

# GATSAL



*Left, Final exams on the new wooden floors, Tara Temple.*

*Right, Nuns and special guests from England, USA and Bolivia join DGL Nunnery's Losar 2020 Celebrations.*

## Dear friends,

This has been an interesting and challenging time for us all and the end is not yet in sight. Many of the friends of DGL have written to find out how the Nunnery has been managing and so this current Gatsal is devoted to reassuring you all that we are going along as well as usual.

The Tibetan New Year in February was very auspicious with the visit of friends closely associated from our past such as Eliz Dowling and Monica Joyce. Other dear friends also came by to share this happy time of picnics and visits to Tashi Jong. After Losar our nuns performed the annual week of Nyungney – a ritual of purification based on the 1000 armed Avalokiteshvara – along with some devoted lay people from Tashi Jong.

Meanwhile we began to hear vague rumours of a pernicious virus, and then suddenly here in Himachal

the government ordered all schools, colleges and institutions to close until further notice! So immediately DGL closed its gates and received no more visitors. Fortunately, we had time to bring in food supplies for our 100+ nuns just before the lockdown. The

had to be cancelled. So, it has been a quiet stay-at-home year.

Initially there were not so many incidents of the corona virus in Himachal, but the authorities were wisely trying to keep it that way by restricting entry from other States. Of

course, this whole pandemic has been an economic disaster especially for all those connected with the tourist trade among others.

During this strict lockdown period of 2 months all our outside staff remained at their homes. This included our office staff Dolma Keither and Tenzin Lhakpa, as well as our cook and cleaners and the maintenance staff. Meanwhile the nuns took

over: Tsunmas Trinley Paltso and Ngawang Chozom ran the office with growing confidence and the nuns took up gardening zealously. They dug up land behind the nuns' kitchen and planted vegetables (which have grown profusely during the monsoon). They also harvested a small field of wheat.



*Jetsunma and Eliz enjoy a morning moment during Losar 2020*

nuns stocked up with basic necessities such as rice, flour, dal, potatoes etc., enough to withstand a siege. Weekly deliveries of vegetables were allowed.

I had been intending to give local talks at nearby Dharma centres and then a 3 month tour in the US during the summer, but of course all these



*Left, Getting prepared, supplies for 3 months, Lockdown 2020. Top Right, Young tsunmas love to read pecha, or prayers, together every morning and evening for one hour. Bottom Right, Tsunmas Rinchen and Kunzang take on the mighty task of clipping hedges during lockdown.*

The tsunmas also trimmed our many hedges and kept all the grounds in good order.

Although other monasteries were ordered to stop any gatherings including pujas and study groups and to remain segregated in their rooms, at DGL we never received any directives and so we carried on as usual with our rituals and classes. Only the noisy debating sessions were stopped. We are very fortunate that we have ample grounds with grass, trees and flowers, so the nuns were not cooped up in rooms like so many people and so spread themselves throughout the nunnery. Since the DGL Nunnery is surrounded by a high wall and the gates were locked, we assume the authorities did not consider us as a danger (which we were not). We became an enclosed order of nuns!

During the lockdown period local monasteries generously donated funds for food supplies to help those migrant workers who were left

without any source of income. DGL likewise contributed what it could to these worthwhile causes. The nuns also performed many extra pujas and reading of sutras dedicated towards the alleviation of this dire situation.

Eventually the regulations were



*Monica and Tsering Wangmo greet after many years, Losar 2020*

relaxed, and our staff returned. We had continued to pay their wages during their absence, but they were all happy to be back with us again.

In May we had a meeting with the 17 senior graduate nuns concerning how they foresee their future here at DGL now that their studies are over.

They all came up with various duties they plan to undertake, of which the most significant is that three of them have now stepped into the role of full-time Genlas and have moved into the teachers' residence. Others are in the office, running the guesthouse and café and so on. Somehow, they have all found niches for themselves so that is good. Two nuns have now entered the long-term retreat centre where they will remain at least for the next 3 years.

