

MONASTIC CODE OF CONDUCT AND RESIDENCY POLICIES | A Model Policy for Lao Buddhist Temples in the United States

MONASTIC CODE OF CONDUCT  
AND RESIDENCY POLICIES

A Model Policy for Lao Buddhist Temples in the United States

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This document is a model template developed for use by Lao Buddhist temples registered as nonprofit organizations in the United States. Individual temples should adapt bracketed fields, review the document with qualified legal counsel, and adopt it formally by Board resolution before use.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
PREAMBLE	5
1. INTRODUCTION	6
2. PURPOSE AND SCOPE	6
2.1 Purpose	6
2.2 Scope	6
2.3 Governing Authority	7
3. ELIGIBILITY AND ADMISSION	7
3.1 Eligibility Requirements	7
3.2 Application and Admission Process	7
3.3 Documentation	8
4. CODE OF CONDUCT	8
4.1 Foundational Principles	8
4.2 Ethical Standards	8
4.3 Prohibited Conduct	9
4.4 Technology and Media	9
4.5 Vinaya Compliance and Serious Offenses	9
5. DAILY ROUTINE AND RESPONSIBILITIES	10
5.1 Daily Schedule	10
5.2 Communal Responsibilities	10
5.3 Study and Teaching	10
6. COMMUNITY AND LAY RELATIONS	10
6.1 Engagement with Lay Community	10
6.2 Acceptance of Donations and Offerings	11
6.3 External Engagements	11
6.4 Relations with Other Organizations	11
7. PROPERTY AND ASSET USE	12
7.1 Ownership of Temple Property	12
7.2 Permitted Use	12
7.3 Care of Temple Property	12

MONASTIC CODE OF CONDUCT AND RESIDENCY POLICIES | A Model Policy for Lao Buddhist Temples in the United States

7.4 Personal Possessions	12
8. FINANCIAL GUIDELINES	12
8.1 Financial Integrity	12
8.2 Handling of Donations	12
8.3 Financial Controls	13
8.4 Prohibited Financial Conduct	13
9. HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELFARE	13
9.1 Health and Welfare of Residents	13
9.2 Emergency Procedures	14
9.3 Mental Health and Well-being	14
9.4 Safe Environment	14
9.5 Safeguarding and Protection of Vulnerable Persons	14
10. GRIEVANCE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION	14
10.1 Principles	14
10.2 Informal Resolution	14
10.3 Formal Grievance Process	15
10.4 Recordkeeping	15
10.5 Protection from Retaliation	15
10.6 Whistleblower Protection	15
11. LEAVE OF ABSENCE AND DEPARTURE	15
11.1 Temporary Leave	15
11.2 Voluntary Departure	16
11.3 Departure Due to Disrobing or Laicization	16
11.4 Notification of External Authorities	16
12. COMPLIANCE AND DISCIPLINARY ACTION	16
12.1 Commitment to Fair Process	16
12.2 Progressive Discipline	16
12.3 Emergency Removal	17
12.4 Right of Appeal	17
12.5 Reporting to Authorities	17
13. POLICY ADMINISTRATION AND REVIEW	17
13.1 Administration	17
13.2 Orientation	17

MONASTIC CODE OF CONDUCT AND RESIDENCY POLICIES | A Model Policy for Lao  
Buddhist Temples in the United States

13.3 Periodic Review	17
13.4 Translation	18
13.5 Supersession	18
14. ADOPTION AND SIGNATURES	19
APPENDIX A: RESIDENT ACKNOWLEDGMENT FORM	20
APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF THE 227 VINAYA RULES (BHIKKHU DISCIPLINE)	21
Purpose of This Appendix	21
Overview of the 227 Rules	21
1. Pārājika — Defeats (4 Rules)	21
2. Saṅghādisesa — Serious Offenses Requiring Rehabilitation (13 Rules)	21
3. Aniyata — Indeterminate Cases (2 Rules)	22
4. Nissaggiya Pācittiya — Forfeiture and Confession (30 Rules)	22
5. Pācittiya — Confession Offenses (92 Rules)	22
6. Pāṭidesanīya — Acknowledgment Offenses (4 Rules)	22
7. Sekhiya — Training Rules (75 Rules)	23
8. Adhikaraṇa-samatha — Rules for Settling Disputes (7 Rules)	23
Key Principles of the Vinaya	23
Application in This Policy	23
Reference for Further Study	24
APPENDIX C: REFERENCES AND RESOURCES	25
Foundational Monastic Sources	25
U.S. Nonprofit Law and IRS Guidance	25
Immigration — Religious Worker Visa	25
Reference Temples and Models	25
Lao Buddhist Community Organizations	25
APPENDIX D: Glossary Table	26

## PREAMBLE

The Lao Buddhist tradition has sustained our families, communities, and cultural identity for generations — both in Laos and throughout the Lao diaspora in the United States. The temple — the Wat — is the spiritual and cultural heart of every Lao community. It is a place of refuge, learning, ceremony, and service.

As Lao Buddhist temples establish themselves as formal nonprofit organizations in the United States, they take on a dual responsibility: to faithfully preserve the monastic traditions rooted in the Theravada Vinaya, and to fulfill the legal and fiduciary obligations that come with operating as a recognized charitable institution under U.S. law.

