

# Annual Report 2011

Paul Rodrigue, President; Judy Coven, Vice President; Mary Mathias, Treasurer; Fiona Cook, Board Member; Claire Stanley, Guiding Teacher

## **The Dharma: Growing Roots and Breaking Through into Clarity**

In the time of the Buddha, the primarily agrarian society responded well to his images of planting seeds, cultivating what has been planted, and then watching it grow. Many suttas use these metaphors to describe the ways in which the seeds of the teachings, coupled with the practice of mindfulness, and its application to daily life, begin to take root and to grow in significant ways.

In the sixth year of Vermont Insight Meditation Center, it is clear from what participants say that the Dharma has definitely taken root in the hearts and minds of many in our sangha. Additionally, those of us who teach the Dharma at Vermont Insight consistently hear reports of how these roots are spreading to create a firm support for the new plant to break through the earth into the light of day and to begin to grow fully towards its potential. In the weekly Sunday sittings, in the evening courses, during monthly daylongs and in the meeting of sangha members out in our community, people consistently describe ways in which the Dharma is both informing their ways of seeing and responding to what life is offering at any moment, and ways in which people turn to the Dharma for support when great difficulties arise. Many people say something like this: "I do not know how I would be dealing with X situation, if I did not have the practice."

As was true in 2010, topics of study for 2011 continued to go deep and wide including The Four Foundations of Mindfulness, The Three Characteristics, The Paramis, The Eightfold Path, and Dependent Origination. Once again, VIMC was able to offer a course on the applications of Mindfulness and Compassion practices for Seasonal Affect Disorder Syndrome or Depression. An Introduction to Insight Meditation course was offered in the Spring and Winter, providing the very important foundational training in the meditation practices for new students as well as an overview of the key teachings and their applications to daily life.

Students of the Dharma from Vermont Insight who attend retreats at either Insight Meditation Society or Barre Center for Buddhist Studies consistently tell us how well prepared they felt when taking part in retreats since many of the basic teachings are already established in their hearts and minds. This is another indication of the ways in which the Dharma is growing roots and breaking through the earth to come into the midst of people's meditation practice and their lives.

The strength of our roots is evidenced in other ways as well. By the end of the year 2011, the number of people on our email listserv went above 400, a small increase over last year, while the number on the database for mailings was up to 489. Sunday group sittings generally attracted 9-15 people, while course attendance averaged 10 per class, slightly more than last year, out of an offering of 12 classes, one more than last year. Tuesday and Thursday morning sittings continued with a solid core group of four as well as another four people who came less regularly.

As has been the tradition, Vermont Insight offered a meditation retreat or special dharma presentation almost every month of the year. The teachers of these were: Mu Soeng, James Baraz, Rebecca Bradshaw, Sandra Weinberg, Kim Weeber, Taraniya Ambrosia, Kate Wylie, Cheryl Wilfong, and Eowyn Allstrom with Claire Stanley. Numbers for these all day retreats ranged from 13-35, with leading teachers from IMS or BCBS attracting the largest groups. In addition, one monastic, Ajahn Metta, was a special guest for a half day and taught a Sunday sitting in February; her dharma talk focused on The Dance of Feelings and Emotions.

The summer Tuesday sittings continued, led by Drew, Mary, Fiona, and Cheryl, although attendance was down from last year. The one exception was the night of the murder at the Brattleboro Coop, when a

larger group of mostly new people came to honor the victim's memory and mourn together, at Cheryl's suggestion through a special email she sent out.

In addition, the Dharma Friends or Kalyana Mitta Group, continued to meet on Wednesday evenings, with an average of 4-6 attending. 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.

## **Sangha Activities**

We had three Pot Luck Dinners in 2011 on the fifth Sundays of the month: in May at Cheryl Wilfong's, in July 31 at Diana Bander's, and in October at Mary Mathias's. Attendance at the pot-lucks varied: the spring and fall pot-lucks had 12-15 folks, but the summer pot-luck only 5. Summer may not be a good time for pot-lucks in the future.

New this year is the offering of sangha movie nights. The first movie night took place in late January with the showing of the Korean film, "Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter ... and Spring" (20 people attended) with a second one in mid-November, showing the French film, "Of Gods and Men" (10 people attended).

