen Community of Oregon (ZCO) and received training on clergy misconduct from the Faithtrust Institute in Seattle. For more than 40 years, she has worked with Buddhist sanghas facing challenges from teacher misconduct and is regarded as a national leader in this area.

The PIMC board accepted Bays' offer for assistance. After several meetings with Bays, the board invited her and two other senior women teachers from ZCO – Laura Jomon Martin and Nan Kyoko Whitaker-Emerich – to lead a pair of Council Process Circles at PIMC in late 2024 and a one-day training on healthy boundaries in spiritual communities in early 2025.

Additionally, to help the board and PIMC sangha better understand the scope and dynamics of teacher misconduct at PIMC, Bays suggested that she and her colleagues talk more with members of the community. In early 2025, with the permission of the PIMC board, Bays, Martin and Whitaker-Emerich began a process of interviewing individuals who had been students of Beatty at PIMC as well as community members who held administrative, board and teaching roles at different points.

A 27-page report, plus appendices, on the findings of those interviews was presented to the current PIMC Board in early summer 2025 (two individuals who were on the board in the fall of 2024 stepped off in 2025, and three new board members have joined). This summary document outlines the report's high-level findings and recommendations.

The testimony detailed in the report was presented anonymously. But even so, a number of interviewees expressed concern to the ZCO representatives that they could be identified by Beatty and others based on the specifics of what they shared. To reduce harm and protect those

individuals who came forward to offer their accounts, the PIMC board, in consultation with the report authors, has decided not to make the full report widely available. Community members who wish to review the full report can do so by contacting the PIMC office (office@portlandinsight.org) to schedule an in-person reading at the center.

Process of the Investigation

Bays and her ZCO colleagues in early 2025 established an email address through which individuals from the PIMC sangha could get in touch to express willingness to discuss their experiences. This email channel was communicated to the community by the PIMC board via in-person announcements and the organization's weekly email newsletter.

During the first half of 2025, the ZCO teachers spoke with more than 20 community members, using the same list of interview questions as the basis for each conversation. The final report from Bays and her colleagues acknowledges the fact that this interview pool represented a relatively small sample size and that those who did participate were self-selecting or were referred by other interviewees. Additionally, some details provided could not be independently verified by the report authors.

"However," the authors note in the report, "we believe that valuable information can be gleaned from these reports as PIMC continues to reshape itself and move forward."

The ZCO teachers reached out to Beatty in February of 2025, asking to meet with him to hear his perspective. After initially agreeing to a meeting, Beatty ultimately declined to be interviewed. "You may not have an agenda to act or speak for those wounded by my actions," Beatty wrote in a statement to Bays and her colleagues in March 2025, "but I have some clarity that at this time I am unwilling to take the risk of our gathering devolving into a shaming session to hold me accountable for my violating the precepts." (The Five Precepts represent the ethical guidelines of Buddhism and form the basis of the [PIMC Code of Ethics](#).)

Key Findings

The interview process did not find any additional instances of explicit sexual relationships between Beatty and members of the PIMC community that had not been previously reported. (In addition to the relationship with Mercer in 2024, Beatty engaged in a sexual relationship with a student in 2007. The community learned of that relationship around the time of its occurrence, and members of the community and the PIMC board subsequently supported Beatty maintaining his role.)

But the ZCO report does detail accounts from a number of sangha members who expressed feelings of discomfort from Beatty's words, demeanor and use of physical contact.

"Every woman but one that we spoke to described unwanted advances by Robert Beatty," the report states, "including inappropriate comments about their attractiveness and their bodies,

holding hands or hugging, inappropriate touching of cheeks and hair, taking them on private secluded walks during a retreat, giving them gifts, and encouraging them to meet with him privately for counseling sessions.”

Two people who were past members of the PIMC Teachers Council, a teachers group that included Beatty, told the ZCO representatives they had witnessed concerning behavior or remarks from Beatty. One of those individuals labeled such actions as “grooming behavior.” Another former Teachers Council member told the report authors that when confronted with behavioral concerns by colleagues, Beatty “knows how to say, ‘OK, I’ll pay attention to it,’ but he just keeps on going back to his old patterns.”

One section of the report focuses on Beatty’s behavior toward participants in the organization’s former Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) committee, particularly during a meeting in early 2024. Beatty, who was not a member of the committee at that time, joined the meeting and discussed his concerns about how the group was interacting with the rest of the community. One person on the committee told the report authors that Beatty at the meeting was “insensitive, hostile, angry and condemning.” Another person at the meeting noted, “This defensive characteristic is very alarming for someone whose life work lies in mindful awareness.”

The report also describes concerns about Beatty’s approach to finances at the organization. Interviewees who held administrative and board roles at different points told the report authors that Beatty did not keep a close watch on how expenses were tracked, nor did he prioritize maintaining the organization’s reserves.