This document provides a comprehensive framework for fulfilling both responsibilities. It establishes clear expectations for monks, novices, and all residents of the temple — governing how they are admitted, how they conduct themselves, how they relate to the lay community, how temple resources are managed, and how departures and disputes are handled with respect and transparency.

This model policy was developed by drawing on the foundational document of Wat Lao Buddhavong (Catlett, Virginia), the oldest Lao Buddhist temple in the United States, and adapted to serve as a replicable template for all Lao Buddhist temples across the country. Individual temples should adapt this document to reflect their specific community, location, and governance structure, and formally adopt it by Board resolution.

How to use this template: Bracketed text [ ] indicates fields to be completed by the adopting temple.

Underlined text indicates provisions that should be reviewed by qualified legal counsel before adoption.

Footnote references should be updated to reflect sources appropriate to the adopting temple's tradition.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

[Temple Name] — [Temple Name in Lao script], located at [Address, City, State] — is a Lao Theravada Buddhist temple and a nonprofit corporation registered under the laws of the State of [State] and recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

This Monastic Code of Conduct and Residency Policies establish the expectations, responsibilities, and behavioral standards for all monks, novices, and resident staff living and serving at the temple. It reflects the dual foundation of our community: faithful observance of the Vinaya — the ancient monastic code established by the Buddha — and responsible compliance with the laws governing nonprofit religious organizations in the United States.

These policies were developed with input from the Board of Directors, Officers, Board of Advisors, and Legal Counsel of [Temple Name], in consultation with respected senior monastics and regional Buddhist organizations. They are intended to be clear, practical, and compassionate — offering guidance that supports spiritual practice, protects the well-being of all residents, and upholds the trust of the lay community.

Nothing in this document supersedes the Vinaya or the teachings of the Buddha. Where this document speaks to matters not addressed by the Vinaya, it fills gaps created by the unique context of operating a Buddhist temple in the contemporary United States.

## 2. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

### 2.1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Communicate clear expectations to all monks, novices, and residents of [Temple Name];
- Support an environment in which Buddhist practice, personal development, and service to the community can flourish;
- Ensure that temple resources — including finances, property, and facilities — are managed with honesty, transparency, and accountability;
- Protect the well-being, dignity, and rights of all residents and members of the community;
- Demonstrate compliance with U.S. nonprofit law and IRS regulations governing charitable organizations.

### 2.2 Scope

This policy applies to:

- All fully ordained monks (Phra) residing at the temple;
- All novice monks (Samanera) residing at the temple;
- All female renunciants (Mae Khao) residing at the temple;
- All lay residents living on temple grounds in a service capacity;

- Guest monastics staying at the temple for extended periods (more than 14 days).

Lay visitors, retreat participants, and members of the public visiting the temple for ceremonies or teachings are governed by the temple's separate Visitor Guidelines, not by this policy.

### 2.3 Governing Authority

This policy is adopted by the Board of Directors of [Temple Name] and is administered by the Abbot in cooperation with the Board. Any conflict between this policy and applicable U.S. law shall be resolved in favor of the law. Any conflict between this policy and the Vinaya shall be referred to the Abbot and Board of Advisors for resolution consistent with both traditions.

The Abbot serves as the highest spiritual authority of the temple and has primary responsibility for:

- Oversight of monastic discipline and Vinaya compliance;
- Daily religious operations and spiritual guidance;
- Admission and supervision of monastic residents.

The Board of Directors retains authority over corporate governance, finances, legal compliance, and fiduciary oversight.

Both parties shall act in mutual respect, recognizing the distinct but complementary nature of spiritual and administrative leadership.

## 3. ELIGIBILITY AND ADMISSION

### 3.1 Eligibility Requirements

These eligibility and admission requirements apply to all monastics (including monks, novices, and Mae Khao) and resident applicants, unless otherwise specified.

Any person seeking to reside at [Temple Name] as a monk or novice must meet the following requirements:

- **Ordination credentials:** The applicant must hold a valid ordination certificate issued by a recognized Buddhist temple or ordaining authority, confirming the date, location, and lineage of ordination.
- **Physical and mental fitness:** The applicant must be in good physical and mental health, and capable of fulfilling the duties of monastic life.
- **Commitment to the Vinaya:** The applicant must sincerely commit to living in accordance with the Theravada Vinaya and the community guidelines of [Temple Name].
- **Immigration status:** Any applicant arriving from outside the United States must possess a valid visa or immigration authorization permitting religious work in the U.S. The temple will assist with R-1 religious worker visa sponsorship where eligible, subject to USCIS requirements. No individual may reside at the temple in violation of U.S. immigration law.
- The temple shall not permit any individual to reside or serve in a capacity that violates U.S. immigration law. Failure to maintain lawful status may result in immediate review of residency.

### 3.2 Application and Admission Process

The admission process shall proceed as follows:

- **Step 1 — Application:** The applicant submits a formal written application to the Abbot, including ordination documents, a brief personal statement, and, where applicable, immigration documents.
- **Step 2 — Review:** The Abbot reviews the application in consultation with the Board of Directors. A decision will be communicated within thirty (30) days of receiving a complete application.
- **Step 3 — Orientation:** All approved residents must complete a formal orientation before taking up residence. Orientation covers the temple's daily schedule, community guidelines, financial policies, health and safety procedures, and expectations for community relations.
- **Step 4 — Probationary period:** New residents serve a probationary period of ninety (90) days. During this period, either party may terminate the residency with fourteen (14) days' notice and without formal cause.

