

# Annual Report 2013

Paul Rodrigue, President; Judy Coven, Vice President; Mary Mathias, Treasurer; Fiona Cook, Secretary; Claire Stanley, Guiding Teacher; Alison Taylor, Board member; Rick Willhite, Board member

## Deepening Understanding of the Dharma

In the year of 2013, the VIMC sangha grew ever stronger in its commitment to practice and in its deepening understanding of the Dharma. As the Guiding Teacher at Vermont Insight, I interact with many people on Sundays, during daylongs, and in weekly classes, as do the other teachers at VIMC. Our growing sense is that, for many students of the dharma at VIMC, there are more frequent moments of clarity, of understanding the dharma and how it works, and subsequently, how beneficial it is to our own life and for those we know and love.

Some dharma students find benefit at a simple technique level – *“Riding in the ambulance to the hospital, I focused on the sounds in the street and the siren, rather than the intense pain I was feeling and it was incredible how much it brought some calm. I could not have done it without this practice.”* Other dharma students find benefit from a bigger picture level – *“I’m beginning to see how what I do in my life influences my practice and how my practice influences my life.”* Either way, VIMC sangha members are making connections with the dharma internally in their own hearts and minds, and externally with all of the circumstances in their lives and seeing how the dharma can help just about any situation that can arise.

At a third level, VIMC dharma students are also practicing compassionate and wise action in the world for the benefit of others either through offering a meal at the shelter, or serving on the VIMC Board or a Committee, or visiting a dying person through Hospice, or by volunteering to show a film at the jail through the program that Kate Wylie coordinates. Wise and compassionate action is a concrete manifestation of a deepening understanding of the Dharma.

In the eighth year of Vermont Insight Meditation Center, more people attended all of our offerings than ever before: the morning sittings, regular Sunday Sangha sittings, evening courses, Dharma Friends and Daylong Retreats. With more teachers and an extended timetable, Vermont Insight continued to grow as new courses were offered and options expanded. A good example of this organic expansion is the growth of courses offered in the 4pm time slot, as well as the 6:30 time slot on several nights, and a course offered on Wednesday morning and Wednesday evening which were all new additions. In terms of courses, VIMC again offered 17 courses, as it did in 2012.

A significant new addition in 2013 was the May Commitment to Practice Month. A newsletter went out in mid-April, announcing the opportunity to commit to a month of practice for at least 30 minutes a day or more. Students were asked to sign up formally to make the commitment and then those who did commit received a daily dharma reflection email from one of the teachers. Seventy-two people signed up for the month of practice. Morning sitting periods were expanded so that there were sittings five mornings a week. Most people practiced at home, but truly found a way to commit to the practice no matter what. Several dharma students said they made the breakthrough to a daily sitting practice because of this month and the organized way in which people felt connected through the shared commitment.

Another important outgrowth of the May Month of Practice was that Paul Rodrigue agreed to continue to be the Practice Leader for the Wednesday morning sitting, so that VIMC now offered an organized morning sitting from 7 – 7:45 on three mornings a week.

Finally, outside teachers came to VIMC almost every month in 2013. In March, Kim Weeber came up from Insight Meditation Center of Pioneer Valley to teach a daylong for members of the LGBTQ community and their allies. A group of eighteen people took advantage of this special opportunity for practice. Another special day of practice was offered on November 2 when Christopher Germer, Ph.D. taught on Mindful Self-Compassion. Dr. Germer teaches worldwide and has published a book on this topic. Approximately 120 people attended that daylong; several people drove down from Montreal, and others drove up from Boston and New York. These two events marked a new kind of engagement with local students and students throughout New England and even into Canada.

Let me conclude this section on the growth of the Dharma at VIMC by taking a moment to express my gratitude to all who teach at Vermont Insight – Jack Millett, Cheryl Wilfong, Kate Wylie and Manny Mansbach. Without the teachers and the teachings, we would not be the urban meditation center that we are. Equally important is the sangha, all of you who attend sittings, courses, dharma friends groups, Sunday sittings and daylongs. Without students, we would not be actually able to teach and to practice the dharma in community. May we all continue to deepen and strengthen our commitment to this path of practice that is actually a way of life. And may the positive energies gathered from our practice be dedicated to the benefit, welfare and the liberation of all beings everywhere.

~Submitted by Claire Stanley

## **Sangha Activities**

The **Sangha Development Committee** (Mary Mathias, Cheryl Wilfong, and Fiona Cook) meets once every 4 to 6 weeks to brainstorm fun things we can plan that will bring Sangha members out to do things together.

In 2013, 3 pot-luck dinners were organized. On Sun. June 2 at Cheryl Wilfong's in Dummerston, Sun. August 4 at Fiona and Gene's house in West Brattleboro, Sun. September 29 at Michael Jaro's in Brattleboro.

The group also planned three Movie Nights during the winter months. On Sunday January 20 we showed "Amongst White Clouds", a documentary about hermit monks and nuns living in a remote mountain region of China, on Sunday February 17, "Rivers and Tides" an exquisite movie about the work of artist Andy Goldsworthy with Claire Stanley leading the discussion afterwards, and on Sunday November 24, we viewed "My Life as a Turkey" followed by a discussion led by local naturalist, Patti Smith.

