

Gephel Shadrubling Nunnery

The past summer there were some important developments in the plans to realize possibilities for a future higher education for nuns in Ladakh. Both the LNA and a group of young nuns of Gephel Shadrubling are thinking about these plans. Of course those plans are going to cost a lot of money, but at this stage it is more important to figure out what the possibilities are for two initiatives and on what areas they can work together. There was a meeting with everyone involved. It became clear that the two foundations differ from each other in goals and vision, but as a result will complement each other beautifully. The LNA will educate nuns foremost to be a part in social life and health, the Gephel idea is to educate Geshe-ma's in the yellow hat tradition of the Dalai Lama (Gelukpa). They have plans to work closely together and refer to each other. The American DZI foundation is also interested in participating in these projects in the future: we are too small (yet!!) to carry out such enormous projects by ourselves.



Aniek Jaartsveld and Thupten Dechen

“ding hall” guests



The new kitchen in the guesthouse

Marlies Bosch and Nyerma nuns



Monks Thiksey filmed by VRT

New prayer hall Nyerma nuns



foto's van diverse vrijwilligers

Board

The board of the DFLN comes together twice a year at least to talk about all current projects and discuss visions. Its members are enthusiastic and only respond with respect for local culture and traditions. We try to put all efforts into realizing projects offered to us by the nuns themselves.

Thanks

We would like to thank everyone who, in whatever way, puts time and effort into supporting the cause of the nuns in Ladakh. If you are an individual sponsor: please know the nuns are praying for you always. We know that within a certain amount of years we will be superfluous with our support because the nuns will be independent. But right now that is not the case yet. At this moment our priorities are: livelihood, health and education projects. We hope that you will still support our projects for a while. Thank you,

on behalf of the board,
Marlies Bosch, secretary DFLN

DUTCH FOUNDATION FOR LADAKHI NUNS

Newsletter 2008



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Introduction

When everything goes smoothly, a year has gone by before you know it started. In this Newsletter we would like to share with you all our activities in the past year.

The Postbank case

The past year the Dutch Foundation for Ladakhi Nuns has observed how people from all over the country got involved with the developments of the nuns in Ladakh. One example is the case with the 'Postbank'. One of our dedicated sponsors yearly donates the "tip box" of their camping site in southern France to us. This year they had sent € 1550, including the sponsoring of two Ladakhi nuns who study in Nepal. When they transferred the money to our bank account by international bank account number, they switched just one number and all the money ended up with a man in the Hague, who refuses to give it back. We tried everything; but the bank told us it is not their responsibility. We approached a big daily newspaper, the 'Volkskrant'. After they published an article about this mishap, spontaneously people started to donate money to make up for the loss. One man even donated a thousand Euros! As a result of this mishap, we are opening a new bank account with the Triodos bank, which also comes closer to our vision: they only invest in 'green' projects.

People let us know they trust us with their money, because it is clear that all donations really end up with the projects for the nuns in Ladakh, because everybody, including the board, pays for all expenses themselves.

Homestay and nunnery in Nyerma

In Nyerma we go from one surprise to the next. The guesthouse project was well on its way when I left at the end of June 2007, and 15 nuns were living in the nunnery. Now, after one year, the guesthouse was all done, including decoration, furniture and painting jobs. Aniek Jaartsveld and Josephien Büdel, who already went to Ladakh in May, used their first month to clean the rooms and buy all the equipment needed to receive the first guests. The younger nuns helped them; they thought it was an exiting experiment to start being hostesses.

This year the guesthouse "Tara" has been in operation for 4 months and all guests were enthusiastic about the rooms and the experience. We posted flyers all over Leh during the summer, especially at the ATM machine with long cues. The nuns Dechen en Lhamo Chamba, who are in charge of the nunnery, opened a bank account for the nunnery this summer, and at the end they had been able to put in over 70.000 Røpepees, which is over € 1000,00! This included generous gifts from different guests. We added € 500,00, so the nuns had enough to get through the winter.