### 3.3 Documentation

The temple shall maintain on file, for each resident monk or novice: a copy of ordination documents; immigration documents (where applicable); a signed copy of this policy; and emergency contact information. All records shall be kept confidential and stored securely by the temple Office Manager or designated officer.

## 4. CODE OF CONDUCT

### 4.1 Foundational Principles

All monastics (including monks, novices, and Mae Khao) and residents of [Temple Name] are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that reflects the Buddha's teachings and upholds the dignity and reputation of the temple. The Vinaya remains the primary standard of conduct for ordained monks, while Mae Khao are expected to observe the Eight Precepts and applicable training guidelines. The following expectations supplement these traditions for the specific context of temple life in the United States.

### 4.2 Ethical Standards

All residents are required to observe applicable ethical precepts consistent with their role, including the Vinaya for ordained monks and appropriate training precepts for novices, Mae Khao, and lay residents.

- Observe the precepts of the Vinaya at all times, including the rules of celibacy, non-theft, non-harm, truthfulness, and sobriety;
- Refrain from the use of alcohol, illegal substances, or any intoxicants;
- Wear monastic robes correctly and in the manner prescribed by Lao Buddhist tradition;
- Treat all members of the community — fellow monastics, lay community members, staff, and visitors — with kindness, patience, and respect, regardless of age, background, or status;
- Maintain honest and transparent communication with the Abbot, Board, and community regarding matters affecting the temple.

- Mae Khao are expected to observe the Eight Precepts and maintain conduct consistent with their role as female renunciants within the Lao Buddhist tradition.

### 4.3 Prohibited Conduct

The following conduct is strictly prohibited and may result in disciplinary action up to and including removal from residency:

- Any form of physical, verbal, or psychological harm directed at any person;
- Sexual misconduct of any kind, including conduct that violates the Vinaya's precepts on celibacy;
- Theft, fraud, or misappropriation of temple funds or property;
- Making false or misleading statements to the Board, Abbot, community members, donors, or government authorities;
- Engaging in unauthorized commercial activity, employment, or income-generating work outside the temple without prior Board approval;
- Unauthorized use or disclosure of confidential temple records or donor information.

### 4.4 Technology and Media

All residents are expected to use electronic devices, social media, and the internet in a manner consistent with the Vinaya and the values of the temple. Communications made on behalf of the temple — including social media posts, emails, and public statements — must be reviewed and approved by the Abbot or a designated officer prior to publication. Personal social media use should not reflect negatively on the temple or the monastic community.

Residents shall not:

- Represent personal opinions as official temple positions;
- Engage in political advocacy on behalf of the temple;
- Post content that could reasonably damage the reputation of the temple or the monastic community.

### 4.5 Vinaya Compliance and Serious Offenses

All ordained monks (bhikkhu) are bound by the Theravada Vinaya, including the 227 rules of the Patimokkha.

In cases involving serious Vinaya violations—including the most serious offenses resulting in automatic loss of monastic status (pārājika), as well as serious offenses requiring a formal process of rehabilitation and reinstatement within the monastic community (saṅghādisesa)—the matter shall be reviewed by:

- The Abbot; and
- At least two senior monks or members of the Board of Advisors with demonstrated knowledge of the Vinaya.

Where a violation constitutes a pārājika offense, the individual shall no longer be recognized as a monk and must immediately cease representing themselves as ordained.

All such matters shall be handled with compassion, discretion, and respect for the dignity of all parties, while maintaining fidelity to the Vinaya and full compliance with applicable U.S. law.

## 5. DAILY ROUTINE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### 5.1 Daily Schedule

All resident monks and novices are expected to participate in the temple's daily schedule. The Abbot shall maintain and post the schedule, which shall include at minimum:

- Morning chanting (Tham Vat), led by ordained monastics, with lay participation at the discretion of the Abbot;
- Evening chanting and meditation;
- Alms rounds or morning meal, as practiced in the local community;
- A morning or afternoon work period for maintenance, preparation, and service.

The Abbot may adjust the daily schedule seasonally, during Buddhist Lent (Vassa/Khao Phansa), or for special ceremonies and festivals.

The Abbot may establish coordinated or separate practice schedules for monks, novices, and Mae Khao, as appropriate to maintain proper discipline, harmony, and operational effectiveness within the temple.

### 5.2 Communal Responsibilities

All residents share responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of the temple. This includes:

- Participation in cleaning and maintenance of shared spaces;
- Assisting with meal preparation and cleanup;
- Setting up and taking down for ceremonies, festivals, and community events;
- Welcoming visitors and assisting them with questions or temple protocols.

During Pi Mai Lao (Lao New Year), Boun Ok Phansa, Boun Kathin, and other major community events, all residents are expected to contribute additional time and effort to support the community gathering.

### 5.3 Study and Teaching

All residents are encouraged to devote time to the study of the Dhamma, Pali language, Lao Buddhist scripture, and related subjects. The Abbot may assign specific study responsibilities and may arrange for monks to teach community members, children, and youth. Teaching activities conducted on behalf of the temple shall be consistent with Section 6.3 of this policy.