Later in May came the annual exams both written and with live debate. The nuns then entered silent retreat after Saga Dawa [Vaisakha] apart from some of the small nunlets who moved into the study centre and camped out on mattresses on the floor of the classrooms - which they saw as an adventure. They continued their daily classes with Gen Rigzin. (Many of our original small nuns have now grown up enough to enter the middle class which includes attendance at



*Left, Offerings from the Tsunmas' gardens.  
Right, Admiration during convincing philosophical questioning. DGL debate exams.*

pujas and studying philosophy)

The rest of the nuns (apart from those who kindly volunteered to be cooks) were divided into five groups depending on their practice and distributed into different locations. Whenever we went around to see how they were getting on, they were all sitting so straight, concentrated and calmly reciting their mantras (apart from the youngest class who were diligently doing prostrations in the lower shrine-room which now has a wooden floor.) Khenpo Sonam and the two nun Genlas from Dolma Ling and Namdroling nunneries were also in retreat. My assistant Tsunma Tenzin Dasel likewise undertook a 3 months retreat during this time.

During July I also did a one month retreat: the nunnery was so still and quiet with almost everyone in retreat and no visitors from outside.

Then in August was the break

before the start of term but the nuns remained within the nunnery boundaries and did not even go outside for walks (now allowable). During this time Dr Barbara and Dr Kusum came from their clinic in Sidhbari to give talks in Hindi to all the nuns on menstruation and dental hygiene. The nuns showed their appreciation with laughter and lots of questions.

Now the new academic term has started with the inclusion of our own Genlas in a formal teaching role. Although our gates are still locked and we continue with the policy of no outside visitors, as cases of local infection are daily reported. Yet we have been fortunate throughout these challenging times and so far have not experienced any hardships unlike so many others.

Soon some nuns will start rehearsals for the Dakini Dances

which we have now resolved to perform every year at Lhabab Duchen. This is an important time at DGL Nunnery and commemorates when the Buddha descended from Heaven after teaching Dharma to His mother during the rainy season. We will report more fully in our next Gatsal.

This is a challenging time when we need to bring together our inner resources and apply the medicine of the Dharma to help cure the sickness of this threatened world.

Meantime the nuns continue with their rituals and studies, praying sincerely for the world to come into balance and harmony.

With every good wish in the Dharma,

*Tenzin Palmo*

# ABOUT COVID 19

As we all know COVID 19 started last year in 2019 and slowly has spread through every corner of the world. Many people are dead and many are still suffering from this terrible virus. Beings are facing lots of fear and anxiety.

In our nunnery we started taking care of our own business because of COVID 19. This means we did our monastic grounds work by own self like: plucking the unwanted grass [weeds], watering the plants and flowers, and gardening.

In this year 2020, we also made vegetable gardens where many vegetables are planted like pumpkin, onion, green chilli, garlic, ginger, potato and so many. Basically, before the COVID 19 there are workers in our nunnery and each worker has his/her own work so we did not have to do our gardening work. So, after hearing about COVID 19 we had closed everything and even workers are also not allowed to enter in our nunnery for saving our lives from COVID 19.

We always follow the rules which Ven Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo la told to us, which are really very useful to us. We wash our hands many times in a day. We drink hot water so as to stay healthy. We are only allowed to go outside of the nunnery if someone has an emergency case so during this time we mostly take care of each other. When returning and before entering in our room we wash our body and clothes.

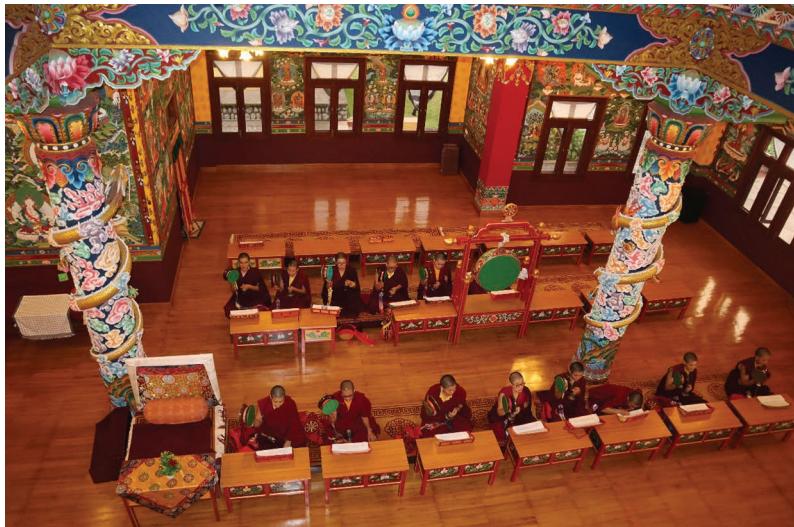
Without any emergency case we are not allowed to go

outside the nunnery and visitors are not allowed to enter inside our nunnery. Even hearing and seeing many sad news we really felt anxiety and compassion. We cannot help other beings who are suffering from those virus which is really terrible for life, but one thing we always do for beings that is our prayers and pujas (rituals) for all the sentient beings.

