

2014 ANNUAL REPORT

Paul Rodrigue, President; Claire Stanley, Guiding Teacher; Judy Coven, Treasurer; Fiona Cook, Secretary; Alison Taylor, Board member; Rick Willhite, Board member; Susan Dreyer Leon, Board member; Petria Mitchell, Board member.

Developing Resiliency in the Dharma

The year 2014 marked the ninth year of Vermont Insight as a 501c3 religious organization in Brattleboro, Vermont. As the Guiding Teacher since 2014, and one of the co-founders, I arrived at this year with the need for a sabbatical after the full-time energy of start-up and the growing development of systems within the organization to envision the viability and sustainability of VIMC and the teaching of Insight meditation and the teachings of the Buddha as laid out in the Theravada tradition. From March to August, I was able to take leave of my position on the Board of Directors and to trust that VIMC was in the good hands of those members who have supported our organization for a number of years. Equally important, three of the VIMC teachers sustained the weekly and regular offerings in the form of courses and Sunday teaching so that the Center continued to teach the Dharma and to maintain its operations in my absence.

From my network of dharma teachers across the United States, I have learned that this continuity of offerings, teachings, and operations of VIMC in the absence of the Guiding Teacher during her sabbatical leave is the hallmark of a maturing sangha and of greater resiliency of community, all based in a further foundation and depth of practice and understanding of the dharma by the members of the sangha, the Board, and the teachers. It is with deep gratitude that I wish to offer a bow to all those who sustained and maintained VIMC during my sabbatical leave and most importantly, during my 101-day meditation retreat.

In 2014, VIMC continued to offer silent sitting meditation three mornings a week, a Dharma Friends group on Wednesday evenings, Sunday sittings every Sunday, ten Daylong Retreats, and the now popular May Commitment to Practice month. A slight increase over 2013, VIMC offered 18 courses Mondays through Thursdays, mornings and evenings. The entire spring and summer sessions went forward with the help of Cheryl Wilfong, Manny Mansbach, and Kate Wylie offering courses and teaching on Sundays throughout that time.

Several highlights of the Retreat program included a daylong retreat/workshop with Chris Willard on Teaching Mindfulness to Young People, a daylong with Leigh Brasington on Dependent Origination, and finally, an afternoon with Sharon Salzberg in November, that was a huge success with 263 people attending. Sharon was so pleased with the turnout that she offered to come back again to VIMC when her new book is published in several years. Center Congregational Church was full the afternoon of November 22nd and many people from the community attended. During a trip to the Post Office the week after Sharon's teaching, I heard positive feedback from one of the postman who had been there. Clearly, the amount of effort required to orchestrate this kind of special event is worth the benefit that so many people derived from attending. It took many people to help make this event possible, and I offer a bow of gratitude to all of them!

Clearly, 2014 marked a year of greater resiliency of the teachers, the Board, the students and the community at Vermont Insight. May we all continue to deepen and strengthen our commitment to this path of practice as a way of living in this world. 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

Sangha Development Committee

Mary Mathias, Cheryl Wilfong, and Fiona Cook, with Drew Kovach.

The Sangha Development Committee plans activities designed to bring sangha members together socially. During 2014, the committee met 6 times to organize potlucks, a picnic, movies, sits, wildflower and kayaking excursions, and other community events.

In 2014, there were three potluck events. Over 30 people attended the first, an Aloha Potluck and Open House held at Betty Phillips and Neil Flynn's house on March 30th as a send off for Claire and Jack. The committee spent the spring planning a picnic held at the Kiwanis Shelter at Living Memorial Park on Sunday June 22, with the help of Drew Kovach, to which we invited other Buddhist groups in the area. About 35 people from six different Buddhist groups came. The third potluck was on Sunday, August 31 at Cheryl Wilfong's to which about 15 people came.