## 6. COMMUNITY AND LAY RELATIONS

### 6.1 Engagement with Lay Community

All residents are ambassadors of the Dhamma and of Lao Buddhist culture. They are expected to engage with lay community members, donors, and visitors with warmth, patience, and dignity — modeling the qualities of compassion (Metta) and humility that are central to the Buddhist path.

## MONASTIC CODE OF CONDUCT AND RESIDENCY POLICIES | A Model Policy for Lao Buddhist Temples in the United States

Monks should always maintain appropriate boundaries consistent with monastic discipline. In all interactions with individuals of any gender, monks shall:

- Avoid private, one-on-one meetings in enclosed spaces without the knowledge of the Abbot or another monastic;
- Conduct any counseling, spiritual guidance, or personal conversations in accessible, visible areas of the temple;
- Adhere to all Vinaya rules governing interaction with laypeople.

Interactions between monks and Mae Khao must be conducted with appropriate boundaries, transparency, and mutual respect, consistent with the Vinaya and established monastic conventions.

Private, unsupervised interactions between monks and Mae Khao in enclosed or secluded settings should be avoided. All interactions should take place in appropriate, open, or community settings to ensure accountability and maintain the integrity of the monastic community.

### 6.2 Acceptance of Donations and Offerings

All donations, gifts, and offerings received by monks or on behalf of the temple are the property of the temple, not of the individual monk receiving them. Every donation must be:

- Transferred to the temple treasurer or designated officer promptly upon receipt;
- Recorded in the temple's financial records in accordance with Section 8 of this policy;
- Used exclusively for the religious, educational, charitable, and operational purposes of the temple.

No monk or resident may accept or retain money, gifts, or personal benefits from donors for personal use. Monks may retain only the personal requisites permitted under the Vinaya.

### 6.3 External Engagements

Monks representing the temple at external events, teaching engagements, public ceremonies, or media appearances should notify the Abbot and the Board of Directors at least seven (7) days in advance. The notice shall include:

- The nature and purpose of the engagement;
- The name and organization of the inviting party;
- The date, time, and location;
- Any compensation, donation, or offering expected.

This advance-notice requirement exists to maintain transparency, protect the temple's reputation, ensure appropriate oversight of the temple's public representation, and — where compensation is involved — ensure proper financial reporting.

Monks may not engage in ongoing paid employment, commercial enterprise, or income-generating activities outside the temple without prior written approval from the Board of Directors.

### 6.4 Relations with Other Organizations

[Temple Name] encourages positive relationships with other Lao Buddhist temples, the Lao Buddhist Fellowship of America, and regional and national Buddhist organizations. Any formal

affiliation, memorandum of understanding, or collaborative arrangement with another organization requires approval by the Board of Directors.

## 7. PROPERTY AND ASSET USE

### 7.1 Ownership of Temple Property

All real property, buildings, vehicles, equipment, supplies, and assets of [Temple Name] are owned by the temple as a corporate nonprofit entity and held in trust for the benefit of the Lao Buddhist community. No individual monk, resident, or officer holds personal ownership of any temple asset.

### 7.2 Permitted Use

Temple property and resources may be used only for:

- Religious worship, ceremony, and instruction;
- Community cultural and educational activities;
- The personal requisites of resident monastics, as permitted by the Vinaya;
- Operational needs of the temple as a nonprofit organization.

Any use of temple property for personal benefit, commercial activity, or purposes unrelated to the temple's mission is prohibited.

### 7.3 Care of Temple Property

All residents are responsible for treating temple property with care and respect. Damage caused by negligence or misconduct should be reported promptly to the Abbot. The temple shall maintain an up-to-date inventory of significant assets, reviewed annually by the Board of Directors.

### 7.4 Personal Possessions

In keeping with the spirit of the Vinaya, monks and novices are encouraged to live simply, owning only what is necessary for monastic life: robes, personal hygiene items, and requisites permitted by tradition. Questions about whether a possession is appropriate should be directed to the Abbot.

## 8. FINANCIAL GUIDELINES

### 8.1 Financial Integrity

All financial transactions involving [Temple Name] must be conducted with complete honesty and transparency, in compliance with the requirements of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and applicable state nonprofit law. The Board of Directors bears ultimate fiduciary responsibility for the temple's finances.

### 8.2 Handling of Donations

All monetary donations, in-kind gifts, and offerings received by the temple or by any monk on behalf of the temple shall be:

- Transferred to the designated temple treasurer or financial officer immediately upon receipt;
- Recorded with the donor's name (where provided), date, amount, and intended purpose;
- Deposited in the temple's official bank account within five (5) business days of receipt;
- Used only for purposes consistent with the temple's tax-exempt mission.

### 8.3 Financial Controls

The temple shall implement and maintain the following minimum financial controls to ensure accountability, transparency, and proper stewardship of all financial resources:

- **Segregation of duties:** No single individual shall have sole control over the receipt, recording, and disbursement of funds. Financial responsibilities shall be appropriately divided among authorized individuals.
- **Dual approval of expenditures:** Expenditures exceeding \$1,000 shall require approval by at least two authorized officers of the temple.
- **Cash handling and documentation:** Cash payments in excess of \$200 shall require written documentation, including the purpose of the payment and approval by an authorized officer.
- **Annual budget:** The Board shall adopt an annual operating budget prior to the start of each fiscal year.
- **Monthly reporting:** The Treasurer shall provide a monthly financial report to the Board of Directors.
- **Annual financial review:** The temple shall conduct an annual financial review or audit performed by a qualified independent accountant. Results shall be presented to the Board and made available to the community upon request.
- **IRS compliance:** The temple shall file all required IRS informational returns (Form 990 series) on time and shall maintain records sufficient to support all filings for a minimum of seven (7) years.