Due to COVID crisis millions of people suffer from depression, panic, fear and for all the beings we always pray to the Buddhas and we dedicate our prayers daily and we are still dedicating our prayers to all sentient beings. While we tsunmas are dedicating our prayers we really feel unbelievable joy and happiness. When we live our day and life for the benefit of others, the doors of depression, fear, anxiety all such things are closed, and instead there is incredible joy and happiness.

We really feel so fortunate because we are not suffering from COVID 19, we have clothes to wear, beautiful rooms to sleep in, peace and beautiful environment and most important is education which we get without any trouble. This is all due to the kindness of our teachers and staff and we are so extremely grateful to our most precious Jetsunma la.

MAY ALL THE SENTIENT BEINGS  
BE LIBERATED FROM SAMSARA.  
Thank you, Tenzin Kunsel from Zanskar, Ladakh,  
and Yangchen Chodroen from Lahoul



Tsunmas carry on daily prayers continually for the benefit of all beings.



Before and after. The lawn behind the tsunmas where they have removed the weeds, sometimes even using nail clippers!  
Lawn in front awaits grooming as the team advances.



Tsunmas take good care of each other during Lockdown.  
This year due to the Covid epidemic they could not leave during summer vacation to visit their families.



Genesis of the tsunmas gardens.

## INTERVIEW WITH THE GARDEN TSUNMA TEAM

### Where did the nuns learn how to garden?

Jigmet (from Ladakh) had the idea to build the bamboo trellis to let the vines run up and over, and to create more space on the ground. The Nyerpa, kitchen manager Trinley Wangmo who is from Bhutan, had the idea to plant ginger root, which is used in their cooking and ginger lemon tea. We know how to garden from our homes, we learn when we are young from our mothers.

### What is growing in the garden?

Pumpkins, cucumbers, then bumpy veggies known as bitter gourd or karela.

### How did you make the trellis, fences and gate? Is it made out of bamboo?

We had the bamboo poles from some time ago, and we thought we can cut them down and in half to build the fences and gates. We used only what we found here in the nunnery and could make everything needed without buying any materials, so it is all recycled natural materials. We used a hand axe and stripped the bamboo down for thin pieces for the fences and gates.

### Is all your food organic? (No chemicals)

Yes, we only want to grow organic, so we never use any chemical spray. We do not kill the insects and animals that live in the garden, it is their home, too.

### What do you do with the old torma?

We break them all down and then scatter them all in the garden for blessings for our plants and food. It is not the physical substance that gives blessings, but because torma have been blessed by all of the yidams (Yidam is a type of deity associated with tantric or Vajrayana Buddhism said to be manifestation of Enlightenment) that have received the torma and then put their blessing into it. When we recycle the sacred torma, we are really recycling it for the blessings that these substances contain which bless the garden and those beings living in it.



Dechen and Kunzang spread last year's annual torma in the pumpkin garden.



Jigmet shows ginger growing under the trellis.



Karela, or bitter gourd, growing on the trellis.



Dechen giving torma blessings to the garden .



# Torma (gtor-ma): What are torma?

Article and photos by Tsewang Chodron (Kinnaur),  
quotes from article on Torma by Claudia Butler in CHOYANG magazine, 1996

What is Torma? It is an offering cake prepared specially for the Buddha, Bodhisattvas and the Dharmapalas (protectors).

In Buddhism, whatever Dharma activities we perform helps to assist the activities of the Bodhisattvas Dharmapalas, they are like the boss and we are the helpers. So, before we begin our prayers and pujas and sacred work, we present a Torma offering to them first, as a gift so that our activities will be successful.