Thiksey's Rinpoche, who supervises the building, improved the dining hall and the kitchen in the nunnery this past summer. The hall appeared to be too big and thus too cold in the winter. The Rinpoche put in a movable division wall, so for big events it can be removed. The floor has been painted, so the (lamp)oil won't stain the wooden floor any more. In the kitchen a tile counter was built, so the nuns don't have to cook any longer on their (old) knees, and the counter can be kept clean more easily. He also built two new bathrooms, with tiles and a sink. The nuns could never wash themselves in the winter before, with -40 degrees. Then he built an addition to the guesthouse: a kitchen and dining area, plus a room for whoever is in charge of the homestay facility!

The energy company Essent/Green Choice sponsored the guesthouse with 7 Solar lamps. These will be used for the guesthouse in the summer, and for the nuns the rest of the year. The company also organized a sponsor walk for employees. The proceeds of this walk (€ 10.500,00!!!) are meant for solar energy panels for the nunnery in Nyerma. This is a fantastic result, and all this because one of our volunteers who ran the guesthouse this summer, Anneke van der Heide, is working for this big company. Ellen Poelen and Menta Achttienribbe were also hostesses in the guesthouse this summer. Friends of Ellen came up with € 400,00 for dung and wood for the stoves in the winter for the nuns. This is one third of what the nuns actually need. Both guests and volunteers were very enthusiastic and enjoyed the close contacts with the nuns during their stay. Our estimate is that within 5 years the nunnery will be financially independent because of the "home stay with nuns".



Aniek en Josephien in temporary kitchen



new building homestay with nuns



Chamba Lhamo in kitchen

Ladakh Nuns Association (LNA)

The building of the LNA has enormously expanded. The LNA is now also an official nunnery and houses over 20 nuns in various age groups, who all get an official education. Dr Palmo is looking for sponsors for the studies of these nuns, like in the tradition of the Ladakhi society. We try to keep the list with eligible nuns as up to date as possible. Please contact us if you would like more information.

The nine nuns who study to become an amchi (Tibetan doctor) ended their basic education with good results. The DFLN sponsored the traditional equipment needed to make the Tibetan medicine and when the construction of the building at the LNA premises for the Tibetan pharmacy has been finished, the future Tibetan doctors will start their practice for the local community there. They will also practice in other nunneries and communities in Ladakh and Zangskar.

The LNA made plans to extend the nunnery even more. They still need large amounts of money for those plans. We, the Board of the DFLN, are impressed by the amount of work Dr Palmo and her staff have accomplished over the past 13 years to improve the situation of Ladakhi nuns. Through her influence and coaching, over 1300 nuns benefit from better circumstances. It is her focus to have nuns participate in their communities and to make them financially independent. We will support her as much as possible.

Festivals

The "Festival happening" is spreading all over the Netherlands. In 2008 we organized a Ladakh Festival in Goirle (the south). A large number of people came to the lectures and workshops and the Chrystal Sound Bowls meditation by Giny ten Brummelhuis, our Chair. Of course our aim is to gather money for the projects we support, but of no less importance is that we want to spread information about the fact that in Ladakh there are Buddhist nuns who need support, nuns who want to catch up with their male colleagues, the monks. They seem to be very successful at that.

As a result of this festival, the congregation of the "Sisters of Divine Providence" in the south of Holland invited Marlies and Giny for a presentation. This congregation has been sponsoring us for the past three years in solidarity with their fellow-sisters. The sisters were impressed by the Chrystal Sound Bowls meditation and they recognized a lot in the stories about the Ladakhi Nuns. We are now invited again to present before their German Congregation.

In the weekend of 25 en 26 Oktober we held a 6th Ladakh Festival in the north of the Netherlands. It was the biggest up to now, with many workshops, three film documentaries about Ladakh, a concert with a local choir with Haiku's, a play and Tibetan dances for freedom and yoga. The next festival will be held in the province of Sealand, in the south close to the Belgium border.