### 8.4 Prohibited Financial Conduct

The following financial practices are strictly prohibited and may result in disciplinary action, up to and including removal from residency and referral to appropriate authorities:

- Retaining donated funds, offerings, or temple assets for personal use by any monk, officer, or resident;
- Making cash payments to individuals in excess of \$200 without written documentation, including the purpose of the payment and approval by an authorized officer;
- Commingling temple funds with personal bank accounts or using temple funds for personal expenses;
- Entering into contracts, loans, or financial commitments on behalf of the temple without prior authorization from the Board of Directors;
- Falsifying, omitting, or misrepresenting financial records, receipts, or reports;
- Accepting or soliciting donations for personal benefit under the name or representation of the temple.

## 9. HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELFARE

### 9.1 Health and Welfare of Residents

The temple is committed to the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of all residents. Any monk or resident experiencing illness, injury, or a health concern should inform the Abbot or designated temple leader promptly. The temple shall make reasonable arrangements to support medical care for resident monastics.

The Abbot shall ensure that the temple maintains current information on:

- The location of first aid supplies on the temple premises;
- Emergency contact numbers for local emergency services;
- Any applicable health insurance or medical coverage for residents;
- Nearest medical facilities (hospital, urgent care).

## 9.2 Emergency Procedures

The temple shall maintain written emergency procedures covering fire, medical emergency, severe weather, and other foreseeable events. All residents shall be oriented to these procedures upon arrival. Emergency procedures shall be posted visibly in common areas and reviewed annually.

## 9.3 Mental Health and Well-being

Monastic life in a diaspora community carries unique stresses, including cultural transition, language challenges, and separation from family. The Abbot and Board shall be attentive to the mental and emotional well-being of resident monastics and shall ensure that access to counseling or pastoral support is available as needed. No resident should feel ashamed or afraid to seek help.

## 9.4 Safe Environment

The temple is committed to providing a physically safe and emotionally safe environment for all residents, community members, and visitors. Any conduct that endangers, intimidates, or harms another person shall be addressed promptly under Section 12 (Compliance and Disciplinary Action) of this policy.

## 9.5 Safeguarding and Protection of Vulnerable Persons

The temple maintains a zero-tolerance policy for abuse, misconduct, or exploitation involving minors, vulnerable adults, or any member of the community.

All residents must:

- Avoid unsupervised one-on-one interactions with minors;
- Follow all applicable state mandatory reporting laws;
- Immediately report suspected abuse to the Abbot and appropriate authorities where required by law.

Any allegation involving abuse shall be reported to civil authorities in accordance with applicable law and shall be reviewed independently of internal disciplinary procedures.

# 10. GRIEVANCE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

## 10.1 Principles

Disputes and grievances are a natural part of community life. At [Temple Name], all complaints and conflicts shall be addressed with fairness, respect, confidentiality, and a spirit of reconciliation. The goal of every grievance process is not punishment, but the restoration of harmony and the protection of all parties' dignity.

## 10.2 Informal Resolution

In the first instance, any monk or resident with a complaint or concern is encouraged to raise it directly with the Abbot in a private and respectful conversation. Many disputes can be resolved through honest, compassionate dialogue. The Abbot shall make a good-faith effort to address every concern raised within fourteen (14) days.

### **10.3 Formal Grievance Process**

If an informal resolution is not achieved, the complainant may file a written grievance with the Board of Directors. The written grievance shall include:

- A clear description of the issue or incident;
- The date(s) on which the issue occurred;
- Any prior attempts to resolve the matter;
- The resolution sought.

The Board shall acknowledge receipt of the written grievance within seven (7) days and shall convene a Grievance Committee — comprising at minimum two Board members and one member of the Board of Advisors — to review the matter. The Grievance Committee shall:

- Interview all relevant parties;
- Review any relevant documents or evidence;
- Deliver a written decision within thirty (30) days of receiving the grievance.

### **10.4 Recordkeeping**

All formal grievances and their resolutions shall be documented and retained in the temple's confidential records for a minimum of five (5) years. Grievance records are confidential and shall not be disclosed to parties outside the Grievance Committee and Board without the consent of all parties or as required by law.

### **10.5 Protection from Retaliation**

No monk, resident, or community member shall be subjected to retaliation, intimidation, or adverse treatment for raising a good-faith grievance. Any retaliation shall itself constitute a violation of this policy and shall be addressed under Section 12.

### **10.6 Whistleblower Protection**

Any individual reporting suspected misconduct in good faith shall be protected from retaliation. Reports may be made confidentially to the Board or designated officer.

## **11. LEAVE OF ABSENCE AND DEPARTURE**

### **11.1 Temporary Leave**

Any monk or resident seeking a temporary leave of absence — whether for personal, health, family, or religious reasons — should notify the Abbot in writing at least fourteen (14) days prior to the anticipated departure date. The notice shall include:

- The reason for the leave;
- The anticipated duration;
- Arrangements for any responsibilities during the absence.

