

Annual Report 2010

Vermont Insight Meditation Center

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Dharma at Vermont Insight: Deepening Practice, Understanding and Commitment

The path of wisdom is followed in three ways: by studying, meditating, and reflecting in the midst of one's life. These three paths to wisdom are taught in all schools and traditions of Buddhism worldwide. In our fifth year of service, Vermont Insight continues to fulfill the role of a Buddhist meditation center by providing opportunities for sangha members and newcomers to engage in all three of these paths. Our early morning sittings, daylong retreats, financial support for sangha members to attend retreats, and our Sunday sittings directly address the path of meditation. The evening courses, Dharma Friends, daylong retreats, and Sunday sits provide the space for participants to connect with all three paths to wisdom.

The connection between the Board of Directors and the Sangha increased through interaction at a Sunday sitting on September 19th when the Board led the sitting and then talked about its activities and answered questions from sangha members. Additionally, the celebration of five years of Vermont Insight and the teaching of Joseph Goldstein on November 6th brought out many sangha members to support this special event alongside Vermont Insight Board members. The event took a number of months of planning and hours of work during that weekend.

From the standpoint of dharma study, the courses offered in our fifth year of operation now reflect increasingly more serious topics. Students enrolled in courses that included topics from Seeing Things As They Are to Transforming the Roots of Suffering, from The Dharma of Nature, to Awakening Joy, and to the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, and from Awareness of Breath, Body and Feelings to Dependent Origination. We were once again able to offer a course on Mindfulness and Depression in the winter.

By end of year 2010, the number of people on our email listserv was close to 400 (an addition of 100 people over the course of the year), indicating steady growth of interest and connection with VIMC. As was the case last year, Sunday group sittings were attended by an average of 20 people with a few Sundays reaching over 30, depending on topic, weather conditions, and season. Course attendance averaged out to nine members per course over the year out of an offering of 11 courses. Tuesday and Thursday morning sittings continued with a solid core group.

As was possible in 2009, Vermont Insight offered a meditation retreat or special dharma presentation every month of the year except for December in 2010. The teachers of these retreats were: Cheryl Wilfong and Eowyn Allstrom, Jack Millett and Claire Stanley, Chas DiCapua, Cheryl Wilfong, Kate Wylie, Amita Schmidt, Doreen Schweizer, Taraniya Ambrosia, Rebecca Bradshaw, Mu Soeng, and Joseph Goldstein. Leading teachers from IMS or BCBS attracted the

largest groups. New to VIMC was Rebecca Bradshaw who was very well received and who has agreed to return again in September 2011.

Most significant, however, in terms of visibility and recognition, was the aforementioned afternoon of teachings given by Joseph Goldstein on November 6th. This special event was organized by Claire and the Board as a way of celebrating our five years of offering the Dharma in Brattleboro, and was planned as a way to give something back to the community out of gratitude for their years of support and attendance. About 180 people attended that afternoon of meditation practice, combined with questions and answers by Joseph and a book signing. People of all Buddhist traditions and no Buddhist tradition attended and all commented on what a wonderful session it was.

The summer Tuesday evening sittings were successful again this year with attendance ranging from 6-20 participants. Practice leaders included Rose O'Connor and Mary Mathias with the addition this year of Fiona Cook, Kate Wylie, Cheryl Wilfong and Jack Millett.

Additionally, two monastics taught Sunday sittings in 2010. The Venerable Daw Viranani taught the third Sunday in July and the Venerable Ariyanani taught the first Sunday in October.

Dharma Friends or Kalyana Mitta Group, meeting on Wednesday evenings, continued steadily throughout 2011. Dharma Friends is a peer-led group with an emphasis on daily life practice focused on study of a particular book, chosen by the group. The VIMC Dharma Friends group has attracted people from various Buddhist traditions. Numbers in the Dharma Friends group increased to the capacity of the Cherry Room at Solar Hill, or 12 people toward the end of the year.

Sangha Activities

We had three VIMC potluck dinners this year. One was hosted by Rose O'Connor in January at her home in Brattleboro with 22 in attendance. The second potluck took place at Fiona Cook's home in West Brattleboro in May and was attended by 25 people. On October 31st, 21 Sangha members, some in costume, attended a Halloween potluck held at Mary Mathias' home in Brattleboro.

The Board also organized the schedule, preparation and service of meals at the Winter Overflow Shelter. Through the winter months of 2010, Cheryl Baxley and Fiona Cook have coordinated this task and will continue until April 2011. Several sangha members also volunteered to spend nights at the Shelter on a number of occasions.