The committee planned three Movie Nights during the winter months. In January we showed "Crazy Wisdom," a documentary about Tibetan teacher Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche's life and teaching. Kate Wylie led the discussion with an engaged crowd of 29 people. In February 25 people came to see "The Way," a fictionalized, filmed-on-location story about walking the Camino de Santiago from southwest France across northern Spain. Rick Willhite introduced the film, and afterwards answered questions about the Camino, and his 5-week, 500-mile walk in 2012. Unfortunately, we were locked out of the Marlboro Graduate Center for first Movie Night of the 2014-15 season in December, so we rescheduled our showing of "The Whale" to January 2015.

The committee also organized special sits at Neighbors' Hall. During May there were sits on Thursday late afternoons hosted by Mary Mathias, Fiona Cook, and Rose O'Connor in conjunction with the "Commit to Sit" month. The second annual extended Thanksgiving Day morning sit (from 7 to 10 am) and gratitude meditation was led by Cheryl Wilfong and an Ad Hoc Committee took over running the New Year's Eve sit (from 7 to 10 pm) with Kevin O'Connor, Drew Kovach and Paul Rodrigue.

Cheryl Wilfong led a snowshoe hike in January, a wildflower walk in May as well as two kayaking expeditions in June. She also led a few community outreach events, including two Brown Bag Lunches at the River Garden in May, an early morning sit at the Gazebo on the Common for the campers in the Morningside and Drop-In Center Fundraiser also in May, and the Moment of Peace on Friday July 4 at the Centre Congregational Church.

The "Sangha Devas" are always looking for new members who have ideas for get-togethers and activities to foster a positive and inclusive spirit within the sangha.

Submitted by Fiona Cook

Compassionate Action Committee

Rick Willhite, Petria Mitchell, Mary Ann Abney, Diana Bander, Betty Phillips, Marki Webber, and Karen Becker.

Compassion and wisdom, The Buddha taught, are the two indispensable practices that lead to an awakened mind. In recognition of compassion's central place in Buddhist practice, the VIMC Board decided to organize a Compassionate Action Committee (CAC), and in March VIMC Board members, Rick Willhite, Paul Rodrigue, and Petria Mitchell, met to share ideas about launching one.

An invitation was sent out in the newsletter in April to our sangha members to join our initial meeting: "The Compassionate Action Committee will offer members opportunities to engage in and reflect upon actions that convey wisdom and compassion to those who experience suffering."

Areas of focus brainstormed and discussed at the first meeting in May included providing support for those who are ill or who face other difficulties (such as, help with meals, transportation, shopping, or simply a friendly visit), end of life care and respite for care givers, help with obtaining information about community services (heating subsidies, location of homeless shelters, Women's Crisis Center, mental health services, etc.), assisting with the homeless meals, help with gardening and home chores, and joining with others to discuss growing our skills in compassionate action

After further meetings in June, August, and September, the Compassionate Action Committee developed a set of over-arching principles:

- * We wish to be a resource for sangha members
- * Help will be confidential
- * Recipients of CAC services know that they are connecting with a person with a dedicated spiritual practice
- * CAC members take part in varied levels of activity and frequency, with regular meetings that support the volunteer during their CAC service practice.

Action steps taken were to inform the VIMC Board of CAC offerings, place notices in the VIMC newsletter announcing the launch of this committee and its offerings, make a trakfone available for connecting a designated volunteer with person in need, and to keep accurate visit records. The Compassionate Action Committee went "live" in October 2014, but did not receive any calls requesting assistance for the remainder of the year.

The status of the Compassionate Action Committee continuing is unclear since Rick Willhite has now left the VIMC Board and this committee has no chair at present.

Submitted by Petria Mitchell

Dinners at the Winter Overflow Shelter

Fiona Cook and Alison Taylor.

Fiona Cook continued recruiting and organizing VIMC volunteers to provide meals at the Winter Overflow Shelter in Brattleboro. A total of 28 volunteers from the sangha participated in the preparation and serving of dinners in January, February, March, April, November, and December of 2014. Diana Wahle, Judy Davidson, and Betty Phillips helped to coordinate our volunteers at the shelter in the earlier months of the year, and in the fall Alison Taylor volunteered to be the co-coordinator for the coming season. We served an average of 28 guests per night during the early

months of 2014 and 22 in November and December. This is an important community service and allows sangha members a wonderful opportunity to practice generosity.