The Abbot may approve temporary leave at his discretion and shall inform the Board. Temporary leave shall not exceed sixty (60) days without Board approval. Extended or repeated leaves may trigger a review of the residency arrangement.

### 11.2 Voluntary Departure

Any monk or resident who wishes to permanently depart the temple must provide at least thirty (30) days' written notice to the Abbot. Upon departure:

- All temple property in the departing resident's possession — including keys, robes provided by the temple, books, equipment, and any other items belonging to the temple — must be returned in good condition;
- An exit meeting shall be held with the Abbot or a designated officer to review responsibilities, return property, resolve any outstanding obligations, and offer a formal expression of gratitude for the resident's service.

### 11.3 Departure Due to Disrobing or Laicization

When a monk voluntarily disrobes (returns to lay status), the departure shall be handled with sensitivity, respect, and the full dignity owed to someone who has devoted time to the monastic path. The exit process described in Section 11.2 shall apply. The temple shall make reasonable arrangements to support the individual's transition, including, where possible, a brief period of continued residence while alternative housing is arranged.

### 11.4 Notification of External Authorities

Where a departing resident holds a visa sponsored by the temple (e.g., R-1 religious worker visa), the temple's legal counsel or designated officer shall be consulted regarding any required notification to USCIS or other authorities. The temple shall comply fully with all applicable immigration law requirements.

## 12. COMPLIANCE AND DISCIPLINARY ACTION

### 12.1 Commitment to Fair Process

Any allegation that a monk, novice, or resident has violated this policy shall be handled promptly, fairly, and consistently. [Temple Name] is committed to a disciplinary process that is corrective in intent, transparent in procedure, and respectful of the dignity of all parties.

### 12.2 Progressive Discipline

In most cases, the temple shall follow a progressive approach to discipline:

- **Step 1 — Informal counseling:** For minor or first-time violations, the Abbot shall meet privately with the individual to explain the concern, discuss the expected behavior, and offer guidance. No formal record is required.
- **Step 2 — Formal written warning:** If the behavior continues or if the violation is more serious, the Abbot shall issue a written warning documenting the violation, the corrective expectation, and the potential consequences of further non-compliance. The individual shall be given an opportunity to respond in writing. The warning shall be placed in the individual's file.

- **Step 3 — Mediation:** For persistent or complex violations, the Abbot may convene a mediation process involving temple elders, a member of the Board of Advisors, and any affected parties, to seek a resolution acceptable to all sides.
- **Step 4 — Removal from residency:** In cases of serious violation — including any conduct listed in Section 4.3, financial misconduct, or conduct posing a risk of harm — the Board of Directors may, after a good-faith review process, require the individual to vacate the temple.

### 12.3 Emergency Removal

Where a monk's or resident's conduct poses an immediate risk of harm to any person or to temple property, the Abbot, with the concurrence of at least one Board officer, may require immediate temporary removal from the premises pending a full review. Emergency removal shall be documented and reviewed by the full Board within seven (7) days.

### 12.4 Right of Appeal

Any individual subject to a formal written warning, mediation outcome, or removal decision has the right to appeal to the full Board of Directors within fourteen (14) days of the decision. The appeal must be submitted in writing and shall state clearly the grounds for the appeal. The Board shall convene a hearing within thirty (30) days and shall issue a written decision. The Board's decision is final.

### 12.5 Reporting to Authorities

Nothing in this policy prevents any person from reporting to law enforcement, government authorities, or regulatory agencies conduct that may constitute a crime or a violation of law. The temple shall cooperate fully with any lawful investigation. Where required by law, the temple shall itself make reports to appropriate authorities.

## 13. POLICY ADMINISTRATION AND REVIEW

### 13.1 Administration

This policy is administered by the Abbot in cooperation with the Board of Directors of [Temple Name]. Day-to-day questions about the application of this policy should be directed to the Abbot. Matters requiring Board action are identified throughout this document.

### 13.2 Orientation

The Abbot or designated officer shall ensure that every new monk, novice, or resident receives a copy of this policy and completes the formal orientation described in Section 3.2 before taking up residence. Residents shall sign an acknowledgment confirming that they have received and understood this policy. Signed acknowledgments shall be retained in the resident's file.

### 13.3 Periodic Review

This policy shall be reviewed by the Board of Directors no less than once every three (3) years, or more frequently as needed in response to changes in law, community circumstances, or operational experience. Proposed revisions shall be circulated to the Abbot, Board of Advisors, and senior monastics for comment before adoption. All revisions shall be adopted by formal Board resolution and dated accordingly.

### **13.4 Translation**

An official Lao-language translation of this policy shall be maintained and kept current with each revision cycle. In the event of any conflict between the English and Lao versions, the English version shall control unless the Board expressly designates otherwise.

### **13.5 Supersession**

This policy supersedes any prior written or informal policies, guidelines, or understandings relating to the conduct and residency of All residents at [Temple Name]. Upon adoption by Board resolution, this policy becomes the sole governing document for these matters.

#### **14. ADOPTION AND SIGNATURES**

This Monastic Code of Conduct and Residency Policies was reviewed and adopted by the Board of Directors of [Temple Name] by formal resolution on the date set forth below.