In the summer Cheryl led two kayaking outings on the West River, on Sunday June 9 and on Sunday July 14.

For the first time there was a Thanksgiving Day extended sit in November, 7am to 11am, with Cheryl and volunteers leading the sitting and walking in the forenoon; offering an opportunity for silent reflection and gratitude. Muffins and tea were served, and about 20 people came and went over the course of the morning.

New Year's Eve has become a regular event for VIMC, with Cheryl and practice leaders leading the sittings, walking, and movement segments; refreshments served. A nice alternative way to welcome the new year.

This committee is always looking for new members who have ideas for get-togethers and activities. The activities organized by the Sangha Devas are a conscious effort to foster a positive and inclusive spirit within the sangha.

~ Submitted by Fiona Cook and Mary Mathias

## **Dinners at the Winter Overflow Shelter**

Fiona Cook and Cheryl Baxley continued in their roles of recruiting and coordinating VIMC volunteers to prepare and serve meals at the Winter Overflow Shelter in Brattleboro. A total of 33 volunteers from the sangha contributed to the preparation and serving of dinners in January, February, March, April, November, and December of 2013. Most of these volunteers participated in multiple dinners. We served an average of 25 guests during the early months of the year and around 20 in both November and December.

~ Submitted by Fiona Cook

## **Participation of Sangha Members on Committees**

Sangha participation in the overall running of VIMC continues to be strong. The following committees, in addition to Sangha Development, supported the work of VIMC during 2013:

**Administrative Support Team Committee:** Rose O'Connor, Cheryl Baxley, Rebecca Reuter, Claire Stanley, Fiona Cook

For the first eight months of the year Cheryl Baxley continued to support Rose O'Connor in working with phone and email inquiries, while Rose continued to handle registrations as well as fund-raising and teacher support duties. Rebecca Reuter joined the team in August and a new configuration of responsibilities was implemented.

Rose O'Connor has now taken on the role of Office Manager, overseeing and serving as back up for both Cheryl and Rebecca. In addition she has been handling mail, depositing checks and dana fees, conferring with Elaine Johnson regarding our use of Neighbors' Hall, purchasing supplies, and liaising with Anne McKinsey on website updates.

Cheryl Baxley has become our Registrar, responding to telephone and e-mail messages, registering people for both courses and daylong retreats, sending the lists to teachers and the set-up committee, maintaining a database of course enrollments, and keeping records of Paypal payments. Rose reports that Cheryl has been doing a splendid job and that she has developed an efficient system for entering new subscribers onto our VIMC e-mail and MailChimp lists.

Rebecca Reuter began as our Communications Director in August 2013 and has set up a system for eliciting information about the Sunday dharma talks from teachers and about other Vermont Insight activities, which she then publishes in a very attractive, MailChimp e-newsletter, sent out to the sangha each Wednesday since the late fall.

The team works very well together, and continues to look into ways to improve the administrative process in order to function smoothly and efficiently as Vermont Insight grows.

This is an all-volunteer team and we are extremely lucky to have such competent and committed people helping keep the organization on track with this important, detail-oriented work.

Fiona Cook has stepped into the role of liaison between the team and the Board and continues to help with publicizing sangha events, such as the monthly daylong retreats, new courses, and Movie Nights by distributing flyers to nine volunteers to post in around 30 locations in the community and surrounding towns. Kevin O'Connor sends notices about our daylong retreats to the Brattleboro Reformer and i-Brattleboro, Rose O'Connor submits notices about our sats during the week to the Reformer calendar, and Roger Wilken submits information on the Sunday dharma talk to the calendar at the Reformer.

~ Submitted by Fiona Cook

**Set-Up Committee:** Under the management of Alison Taylor and with the dedicated support of Mary Mathias, Paula Swenson, Margaret Wilson and Chris Arieta, the Set-Up Committee continued to function smoothly this past year. Committee members correspond by e mail before the beginning of each month and sign up to cover the Sunday morning programs at Neighbors Hall. Besides setting up, cleaning up and closing the hall each week, these volunteers take on the responsibility for greeting arriving meditators, familiarizing new participants with the layout of Neighbors Hall, answering questions, and providing a warm, welcoming first contact for those who come to sit and hear the teachings. Two added responsibilities have been taken on by this committee since the last report: the explanation, during announcement time, about the dana tradition that helps sustain our teachers, and the registration and collection of payment duties that occur before the daylong programs on the fourth Sunday of each month. The committee would like to acknowledge the help of Rose O'Connor from the Administrative Team, who is present so many Sundays to assist.

~ Submitted by Alison Taylor

**Finance Committee:** Judy Coven, Mary Mathias, Rose O'Connor, and Cheryl Wilfong. The finance committee sent out two appeals in 2013: one for Guiding Teacher Education and the other our Annual Appeal. In addition to committee members, Mary Ide and Cheryl Baxley provided much appreciated help with the appeal mailing. VIMC receives strong support through a combination of regular contributions and sustaining support from seven monthly donors.