The Board continued its commitment to the Winter Overflow Shelter in Brattleboro. Fiona Cook and Cheryl Baxley again took responsibility for recruiting and coordinating VIMC volunteers to prepare and serve meals at the Overflow Shelter throughout the winter. A total of 28 volunteers from the sangha contributed to the preparation and serving of dinners in January, March, April, and December. The numbers of people using the shelter increased significantly by the start of this fourth (2011-12) season. Several sangha members also volunteered to be on duty overnight at the shelter.

In 2011 the Interfaith clergy was asked to lead the 4th of July parade. Their theme was "Standing on the Side of Love." Through Cheryl Wilfong's leadership, VIMC sangha members took their place in the parade behind a brand new VIMC banner designed by Sarah Kovach (with a sketch of the VIMC logo on a red-orange-yellow background). Many participants wore tangerine t-shirts designed by Cheryl, with a meditator on the front and a verse by the Buddha on the back—"Hatred never ceases through hatred, but by love alone is healed." VIMC sangha members participated in a variety of ways—as parade marshal as well as by marching and singing in the Interfaith choir, marching behind our banner, or riding on the accompanying float.

## **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:

**The Sangha Development Committee:** Mary Mathias, Cheryl Wilfong, and Fiona Cook. Mary oversees this committee. This group organized the three Pot Luck Dinners in 2011. It also organized our first Movie Night in late January and followed with a second one in mid-November. Cheryl continues to maintain Vermont Insight's Facebook page and posts announcements there.

**The Set-Up Committee:** Set-up Support had a good year, with more volunteers on tap for Sundays and Day-Longs. Alison Taylor joined the committee as Co-Chair, along with Mary Mathias. We recognized the need for greater organization of the set-up, and steps were taken to seek out and train new volunteers. Some regulars who have helped with set-up include: Rose O'Connor, Margaret Wilson, Betty Phillips, Susan Kenney, Judy Davidson, Steve Krane, Charlene Ellis, Suzanne Jones, Drew Kovach, and Linsey Doolittle. We will do some trend-tracking in 2012 by keeping an attendance log for sittings. More volunteers are always appreciated.

**The Publicity Committee:** Fiona Cook, Susan Denison, Roger Wilken, and Kevin O'Connor. Fiona oversees this committee most of whose work involves distributing and posting flyers for the monthly

daylong retreats, courses, and other events, such as Movie Nights, and preparing the postcard mailings three times a year. Fiona continued taking care of updating the VIMC website until the new website came online. Kevin takes care of sending notices about our events to the Brattleboro Reformer and i-Brattleboro.

The **Finance Committee**: Judy Coven, Rose O'Connor, Mary Mathias, and Cheryl Wilfong. The finance committee sent out two appeals in 2011: one for Guiding Teacher Education and the other our Annual Appeal. In addition to the regular contributions we receive, sustaining support is finally catching on with four people signed up for it by the end of 2011.

The **Administrative Support Committee**: Rose O'Connor and Suzann Jones continued to serve as the Administrative Support Committee for 2011. Suzann stepped down at the end of the summer and Rose continued on her own through the Fall. The Center could not function without the Administrative Support offered by this Committee in all aspects of daylong and course development and registration. We are currently undergoing a search to find a second person to work with Rose, particularly for times when she is on retreat or vacation.

The **Retreat Assistance Fund Committee**: Paul Rodrigue, Drew Kovach, and Megan Littlehales. The retreat assistance fund continues to grow by \$100 per month, thanks to a generous anonymous donor. Four people requested and were provided funding. Two additional recipients were retiring Board members who were each awarded \$500 in recognition of work done for the VIMC Board. The RAF disbursed a total of \$1600 for the year.

## VIMC Board of Directors' Activity

The Board agreed to improve the signage around Solar Hill so that people could locate us more easily. A larger sign was installed on Western Avenue and the former sign was installed at the top of Solar Hill to direct participants to Neighbor's Hall. A new sign was installed on Neighbor's Hall.

Lawrence Williams completed his formal role as accounting consultant. Mary Mathias took over all responsibilities for finances. She is both capable and attentive in her efforts, and she is helping to educate the Board about finances and book-keeping. Lawrence continues to be available for occasional consulting, for which we are grateful. The Board approved funding of the cost of a weekend retreat for Lawrence to express this gratitude.

A new website was developed, approved, and implemented. Anne McKinsey, a professional web designer was hired for this task. The Board put much effort in considering the many options involved in such a task, including the possibility of revising our logo. Slight changes to the logo were made for the website, while more radical considerations were set aside for now. The new website is more attractive and user-friendly. Feedback about the changes has been positive.