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Board Chair – Signature

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Abbot – Signature

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX A: RESIDENT ACKNOWLEDGMENT FORM

To be completed by all new monks, novices, and residents upon admission to [Temple Name].

Full Name:	
Monastic Name:	
Status:	<input type="checkbox"/> Monk (Phra) <input type="checkbox"/> Novice (Samanera) <input type="checkbox"/> Mae Khao <input type="checkbox"/> Lay Resident
Date of Arrival:	

I, the undersigned, acknowledge that I have received, read, and understood the Monastic Code of Conduct and Residency Policies of [Temple Name]. I agree to abide by all provisions of this policy for the duration of my residency and understand that violations may result in disciplinary action up to and including removal from residency.

Resident Signature	Date
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## APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF THE 227 VINAYA RULES (BHIKKHU DISCIPLINE)

### Purpose of This Appendix

This appendix provides a simplified overview of the **227 rules of discipline (Patimokkha)** that govern the conduct of fully ordained monks (bhikkhu) in the Theravada Buddhist tradition.

These rules originate from the Vinaya—the monastic code established by the Buddha—and are intended to support:

- Ethical conduct
- Mental discipline
- Harmony within the monastic community (Sangha)
- Trust and respect between monastics and the lay community

This summary is provided for general understanding. It does not replace formal Vinaya study or guidance from qualified monastic teachers.

### Overview of the 227 Rules

The 227 rules are organized into categories based on their **severity and required response**:

#### 1. Pārājika — Defeats (4 Rules)

These are the most serious offenses.

If a monk commits any of these, he:

- Immediately loses his status as a monk
- Cannot be re-ordained in this lifetime

Examples include:

- Sexual intercourse
- Stealing of significant value
- Intentional killing of a human being
- Falsely claiming spiritual attainments

#### 2. Saṅghādisesa — Serious Offenses Requiring Rehabilitation (13 Rules)

These offenses require:

- Formal acknowledgment
- A period of probation
- Rehabilitation under supervision of the monastic community

Examples include:

- Intentional sexual misconduct short of intercourse
- Creating division within the Sangha
- Persistent inappropriate behavior after warning

### **3. Aniyata — Indeterminate Cases (2 Rules)**

These involve situations that are:

- Ambiguous or dependent on circumstances
- Typically related to interactions with laypersons

They are resolved based on investigation and testimony.

### **4. Nissaggiya Pācittiya — Forfeiture and Confession (30 Rules)**

These involve improper possession or use of material items.

Resolution requires:

- Forfeiting the improperly obtained item
- Confession of the offense

Examples include:

- Accepting or storing money
- Possessing more robes than allowed
- Improper handling of donations

### **5. Pācittiya — Confession Offenses (92 Rules)**

These are less serious violations that require:

- Acknowledgment and confession

Examples include:

- Telling lies
- Speaking harshly
- Improper behavior with laypeople
- Minor breaches of etiquette

### **6. Pāṭidesaniya — Acknowledgment Offenses (4 Rules)**

These require:

- Formal acknowledgment before other monks

Typically related to:

- Improper acceptance of food or offerings

## 7. Sekhiya — Training Rules (75 Rules)

These are rules of:

- Conduct
- Etiquette
- Mindfulness

They guide proper behavior in:

- Eating
- Speaking
- Interacting with others
- Carrying oneself with dignity

## 8. Adhikaraṇa-samatha — Rules for Settling Disputes (7 Rules)

These provide methods for:

- Resolving conflicts within the Sangha
- Maintaining harmony and unity

They outline formal procedures for handling disagreements and accusations.

## Key Principles of the Vinaya

Across all categories, the Vinaya is guided by core principles:

- Non-harm (Ahimsa)
- Truthfulness
- Simplicity and renunciation
- Self-discipline and mindfulness
- Respect for the Sangha and community

The purpose of the Vinaya is not punishment, but:

- The cultivation of ethical conduct
- The protection of the integrity of the monastic life
- The preservation of trust within the community

## Application in This Policy

This policy recognizes the Vinaya as the **primary standard of conduct** for ordained monks.

Where necessary, this document provides additional guidance to address:

- Legal requirements in the United States

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- Organizational governance
- Community relations

In all cases, efforts are made to uphold both:

- The spirit and discipline of the Vinaya, and
- Applicable civil law and nonprofit obligations

### **Reference for Further Study**

For a complete and authoritative explanation of the 227 rules, refer to:

- *Buddhist Monastic Code (Volumes I & II)* by Thanissaro Bhikkhu
- Translations of the *Patimokkha* available through Access to Insight

## APPENDIX C: REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

### Foundational Monastic Sources

- Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Buddhist Monastic Code I & II. Valley Center, CA: Metta Forest Monastery. (Definitive English-language exposition of the Theravada Vinaya; freely available at [dhammatalks.org](http://dhammatalks.org))
- Patimokkha — The 227 Rules of the Theravada Bhikkhu Vinaya (multiple translations available through Access to Insight, [accesstoinsight.org](http://accesstoinsight.org))
- Discipline and Conventions of Theravada Buddhist Renunciate Communities: A Guide for the Western Sangha. Sanghapala Foundation / English Sangha Trust. (Available through Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery, [abhayagiri.org](http://abhayagiri.org))