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 supported the work of VIMC during 2014:

Administrative Support Team Committee

Rose O'Connor, Cheryl Baxley, Rebecca Reuter, Paula Swenson, Doug Wessels, Claire Stanley, Fiona Cook, and Alison Taylor

2014 has seen some big staffing changes in the Administrative Support Team, but, thanks to the tireless efforts of our team of committed volunteers, these have happened relatively seamlessly behind the scenes without negatively impacting the smooth running of our communications and registration systems.

The year began with a team of three in well-defined administrative roles. Rose was the Office Manager overseeing the team as well as handling mail, making bank deposits, purchasing supplies, and liaising with Anne McKinsey about the website, and with Elaine Johnson regarding our use of Neighbors' Hall. Cheryl Baxley was the Registrar, responding to telephone and e-mail messages, registering people for courses and retreats, sending the lists to teachers, maintaining a database of course enrollments, and keeping records of Paypal payments. Finally, Rebecca Reuter, who had joined the team in August 2013, was taking care of publishing a very attractive weekly MailChimp newsletter.

In late March, however, Rebecca had to step down suddenly and so the search began immediately for someone to continue handling the sangha communication piece. In the absence of a candidate, Rose took on publishing the newsletter, on top of her already long list of responsibilities. In early June, Rose trained Fiona and Cheryl in using MailChimp so that there would be additional help with the newsletter available whenever needed.

Rose, who had planned to continue in her role as Office Manager until the end of 2015, had a medical diagnosis in August, which required her to let go of all her responsibilities immediately to take care of her health. Although Fiona and Cheryl were available to cover part of Rose's duties on a temporary basis, it became critical to find and train long-term help as soon as possible. Happily, two highly-qualified and very competent candidates, Paula Swenson and Doug Wessels, responded to the notice in the newsletter to offer their services in handling administrative tasks that keep VIMC running smoothly.

Rose trained Paula and Doug on MailChimp as well as other admin tasks in early September. Rose reported it was "great to see their energy, enthusiasm and knowledge." Cheryl Baxley later trained them up in registration procedures. Training both of them on all the systems meant they would be able to function as back-up for each other. It was decided that Paula would be the primary person in charge of the newsletter and for liaising with Elaine. She would also forward Sunday sit information to Roger Wilken for the Reformer Calendar. Doug took on the role of the database manager, and would be a back-up for Cheryl with the registration duties. He began by bringing the database up-

to-date in time for the November appeal. He also expressed interest in developing a new overall system to keep all the data about our sangha members in one place.

In the spring, Rose and Cheryl had started to investigate ways they could better keep track of data in order to improve efficiency and simplify their work. They had been using systems developed organically over the years and were finding it cumbersome to not have a single data entry system or have all the information in one place. In May they visited Laurie Phillips at BCBS to find out how they manage their data there and were impressed at their contact management software. In the fall Doug continued to investigate how best to update and streamline our systems. He contacted Alden Gannon, a tech person who has created systems for a number of dharma organizations, and set up a conference call between Alden and the Admin Team in early December to explore options for a new database system, and learn from Alden's expertise. Unfortunately, this meeting was cancelled due to the weather but rescheduled for early January 2015.

Fiona continued as the primary liaison with the Board, organizing, making copies, and distributing publicity flyers, and providing backup for the newsletter. In September Alison volunteered to pick up the mail from the PO Box and mailbox at Neighbors' Hall, and make bank deposits, taking over these tasks from Rose. Claire still makes up the course list with descriptions and elicits descriptions of the daylong retreats which she then forwards to Paula for the newsletter, to Anne for the website, and to Fiona for the flyers. By asking teachers to provide electronic handouts for classes from now on, we could eliminate the need for someone to photocopy handouts as Rose had been doing.

Cheryl was due to finish her term as Registrar at the end of 2014. However, Claire asked whether she would be willing to remain in this role for another year and much to everyone's relief she agreed. As Claire reported, "This is a great benefit to VIMC as she has been doing a great job and knows the systems and can serve well until we look at streamlining our systems to meet demands."