The Board chose three goals to focus on for 2011 and, while making some progress on two of them, put most of its energy into the third. More Board members are taking on VIMC responsibilities, and more sangha members are now involved in the work of the Set-Up Committee, two steps in the direction of fostering broader participation in the organizational work of VIMC. The Board reorganized the structure of its meetings to help make them more efficient, providing more time for discussion and planning in order to strengthen the work of the Board, a step in the direction of its own self-assessment and growth.

The Board put its greatest focus on the third goal and has been carefully considering the role of VIMC in the larger community. We admire the contributions that other faith communities make to the town and its citizens and have been aware of criticisms leveled against Buddhists for what some portray as self-centeredness. In response to the Brooks House fire, we contributed \$200 to the United Way fundraising efforts. We continue to help organize volunteers for the Overflow Shelter and have initiated collecting non-perishable food and other needed items as well as money for the Drop In Center. In an effort to explore further how VIMC might be involved in our community, the Board began earnest study, through readings and ongoing discussion, of a concept called engaged Buddhism. We met for an additional

meeting in December for the sole purpose of exploring directions the organization might take. These discussions were rich and productive, but continued discussion and final decisions weren't able to take place until a subsequent meeting scheduled for January.

The Board welcomed a new member, Alison Taylor, who steps into Drew Kovach's spot on the board. She brings much enthusiasm and experience from volunteer efforts elsewhere. Sadly, we saw the departure of one of our founding members in Drew Kovach. He has been a steady presence and his long-time commitment to the practice has been a helpful rudder as VIMC has weathered through its early stages of development. In his last meeting in September, he suggested that VIMC develop a Sangha retreat that might support daily practice for members by intensifying the experience over the course of a week.

Paul Rodrigue stepped into the role of President, and Judy Coven began a term as Vice-President. This is a new structure for the Board. We have not had a Vice President role in the past. We decided that the additional role would be helpful to current leadership responsibilities and allow for an easier transition between leaders, as the Vice-President is seen as the eventual successor to the President. Judy also stepped into the role of Secretary in June, replacing Anne Fines, who remains on the Board.

We had another Sunday Sit with the Board in September (18<sup>th</sup>) and found the response from Sangha members to be very positive. This time, Claire started with a review of the history of the organization. That was followed by an introduction of different Board members who each discussed some of their interests and history. This led spontaneously to Sangha members present also introducing some of their practice and history. Due to the success of this experience, we decided that a Board Sit should become an annual event.

The Board has chosen to continue to focus on the following three goals in the coming year:

- To develop and implement a plan to foster broader participation in the organizational work of VIMC
- To develop and implement a plan for Board self-assessment and growth
- To build on VIMC's contributions to our local community

Again, a deep expression of gratitude to all Vermont Insight members who serve on the Board and on Committees. Board member term expirations were reviewed and are as follows:

Mary — September 2014  
Anne — September 2012  
Fiona — March 2012

Paul — March 2012  
Judy — July 2013  
Alison — September 2014

## Vermont Insight Financial Report 2011

### INCOME

CONTRIBUTED SUPPORT:	
Annual Appeal	2,825.00
Spring Appeal	1,755.00
Sitting group dana	3,960.00
Movie night dana	102.00
Contributions	130.00
Sustaining support	120.00
<b><u>Total Contributed Support</u></b>	<b>\$8,892.00</b>

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<b>EARNED REVENUES:</b>	
Course Materials	370.00
Course Registrations	6,165.00
Daylong Registrations	2,634.00
<b>Total Earned Support</b>	<b>\$9,169.00</b>
Interest Income	13.00
<b><u>Total Income</u></b>	<b>\$18,074.00</b>

<b>EXPENSES:</b>	
Charitable	396.00
Insurance	523.00
Legal Fees	70.00
Movie night	75.00
Office expenses	622.00
Paypal fees	69.00
Postage	613.00
Printing	57.00
Rent	6,342.00
Teacher Health Ins	3,000.00
Teacher Education	2,000.00
Stipends	145.00
Supplies(banner)	85.00
Phone/Internet	591.00
Teacher travel	400.00
Travel, meals	163.00
Web Design, updates	1,153.00
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$16,000.00</b>
<b>Net Surplus</b>	<b>\$2,074.00</b>

*Respectfully Submitted by the Board of Directors to the Sangha.*