~ Submitted by Judy Coven

**Retreat Assistance Fund Committee:** Paul Rodrigue, Alison Taylor, and Megan Littlehales. The retreat assistance fund continues to grow by \$100 per month, thanks to a generous anonymous donor. Five people requested assistance and were provided funding. Vermont Insight is grateful to be in the position of helping people experience the wonderful benefits of extended retreat time. The RAF disbursed a total of \$1,210 for the year.

~ Submitted by Paul Rodrigue

## **VIMC Board of Directors Activity**

2013 proved to be a busy year for the Board. Our most ambitious project was an exploration of ways to restructure the organization and delegate some of the various tasks of running the center. As VIMC has grown over the years, the work required to manage it has become increasingly difficult for our Guiding Teacher, the Board, and the dedicated volunteers who have been helping. Any long range planning has been difficult to address, and has been consistently set aside as we focus limited energies on day to day operations. This year we spent a lot of time

considering these issues and exploring alternatives. This exploration was an outgrowth of a day long reflection we held in 2012. As part of our effort in 2013, we held a day long meeting in April, facilitated by a professional consultant. Much of this meeting focused upon ways we might manage administrative tasks that Claire identified as becoming too burdensome for her to balance along with her responsibilities as Guiding Teacher.

The conversation about options available to us continued through much of the summer. We were pleased when Rose O'Connor and Cheryl Baxley, who have been voluntarily working with Claire on administrative tasks for some time, agreed to take on all of the administrative functions along with the additional help of Rebecca Rueter. A new administrative committee emerged with clearly delineated tasks. This committee has worked remarkably well, and has even brought improvements to our web presence and efficiencies to daily functions. We are so grateful to this work and to the role model it has provided for us as we continue to explore new ways that volunteers within the Sangha might contribute to other tasks that need attention.

Ann Fielder resigned her position on the Board in June, for personal reasons. We were saddened to lose her experience and expertise. Hers had quickly become a respected voice among the members. Rick Willhite agreed to step into her place on the Board and was able to make valuable contributions in short time.

We continued our work studying Karen Armstrong's Charter for Compassion and to consider practical ways to bring such vision to VIMC.

As Mary Mathias' term on the Board is coming to a close in early 2014, the loss of her expertise and wisdom in her role as Treasurer has been a shadow hanging over us for some time. We recognize the hard work that Mary has done and the difficulties involved with this task. Thankfully, and after much consideration, Judy Coven agreed to step into the role of Treasurer when Mary leaves the Board.

We had an active Fall with two notable events requiring extra work and organization. On October 6th, we were visited by two monks from the Thai Forest Tradition. Members from Upper Valley Insight were in attendance as well as people involved in promoting the establishment of a new monastery here in New England. On November 2nd Chris Germer led a day long reflection on self compassion. His presence drew so many people that we had to rent a larger hall to hold everyone. To manage the extra work for both of these events, we were graced by the help of members of the sangha who willingly stepped forward and capably contributed.

~ Submitted by Paul Rodrigue

## **VIMC Financial Report for 2013**

Since its founding eight years ago, VIMC has continued to grow in every respect. This year was no exception. With more activities and offerings, and greater demand for classes, sittings, and daylong retreats, the number of participants has steadily increased. Fortunately, the Sangha continues to be generous in its support of the organization. The Spring Appeal and the Annual Appeal both brought in much needed energy to keep VIMC a vibrant, forward-looking, and dedicated organization. The number of sustaining donors has grown as well, helping to provide a guaranteed income base to meet expenses.

In view of the increasing complexity of our fiscal situation, the Board decided to engage a bookkeeper to manage the books for the year. This worked out well in terms of efficiency and accountability, and we will continue to use these services going into the future.

The Board chose to dedicate the Spring Appeal proceeds to the education of our Guiding Teacher, who was thereby able to go on several important retreats, and to further her own practice as a benefit to the whole Sangha.

The Retreat Assistance Fund provides help for Sangha members to go on retreat. The Fund is donated to VIMC by a generous anonymous donor. In 2013 five people received an average of \$220 each to help defray the expenses of a residential retreat. Applications for the Retreat Assistance Fund are available by calling the office, or emailing a request to [information@vermontinsight.org](mailto:information@vermontinsight.org).

Major expenses of VIMC include website development and maintenance, bookkeeping, rent for Neighbors Hall, and all the work that goes into keeping open communication with over 678 Sangha members. In 2013 we invested in 7 new zabutons for Neighbors Hall, to accommodate the larger number of regular meditators.

## **Income and Expenses for 2013**

### **Sources of Income:**

Sitting dana, spring appeal, annual appeal, movie nights, course registrations, day-long retreat registrations, sustaining supporters, gifts and bequests.

Total Income 2013: \$26,124.

### **Expenses:**

Bookkeeper, board development, charitable gifts, liability insurance, rents, office expenses, paypal fees, postage and post office box, retreat supplies, stipends to teachers, subscriptions, telephone and internet, website development and maintenance, guiding teacher education, visiting teacher support.

Total Expenses 2013: \$21,255

NET SURPLUS 2013: \$4,869.

~ Submitted by Mary Mathias