Torma are variously shaped ritual cakes used as offerings in Tantric rituals. "In Tibet, offerings are often made in the shape of a heap. The heap resembles Mount Meru, the holiest of all mountains, the centre of the world. The shape thrusting upward symbolizes the accumulation of virtue, merit, prosperity and the increase of all that is good in life."

The term Torma is also explained in the following manner: "The giving of a substance without attachment and grasping. In Tibetan, the word gtor-ma is explained as sacrificial objects which are scattered or given away. In Buddhist tradition the meaning of the word has been extended to incorporate the philosophical concepts of selflessness, impermanence and the bodhisattva path. This is explained in the following manner: the destruction of many constituents without attachment, the giving of a substance without attachment and grasping is called torma."

Torma also has a broader meaning as: 'Tor' to overcome an attachment, to purify the motivation and to destroy the concepts of subject and object. The second word 'Ma' is the feminine suffix and is the equivalent of mother.

"[In Tibetan] gTor derives from the verb gtor-wa: to dispel, to disperse, to break up. In addition, a broader meaning has been added to the concept gTor: 'to cut attachments', to purify the motivation' and to destroy the 'concepts of subject/object'. The act of gTor develops the mind and destroys the concept of self. The realization is that 'things are empty of their own nature'.

How to make a gTorma butter sculpture? First take white flour, hot melted vanaspati (vegetable lard) and mix it up until it becomes soft and not so hard. We call them "butter sculpture" but we are not using butter, actually.

We make different types of sculpture according to the shape required. We need to melt vanaspati. Flowering portion of torma is made by the vegetable lard mixed up with different colours.

Who do we offer or perform it for? We offer it to Buddha and Bodhisattvas, Dharma protectors, including various deities, Padmasambhava, Tara or local deities. We place the torma on the altars in the main temple and protector temple.

Why are torma colours different? These colours and shape of the offerings of butter sculptures have different shapes which is recommended by the deities and Dharma protectors. We were taught through a high lineage teacher.

The colours of the main body of the torma are made according to the deity concerned. Generally, the peaceful tormas associated with Tara, Avalokiteshvara are white and of various shapes.

The colour red is usually associated with wrathful deities such as Mahakala and Vajrakilaya.

What is an Enduring torma and a Regular torma? Enduring Torma: These torma are created once a year. For example, the protector torma in the main temple is prepared annually which is called (Lotor).

Regular torma is created every day or offered regularly.

The spiritual tradition of offering torma is indeed important and it needs to be preserved carefully in the changing weather or world situation. The tradition should be taught to future generations.

The practise of good motivation is very essential for cultivating a good heart and avoiding any evil actions associated with a sense of attachment.



Torma in front of Phagma Drolma (Tara) in the main Temple

# ABOUT RECYCLING

In year 2017, we started a project to reduce burning the plastic in our nunnery. Every year a group of tsunmas continues the project.

## Why we started the project?

Like any other community, we had lots of plastic and we were concerned how to burn it all. We knew that it is not good for our health so we wanted to reduce burning plastic.

## What did we do to reduce burning plastic?

First, we sorted out the plastic from other rubbish and stuffed it in plastic bottles. Using these bottles, we made a bench but it wasn't of much benefit to us. So, one of our nuns suggested that we weave mats and baskets from the plastics. Then we started to weave many mats and baskets.

## What process do we follow?

Before weaving these things we wash all the plastics carefully. Some of the nuns used their ideas and made different kinds of things like pencil boxes, small bowls to put fruits in, or weave dustbins. We make these items every weekend.

## What are some advantages of making these things?

We are able to keep our environment clean, improve our health by not breathing the burning plastic smoke and make good use of our waste, too. We also raise some funds for the nunnery by selling the items in our Dragon Café.



Written collectively by the DGL Recycling Team



Go team! Washing and cleaning the plastic first is very important.



Left: An example of the basket woven entirely out of recycled plastic.

Center: Working on a popular mat sold at DGL's Dragon Cafe.

Right: Jetsunma is very happy with and impressed by the creativity of DGL's recycling team.

# Essential Practices of a Monastery

Written by Khenpo Sonam Wangyal

The institution of Dongyu Gatsal Ling is a monastic establishment. Therefore, throughout the year, days are spent absorbed in intensive religious practices. There are numerous reasons to appreciate this institution, such as the infrastructure, study program structure, rules and regulations, and the enthusiasm the nuns show in their study of philosophy and the two-staged secret tantra practices. Dongyu Gatsal Ling (DGL) Nunnery is an environment uninvolved with political gossip, communalism, or materialistic competitions of any sort. Away from noise, in its relaxing atmosphere, this institution stands perfectly oriented to achieve its objectives.