Anne McKinsey continued to maintain and update our website all during 2014. In the fall she added dana buttons connected with each of the courses so that people would be able to give dana to their teachers directly through the website. This is in addition to the "Teacher Dana" button on the "Donate" page where people can make donations to support our Guiding Teacher. In the fall, the Board decided to add another page to the website containing photos and brief bios of the Board members. This information was provided to Anne in December and the page went live early in January 2015.

Submitted by Fiona Cook

Set-Up Committee

Chris Arietta, Mary Mathias, Paula Swenson, Alison Taylor, and Margaret Wilson.

Again this year, the VIMC Set-Up Committee consists of five long-term members who ensure that the Sunday morning programs and monthly daylong retreats run smoothly and consistently.

Duties include setting up Neighbors' Hall to comfortably accommodate participants and teachers, greeting and welcoming sangha members and newcomers, recording attendance, collecting and distributing dana funds for teachers and the Center, registering participants for daylong retreats,

setting up the tea station in the mansion kitchen for daylong attendees and, when needed, making announcements of upcoming events.

Recently, a protocol for cancellations during inclement weather was formalized in order to further insure the seamless running of Sunday mornings at Neighbors' Hall.

Submitted by Alison Taylor

Finance Committee

Judy Coven, Mary Mathias, Cheryl Wilfong, and Lawrence Williams.

The Board established a new Finance Committee this year. This committee oversees the financial stability of the organization. It provides support for the Treasurer, considers issues raised by the Board related to VIMC finances, and makes financial recommendations to the Board as appropriate. Committee members include the current treasurer (Judy Coven), two former treasurers (Cheryl Wilfong and Mary Mathias), and our former volunteer bookkeeper (Lawrence Williams).

This year the committee explored the possible need for VIMC to keep a reserve fund to protect against major organization transitions that affect the ability of VIMC to meet its immediate expenses. On the recommendation of the committee, the Board agreed to establish such a fund. The committee has begun to investigate how best to invest the reserve fund money.

The Finance Committee also looked at VIMC's assets and coming financial needs and made recommendations to the Board in preparation for a 2015 budget.

Submitted by Judy Coven

Retreat Assistance Fund Committee

Paul Rodrigue, Alison Taylor, and Megan Littlehales.

An anonymous donor continues to fund this scholarship fund at a rate of \$100 per month. We are so grateful for the opportunity to support members of the sangha as they dedicate time in residential retreats. This year we approved scholarships for all six people who applied. We provided a total amount of \$1,260 in scholarships this year.

Submitted by Paul Rodrigue

Facilities Committee

Paul Rodrigue, and Linsey Doolittle.

Paul Rodrigue and Linsey Doolittle were the first members of this committee as it took shape at the end of 2014. Their first order of business was to meet with Elaine Johnson to discuss issues of accessibility. We've been concerned that the mildew/moldy smell has kept some members from joining activities at Neighbors' Hall. And the wheelchair ramp that leads to the hall has never been accessible to people in wheelchairs, as the base of the ramp is at the top of a steep rise in the walkway, one that can't be managed by anybody in a wheelchair. Elaine has been, and continues to be a wonderful landlord and is supportive of us in so many ways. As can be seen already, a new ventilation system has been installed to circulate fresh air and negate the problems of the odors in the hall. And after the snow has melted, her carpenter will be making changes to the current ramp that will allow for greater accessibility.

In addition, the initial development of a three-phase plan was proposed and accepted by the Board. This plan will continue to improve upon our experience of the space at Neighbors' Hall, while considering other facility options available to the sangha and the viability of each option. New members to this committee have already pledged their support towards developing this plan.