### U.S. Nonprofit Law and IRS Guidance

- Internal Revenue Service. Tax-Exempt Status for Your Organization (Publication 557). [irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p557.pdf](http://irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p557.pdf)
- Internal Revenue Service. Churches and Religious Organizations (Publication 1828). [irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1828.pdf](http://irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1828.pdf)
- National Council of Nonprofits. Governance resources and templates. [councilofnonprofits.org](http://councilofnonprofits.org)

### Immigration — Religious Worker Visa

- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. R-1 Nonimmigrant Religious Workers. [uscis.gov](http://uscis.gov) (Search: R-1 visa)
- Herman Legal Group. I-129R Petition Guidance for Buddhist Temples. (Example of legal guidance on R-1 visa sponsorship for temple monks)

### Reference Temples and Models

- Wat Lao Buddhavong, Inc. Monastic Code of Conduct and Residency Policies (July 2025). 3043 Catlett Road, Catlett, Virginia 20119. (The foundational document from which this model template was developed)
- Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery (Redwood Valley, California). Guest Guidelines and Monastery Etiquette. [abhayagiri.org](http://abhayagiri.org)
- Sravasti Abbey (Newport, Washington). Visiting Guidelines. [sravastiabbey.org](http://sravastiabbey.org)

### Lao Buddhist Community Organizations

- Lao Buddhist Fellowship of America — the primary national coordinating body for Lao Buddhist temples in the United States
- Lao Global Heritage Alliance — advocacy and cultural preservation organization for the Lao diaspora

## APPENDIX D: DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Abbot	The senior monastic leader of the temple responsible for spiritual authority, monastic discipline, daily religious operations, and supervision of resident monastics.
Abbot's Designee	An individual authorized by the Abbot to act on his behalf in specific administrative or operational matters.
Bhikkhu (Monk / Phra)	A fully ordained male monastic in the Theravada Buddhist tradition who is bound by the 227 rules of the Vinaya (Patimokkha).
Board of Advisors	A group of senior monastics and/or respected community members who provide guidance on religious, cultural, and Vinaya-related matters.
Board of Directors	The governing body of the temple as a nonprofit organization, responsible for legal compliance, financial oversight, fiduciary duties, and organizational governance.
Dhamma	The teachings of the Buddha, including ethical conduct, meditation, and wisdom.
Disciplinary Action	Any corrective measure taken in response to a violation of this policy, including counseling, warnings, mediation, or removal from residency.
Disrobing (Laicization)	The voluntary act of a monk returning to lay status and relinquishing monastic vows.
Donation / Offering	Any monetary or non-monetary gift given to the temple or its representatives for religious, charitable, or operational purposes.
Eight Precepts	A set of ethical training rules typically observed by Mae Khao and lay practitioners engaged in deeper spiritual practice.
Emergency Removal	Immediate temporary removal of a resident from the temple premises due to risk of harm, pending formal review.
Five Precepts	The foundational ethical guidelines observed by lay Buddhists: non-harm, non-stealing, sexual responsibility, truthful speech, and avoidance of intoxicants.

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Term	Definition
Grievance	A formal complaint or concern raised by a resident or community member regarding conduct, policy violations, or disputes within the temple.
Grievance Committee	A designated group appointed by the Board to review and resolve formal grievances in accordance with this policy.
Guest Monastic	A monk, novice, or renunciant temporarily residing at the temple, typically for a period exceeding fourteen (14) days but not permanently assigned.
Lay Resident	A non-ordained individual residing at the temple in a service or support role, subject to temple policies and community expectations.
Leave of Absence	An approved temporary period during which a resident is absent from the temple.
Mae Khao (Female Renunciant)	A female renunciant in the Lao Buddhist tradition who undertakes a life of ethical discipline and spiritual practice, typically observing the Eight Precepts and wearing white robes.
Pārājika Offense	A grave violation of the Vinaya that results in immediate and permanent loss of monastic status.
Patimokkha	The formal code of 227 rules recited regularly within the monastic community, forming the foundation of Vinaya discipline.
R-1 Religious Worker Visa	A nonimmigrant visa classification issued by the United States government that allows foreign religious workers to reside and serve in a religious capacity.
Removal from Residency	Termination of an individual's right to reside at the temple, following due process under this policy.
Resident	Any monk, novice, Mae Khao, or layperson who resides on temple grounds for an extended period.
Saṅghādisesa Offense	A serious violation of the Vinaya requiring formal acknowledgment, probation, and rehabilitation within the monastic community.
Samanera (Novice Monk)	A male novice monastic who has not yet received full ordination and typically observes Ten Precepts under the guidance of a fully ordained monk.

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Term	Definition
Sangha	The community of ordained monastics (bhikkhu), and in broader usage, the collective monastic community.
Temple	The nonprofit religious organization, including its physical property, facilities, and community, established for the practice and promotion of Lao Theravada Buddhism.
Temple Property	All land, buildings, equipment, financial assets, and resources owned or controlled by the temple as a nonprofit entity.
Treasurer	The officer designated by the Board of Directors to oversee financial management, recordkeeping, and reporting.
Vinaya	The monastic code of discipline established by the Buddha governing the conduct of ordained monks, including the 227 rules of the Patimokkha.