All programmed activities serve religious practices, such is the aim of the nunnery. The speech that one hears is mostly of the Dharma, so the facilities here are conducive only for spiritual growth. DGL Nunnery is a college with all the modern as well as traditional educational training including general studies of languages and science, Buddhist philosophy and the unique secret Vajrayana trainings are studied, too.

Every year the nuns engage in retreat for two months. However, the way they practice solitary retreat every year for a moderate time is inspirational and uniquely admirable. It is, therefore, necessary that we discuss this more in detail.

As it is advised “one must establish through contemplation the teaching that one heard and bring what you have contemplated into practice through meditation.” Jetsunma has regularized an annual two-month retreat program which everyone (including nuns in the First Class) participates between completion of one academic year and beginning of the next. In the mornings, along with the sutra classes, Class Four students study the specific inner preliminaries, Vajrasattva recitation mantras, Mandala offerings, Guru Yoga as well as the four prajnaparamitas in their standard line of both instructional and reading transmissions. In the Fifth and Sixth classes, nuns receive initiations, authorizations,

explanations, and the quintessential instructions from Kyabje Khamtrul Rinpoche and elder yogi Chokyi Lodro [Togden Achoe], after which they then engage in the daily Deity Approaching practices, retreat on the Buddha Akshobhya, the Embodiment of the Three Jewels [Guru Padmasambhava], Chod, and the Vajravarahi. This year, certain circumstances necessitated the advancement of the retreat timing a month earlier. So, there are altogether, six classes: the three preliminary classes of Vajrasattva, Mandala, and Guru Yoga, and the actual classes of Vajravarahi, Buddha Akshobhya, and the class of Embodiment of the Three Jewels [Guru Rinpoche].

In addition, the director of the institution, Jetsunma, and the teachers also engage individually in their respective deity approaching practice retreats. The timing of the retreat is as follows: beginning from sixteenth of the Fourth till the fifteenth of the sixth Tibetan lunar month, each day the first session is scheduled from 5:00 to 7:00 am, followed by the next session at 10:00 to

12:00 pm. The evening sessions begin from 2:00 to 4:00 pm, after which the last session between 7:00 to 9:00 pm. In all, there are four sessions. The retreats are such that no one leaves the monastery compound or speaks to each other for two months. This means a complete solitary practice, which logically should bring a certain level of mental solitude. In this way, every day, they spend eight hours for retreat, during the breaks they are active with verse memorization, reading, and engagement in after-session meditations. This is highly commendable.

Somehow, at a time and situation where we find very few people who voluntarily engage in the abandonment of the Eight Worldly Concerns or similar spiritual practices, if the religious institutions and colleges could exercise such yearly retreat in their curriculum, it will be extremely beneficial for those who are looking inwardly for spiritual transformation. Finally, with an appeased heart and pure admiration, I conclude that I have said what I intended to and implore your consideration: what could be a better arrangement for a monastic institution than this?



Khenpo listens to final debate exams, with Jetsunma and head teachers.

# TSUNMAS SHARE OUR THOUGHTS

## My Article on Gardening by Yeshi Chodron

Gardening is very important work. By this work, we can grow lots of trees and plants such as flowers, trees and etc. How we can grow plants? By using water, seed and manure, we can grow lots of plants, vegetable and flowers and etc. We must also try to show more care for the plants growth. We should put plants in a clean environment.

### Why plants are important in our life?

Plants are very important in our life. It can remove carbon dioxide from our environment and also can give us oxygen which is really important for the living. Living among plants also can make us cheerful and joyful. So, try to grow more and more plants. As is my opinion, we should grow more and more plants to keep our environment fresh, clean without any types of pollutions.