Linsey Doolittle continues to provide fresh flowers for Neighbors' Hall on a regular basis.
Submitted by Paul Rodrigue

VIMC Board of Directors Activity

2014 was a year in which volunteer activity in support of the organization flourished, both at the sangha level, and also for Board members. This was especially important as that activity confirmed the investment that many feel for the organization, and it allowed for the smooth running of the organization in the absence of our Guiding Teacher during her months away on sabbatical. Before Claire (and Jack too!) left, we welcomed two new members to the Board. Petey Mitchell and Susan Dreyer Leon officially joined the Board in February. That same month, Mary Mathias ended her six-year term as a Board member. Heavy hearts prevailed as we all said goodbye to Mary and the wonderful contributions she has provided during her work with the Board. In Mary's absence, Judy Coven agreed to assume the responsibilities of Treasurer. She has managed those responsibilities well. Judy's eye for detail is critical to the oversight of our financial resources. In Claire's absence, the Board members stepped into unfamiliar territory as all those little details that Claire manages behind the scenes surfaced and needed attention on a regular basis. Despite the increase in activity and responsibility for Board members, the transition was remarkably smooth and VIMC managed along without problems. The help of our volunteer Administrative Team and other volunteers was crucial during this time and everyone communicated and worked together admirably. We are grateful to everyone who stepped forward at this time. We also thank Manny Mansbach who worked directly with the Board at our monthly meetings during Claire's absence. We thank Cheryl Wilfong and Kate Wylie who continued to be steady and responsive in their roles as teachers and guiding hands.

While Claire and Jack were gone, we launched our inaugural sangha survey. The response to this survey was wonderful and we received important feedback about the work of VIMC. This document will continue to provide guidance as future decisions are made. Alison Taylor, Muriel Wolf, and Paul Rodrigue were responsible for developing this survey, and Edward Suprenant, a Marlboro College student, was so helpful in assisting with the final presentation of data received.

During the course of 2014, the Board and the Teachers' Council met three times to consider aspects of the role of the teachers, and in particular, how best to support the work of the teachers. We are especially concerned about ways to create a secure and sustainable support system that recognizes the work of the teachers, their financial responsibilities, and the dana system that has been a guiding principle in this Theravadan tradition. Muriel Wolf ably hosted all three of these meetings and the Board is grateful for her patronage.

In August, an anonymous donor financed the transportation of three members of the sangha (Drew Kovach, Rose O'Connor, and Paul Rodrigue) to attend the annual Buddhist Insight Network conference at Spirit Rock in California. This conference is a meeting of leaders of Insight meditation centers from many parts of the country to discuss matters pertinent to the organization and

development of Insight meditation centers here in the United States. The experience allowed the members present to network and participate in the exploration of important issues such as programming, financial management, teacher support, and the intersection of Asian Buddhism and American capitalism.

As we closed the year, we were already making plans to clarify our financial priorities and further explore ways to ensure for sustainable development of this organization, which has offered so much to so many.

Submitted by Paul Rodrigue
VIMC Financial Report for 2014

VIMC's growth and vitality continue to be reflected in its financial stability. Participation in our many and varied offerings and our sangha's wonderful generosity have provided the financial support needed to keep VIMC strong and vibrant.

The Board is grateful to the sangha for its generous response to both our annual and spring appeals. The annual appeal generated operating funds for VIMC, and this year's spring appeal offered Claire Stanley, our Guiding Teacher, much appreciated financial support for her sabbatical and three-month retreat. The Board is pleased to have a stable group of sustaining donors who have chosen to donate a small amount monthly throughout the year via direct deposit from Paypal, checking account, or credit card. These funds help to provide a guaranteed income base to meet expenses.

This year the Board created a Finance Committee which oversees the financial stability of the organization. With sustainability of the organization in mind, the Board agreed to accept the Finance Committee's recommendation to create a reserve fund to protect against unexpected major organization transitions that affect the ability of VIMC to meet its immediate expenses. The Board is pleased that the organization has grown to the point where it is able to take this next step in its financial planning.

Income and Expenses for 2014

Sources of Income:

Sitting dana, spring appeal, annual appeal, movie nights, course registrations, daylong retreat registrations, sustaining supporters, gifts, special events.

Total Income 2014: \$32,785.

Expenses:

Bookkeeper, charitable gifts, liability insurance, rents, office expenses, Paypal fees, postage and post office box, stipends to teachers, telephone and internet, website development and maintenance, Guiding Teacher education, teacher mileage, visiting teacher support, special events.

Total Expenses 2014: \$27,440

NET SURPLUS 2014: \$5,345

Submitted by Judy Coven