Participation of Sangha Members on Committees

As mentioned above, sangha participation in the overall running of VIMC continues to grow. We now have the following committees in place:

1. **Sangha Development Committee:** Mary Mathias, Cheryl Wilfong, Fiona Cook, and Chris Arieta. Mary oversees this committee. This group organized the three Pot Luck

dinners and also initiated the Facebook page for Vermont Insight with the help of Chris. Cheryl Wilfong maintains that page and posts announcements there.

2. **Set-Up Committee:** Mary Mathias took over primary responsibility for this committee and has been successfully recruiting other volunteers on a monthly basis. Claire Stanley oversees this committee.
3. **Finance Committee:** Cheryl Wilfong, Rose O'Connor, and new Board member, Judy Coven. The finance committee sent out two appeals in 2010: one for the "Teacher Health Insurance Fund" and our "Annual Appeal."
4. **Publicity Committee:** Fiona Cook, Susan Dennison, Roger Wilken, and Kevin O'Connor. Fiona Cook oversees this committee. As part of her work on this committee, Fiona Cook took over the updating of the VIMC website.
5. **Administrative Support Committee:** Rose O'Conner and Suzann Jones. Claire Stanley oversees this committee. Rose and Suzann continue to answer the phone, respond to inquiry emails, establish registrations for every course and daylong retreat, and help out with documents for evening courses. Both of them did a lion share of registration work for the day with Joseph Goldstein.
6. **Retreat Assistance Fund Committee:** Paul Rodrigue, Drew Kovach, and Megan Littlehales. Drew Kovach oversees this committee. Six people took advantage of the fund in 2010, which is an increase of 50%.
7. **The Afternoon with Joseph Committee:** Joyce Sullivan, Drew Kovach, Paul Rodrigue, and Claire Stanley met bi-weekly for six months to plan and implement a smooth set up, registration, and completion of the event on November 6th. This committee dissolved with the completion of that job.

The Board would like to thank the above committee members and all other volunteer helpers for their contributions and dedication to keeping VIMC running smoothly.

VIMC Board of Directors' Activity

The Board bid farewell to Cheryl Wilfong this year as she stepped out of the position of first Board Treasurer. Cheryl's incredible skills as a former CPA have brought VIMC to the sound financial place that it now maintains. Equally important, Cheryl was a major influence in the development and growth of VIMC. Cheryl will continue to teach classes, teach daylongs, give Sunday dharma talks, and serve on various VIMC committees.

The Board was fortunate to have Mary Mathias step into the Board Treasurer position. Mary brings a wealth of experience to the position; not only a good eye for numbers but also experience as Treasurer on another Brattleboro non-profit.

The Board welcomed one new member: Judy Coven. Judy has been an educator in elementary and higher education and is a long-term sangha member of VIMC. The Board maintained its targeted number of seven members.

A significant step forward for Vermont Insight was the introduction of the use of Paypal for registrations at daylong retreats and special events. While VIMC ends up paying 3% to Paypal, it reduces some of the administrative work required for such registrations.

The Board had designated \$1,000 of last year's budget toward an update of the VIMC website. However, it was decided that the \$1,000 from 2010 budget would be joined with increased funds in the 2011 budget in order to accomplish a significant overhaul of the site.

Two small charitable contributions were made by the Board in 2010. First, the Board, on behalf of the Sangha, made a contribution of \$100 to the Drop-In Center as part of its vision to support community organizations whose mission is in harmony with that of Vermont Insight. Second, the Board agreed to support a newspaper ad in support of respect for people of all races, religions, sexual orientations, genders, and physical abilities. This ad evolved out of the Brattleboro Area Interfaith Clergy group. Jack Millett represents Vermont Insight as the only Buddhist organization in the group, bringing visibility and education to the community about our principles and practices. The Interfaith Clergy group was the initiator of the Winter Overflow Shelter effort and continues to coordinate efforts across all churches, the Jewish community, the Sufi Community and Vermont Insight, representing the Buddhist community.

The Board met with Amita Schmidt on July 24th to work on its own internal processes and vision. The Board found Amita's input valuable since she has herself led a local sangha in New Mexico and was Resident Teacher at Insight Meditation Center for seven years.

Participation in Board meetings was extensive with all members discussing all items, due to the introduction of the consensus process as part of the Board's procedures.

Board member term expirations were reviewed and are as follows:

Drew — September 2011

Mary — September 2012

Anne — September 2012

Fiona — March 2012

Paul — March 2012

Judy — July 2013

In 2010, Lawrence Williams volunteered his bookkeeping services, and fulfilled all obligations not the least of which was learning a whole new financial system. He continues to work each month to develop the various financial reports that keep the Board up to date on the VIMC financial situation.