**About Jukai: Receiving the Precepts**

**What is jukai?** Jukai (literally receiving the precepts), is a ceremony, sometimes called lay ordination, in which a Zen practictioner formally received the sixteen bodhisattva precepts from their teacher, and vows to practice the precepts "even after becoming a buddha". In our tradition preparing for jukai typically takes about one year and involves participation in a precepts study group and hand-sewing a rakusu.

**What is a rakusu?** People often ask what the bib-like garment is that some people wear in the zendo. It is a small version of a Buddhist priest’s robe, used for informal wear. In our lineage, lay people who have done jukai wear a dark blue rakusu, ordained priests wear a black one, and priests who have received dharma transmission wear a brown one. The tradition of hand-sewing the rakusu was revived by a Japanese nun named who taught the practice at San Francisco Zen Center. When one sews a rakusu or okesa (priest’s robe) one takes refuge in the Buddha with each stitch. Our resident sewing teacher at MRZC is Nin-en Susan Elbe.

**What are the bodhisattva precepts?** In Soto Zen lay and ordained people receive the same set of sixteen precepts, which consist of the three refuges in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, the three pure precepts and the ten clear mind precepts. The precepts are guidelines to right ethical conduct, mindfulness practices, and deep koans that bear a lifetime of practice and inquiry.

**What does jukai mean?** Jukai a personal commitment to practice the precepts in the context of this practice tradition and lineage. It need not be exclusive, as some people choose to practice in more than one tradition, Buddhist or otherwise. During a precepts study group, participants are encouraged to explore what the precepts mean to them personally. Jukai is also a commitment to practice the precepts in the context of sangha, or community. The public ceremony is offered in support of the community. In some practice centres jukai is considered a formal commitment to a teacher, but this is not necessarily the case. At MRZC, both of our teachers serve as preceptors for the ceremony, and ask those preparing for jukai to meet with them in dokusan along the way, but we see the formal commitment to the teacher as part of priest ordination, rather than jukai.

**Who can do the jukai ceremony?** Because the practice of the precepts is rooted in the practice of Zen meditations and the teachings, at MRZC we encourage people to establish a steady practice before considering jukai. The requirements are not hard and fast, but generally at least two years of regular practice with MRZC, some experience with weekend retreats and longer sesshin (intensive residential retreat), and participation in sangha life are seen a good foundation for jukai. It is also important that your life circumstances will support following through with a precepts study group and sewing a rakusu. Typically, those interested in jukai/precepts study bring this up with a teacher in dokusan, and the teacher helps to discern the individual’s readiness. Please don’t hesitate to speak with one of our teachers about jukai if you are interested.