Additionally, the report discloses that while Beatty framed residential retreats he organized as being entirely separate from PIMC, in some cases he utilized retreat centers that are only available to nonprofit entities, and he signed those contracts as an agent of PIMC and provided copies of PIMC insurance policies. None of the income from these retreats went back to the organization.

The report notes that individuals who had concerns about Beatty’s behavior often felt unsure of where to turn. Beatty served as the spiritual teacher for virtually everyone at PIMC and was also a board member and the PIMC president. Interviewees stated that other board members were typically nominated by Beatty himself and that there was an overall lack of governance structure to help hold leadership accountable.

Further, some interviewees told Bays and her colleagues that the board, in its various iterations over the years, had been informed of concerns from sangha members but took little tangible action.

The report authors conclude the following: “Why were ‘by-standers’ – long-term members and co-teachers who knew of Robert Beatty’s past problems with becoming romantically and sexually involved with women students and knew of his habit of unwanted touching of women students – not able to speak up? They were put in a double bind. If they spoke up, they risked

losing their (beloved) spiritual teacher ... and also their sangha, source of community support and loving kindness.”

Recommendations and Board Responses

The report outlines a number of recommendations, which are listed below, to help foster better accountability and safety at PIMC. Recent action or planned action by the board related to each recommendation is noted in parentheses beside it.

1. Consider honoring KB Mercer’s life. (PIMC plans to hold a memorial service on Sept. 21, 2025, the one-year anniversary of Mercer’s death.)
2. Revise the organization’s ethical policies to not allow any romantic relationships between teacher and student. (In March of 2025, the PIMC board updated the PIMC Code of Ethics, requiring a three-year gap between when a student-teacher relationship ends and when a romantic relationship can begin; this is the standard followed by professional therapists and a number of other Buddhist organizations.)
3. Consider developing a policy on physical touch at PIMC. (The board in March 2025 adopted a [Code of Conduct](#), which specifically addresses hugging and physical contact.)
4. Create an Ethics and Reconciliation (EAR) Council to serve as the clear entity where community members can bring concerns. (The board has drafted EAR Council guidelines and is currently implementing the process.)
5. Institute a collective teaching model, with the role of “guiding teacher” dispersed among several well-trained and authorized teachers. (The board endeavors to follow such a model as the organization’s future teaching framework is built out in the coming months.)
6. Ensure the board of directors has the ability to disagree with and sanction teachers. (The organization’s bylaws were updated in March 2025 to stipulate that while a guiding teacher may sit on the board, that person does not have voting privileges.)
7. Hold regular classes or discussions on the Buddhist precepts. (The Board and existing PIMC teachers endeavor to follow this recommendation in developing future programming.)
8. Check in with people who leave the Sangha, especially when a group of people appear to disengage abruptly. (The board is developing a strategy for this type of communication.)
9. Develop a more formal process for the creation and governance of committees. (The board is currently developing this policy.)
10. Make board meetings open and publish short meeting minutes in a format available to all community members. (Minutes for every board meeting going back to the start of 2023 are available [on the PIMC website](#), and the board is developing a policy for making select meetings open to the community.)
11. Create term limits for board members. (These have been clarified in the bylaws and current terms are tracked by the board.)
12. Create a limited discretionary fund for teacher use. (This funding mechanism is being considered by the board.)

13. Develop a double- or triple-accounting system; for example, the organization could have a treasurer, a paid independent accountant, and/or an internal bookkeeper. (PIMC currently has a treasurer and bookkeeper, and the board's Finance Committee meets monthly to ensure high levels of visibility on accounting.)
14. Ask the board treasurer to give quarterly budget and financial updates to the rest of the board. (Such updates now occur monthly, and the board is committed to providing an overview of organizational finances twice per year.)

Communication and Transparency

The PIMC Board offers a deep bow of gratitude to Jan Chozen Bays, Laura Jomon Martin and Nan Kyoko Whitaker-Emerich for the significant work that went into the interview process and writing the report.

It is our commitment as a board to maintain open channels of communication with the PIMC community as we continue to strengthen as an organization in the wake of all that occurred in September 2024 – and the years prior, when more subtle patterns of behavior by PIMC leadership led to the episodes of concern that are referenced in the report.

We believe that by fully understanding what has occurred in our community and structuring ourselves more wisely in the years to come, we can develop a sangha where all people can find the ease, respect and healthy interpersonal connection that allow the teachings of the Buddha to flourish in their own lives.

May all beings take merit in PIMC's efforts to learn, to heal and to grow together.

The PIMC Board of Directors

Vik Anantha, Maggie Donahue, Shane Dixon Kavanaugh, Dan Leif, Susan Nosacka and Karen O'Dell