### Gardening by Tenzin Palzom

When a seed is sown into soil, it begins to grow. This process is called germination. It occurs in the following steps. The seed coat splits. A tiny root grows downwards and a shoot grows upwards. This produces a seedling of a plant, which ultimately grows into a new plant. After some time, the plant bears flowers. The flowers produce fruits and again the fruits grow seeds in them. The same process. All seeds can germinate when sown in moist soil under suitable conditions to produce new plants. By natural or man-made processes, these seeds are sown into the ground again, and that is to show that new plants are beginning to grow. The flower's fruit is a tough dry capsule that eventually tears open to release the new seeds. Under the right conditions, these seeds will grow into new flowers. The life cycle starts over once again.



Jetsunma admires how the gardens are in such constant bloom

## How to Support the Nuns at DGL

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo and the nuns at Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery thank our supporters in a most heartfelt manner. Your kindness helps our Nunnery to flourish and keep the Dharma alive.

Sponsorship of a nun here costs \$365 per year.

We welcome your contribution to support our nuns and accept credit card, check/cheque, direct deposit or electronic bank transfer.

US residents are entitled to tax-deductible donations via Dongyu Gatsal Ling Initiatives, a US not-for-profit 501(c) (3) organisation.

Full details for all these methods of payments, including link for US donors wishing to make a tax deductible donation, can be found by visiting our website

**[www.tenzinpaldo.com](http://www.tenzinpaldo.com)**

on Sponsor a Nun page

Dongyu Gatsal Ling Trust is registered in India as a Charitable organisation designated for the support of Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery and its activities.

# TSUNMAS SHARE OUR THOUGHTS



Tsunmas in two month silent retreat, DGL Nunnery summer 2020



Prostration retreat: tsunmas completing over 100,000 prostrations

## Meditation by Tenzin Palzom

Meditation is a simple way of freeing your mind, forgetting about daily anxieties and focusing on mental relaxation. Going into a meditative state involves learning to become a passive observer of one's thoughts. It does not mean suppressing them or attempting to force them to disappear. Meditation is the process of continuous focus on one object for a prolonged period of time. It is a gentle, subtle method which does not require any force or pressure on the mind. The result you gain out of the practice is increased concentration and focus. A devotional exercise or a contemplative discourse, often on a religious or philosophical subject, can lead to contemplation.

## During Three Months by Karma Chodron

Now, we are facing the outbreak of coronavirus all around the world. I would like to share some of my experiences of how I spent my time during these three months. Especially from a meditator's point of view. Whatever comes in our life, we must face it calmly and thoughtfully. During lockdown, I didn't feel anxiety and any difficult in my daily life. During three months, visitors are not allowed to enter in our Nunnery and we also are not allowed to go outside.

### When our retreat started and our retreat practice

On June 6<sup>th</sup>, we started our retreat session. In retreat, we're divided into five different groups: Vajrasattva practice, Prostration practice, Akshobhya practice, Padmasambhava practice and Vajrayogini practice. Practising Dharma and praying is the most powerful sources, I gave my best effort during my two months meditation. It was a great experience and opportunity to do something good for other beings.

I think retreat is really important in our life because when we retreat, we focus and think about the sentient beings and we pray to liberate them from samsara. Helping others is one part of generosity. Practising Dharma is very difficult but I tried to do it with having compassion and wisdom. Honestly, in this two months I practiced meditation. It was a difficult to practice but I didn't give up. Our retreat finished on August 3<sup>rd</sup>. We got great opportunity to do virtuous action to help and pray for all the sentient beings. The most important thing is we can't give up to help others.

They are in suffering by not getting food and they don't have shelter to live. So, I decided to help all the sentient beings through prayer. I dedicate my virtue for the welfare of world peace and happiness. May remedy of this virus be found and the virus vanish as soon as possible.

Thanks to all Jetsunma's and our Root Guru's blessing, love, compassion are always with us. All lord Guru's blessing and kindness is also with us. I always invoke the Buddhas to stop suffering and this dangerous coronavirus disease. So I have shared with you all a little bit about how I spent my three months during this lockdown period. As you all know we include all beings in our prayers. Most days were happy, and if bored, it's on you to work with your mind. Thank you for reading this.

---

**Front cover:** Young Nuns' Corner  
**Back cover:** Jetsunma teaching tsunmas



## BY AIRMAIL

To:

From:

Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery

VILLAGE LOWER MUTT

P.O. PADHIARKHAR, VIA TARAGARH

DISTRICT KANGRA (HP) 176081 - INDIA

[dgloffice@gatsal.org](mailto:dgloffice@gatsal.org)

