



**Vermont Insight Meditation Center  
2018 Annual Report  
March 19, 2019**

Susan Dreyer-Leon, President; Claire Stanley, Guiding Teacher; Doug Wessel, Treasurer; Paula Swenson, Secretary; Scott Hausmann, Board member; Petria Mitchell, Board member; Jeff Bower, Board member

**Introduction**

2018 was a transformative year for Vermont Insight. We have seen the retirement of our founding Guiding Teacher, the transition to a new Interim Guiding Teacher, an expansion of our Teacher Council, and expanded outreach to our community, and a long and varied lineup of daylong retreats and class offerings.

**Guiding Teacher's Report 2018**

Claire Stanley, Vermont Insight Guiding Teacher

Vermont Insight entered its thirteenth year in 2018. This year has had many new and important events and moments as I prepared to step aside from the Guiding Teacher role after serving in that capacity for about 14 years. I will speak first about this transition year, and then about new developments in terms of offerings, and finally about our programs and the numbers of people we reached during the year of 2018.

**Vision and Implementation of a Expanded Teacher Council and VIMC Teacher Training Program**

As part of my vision, supported by the Board of Directors, I created a program to train a small group of senior students to become part of the teaching team. This unique local Teacher Training program was designed to serve the needs of a community-based sangha. On a parallel track, VIMC had been inviting Rae Houseman to teach daylong retreats and Sunday Meditation Sittings since 2016. Rae completed her Teacher Training through the Community Dharma Leader (CDL) program in 2017 and I invited her to join the teaching team at the end of 2017. Rae moved to Brattleboro in January of 2018.

Dedicated practitioners, Susan Dreyer Leon and Paul Rodrigue, were invited to begin the teacher training program along with Rae. Although Rae was already certified to teach the Dharma, this provided her with an orientation to our community and the opportunity to connect with Susan and Paul.

Rae also joined Teacher Council (Claire, Jack, Cheryl, and Manny as members of the TC) meetings starting in the spring of 2018.

The group of Claire, Rae, Susan and Paul met every month in 2018 for 4-6 hours on Saturdays. During that time, we engaged in various group building activities and explorations of the nature of VIMC as an organization and a community. We discussed what it means to teach at the community level, which is different than being a retreat teacher at IMS or Spirit Rock. We began working with one another on giving meditation instructions and on giving dharma talks. Additionally, we discussed issues that arise in community and ways to address them. Dharma talks were given by each person and feedback was offered by the whole group to the trainee.

Another significant component was the discussion of current issues in the dharma such as gender issues and sexual abuse issues. We reviewed the Ethical Guidelines that all VIMC Teachers, Board members, and Practice Leaders must agree to. A significant part of Rae's CDL training consisted of Race Awareness training and she offered perspectives as we entered into the discussions of more political and social issues in community dharma groups and indeed in all dharma contexts in the US and the world. We also spent time on communication between the teachers and the sangha members and between one another. Feedback was an integral part of each session and even at several points during each session. Internal communication issues were addressed.

Jack Millett attended the Saturday session on March 31st and spoke about teaching and learning within the context of Dharma and VIMC. Both Cheryl Wilfong and Manny Mansbach were invited to attend sessions, but their schedules did not mesh with the Teacher Training program which was held on Saturdays due to the fact that all three people, Rae, Susan and Paul have full time jobs. In addition, Susan has a young daughter and was only available on weekends.

The last significant component in the Teacher Training was sutta study. Initially, Claire brought a sutta for the whole group to discuss. Beginning in May, Rae, Susan and Paul brought a sutta for the group to discuss. That aspect of sutta study supported a continuing inquiry into the Dharma and into the early teachings of the Buddha. Sutta study is an important component in preparing for and offering the teachings, along with many other factors above mentioned, within a community dharma context.

The program ended on December 15th, 2018. The feedback as to the value and importance of the program was resoundingly positive. Susan Dreyer Leon and Paul Rodrigue then moved forward with Assistant Teacher status and they have both applied to (and have yet to hear about their acceptance) the newest CDL program that will begin in the Fall of 2019 and continue for 3 years.

### **New Programs Offered at VIMC in 2018**

Paul Rodrigue and Rae Houseman began offering a Beginner's Group Practice two Saturday mornings a month in Neighbors Hall. Over the years, members of the Teacher Council have each offered courses as an Introduction to Meditation. It is clear that within the changing cultural context, and with the ready availability of books and apps that teach mindfulness meditation practice, that people were not drawn

to taking a four-week course in the ways that we had taught it up until now. Since its inception in May, 2018, numbers have varied from 2 to 10 with many people coming consistently. A bow of gratitude to Paul for thinking of this new offering and to Rae and Paul for holding it with the support of the other teachers to substitute when they are not available.

Refuge Recovery Brattleboro held its first session on February 11, 2018 in Neighbors Hall. All of us are aware of the sad toll that drug and other substance abuse is taking on our community and across the nation. VIMC was pleased to have the opportunity to support the meetings of this nationally recognized, peer-led program which is based on the Four Noble Truths and the Eight-fold path. Refuge Recovery Brattleboro began through the initiative of Sangha member Lysa Mosca and joined by Gary Graff from our community; Paula Sistare, who began the Refuge Recovery program at Insight Meditation of Pioneer Valley, lent her assistance during the start-up phase. The program meets every Sunday evening from 7 -8:30 and attendance averages between 15 to 25 people per meeting.

### **Ongoing Program Offerings at VIMC in 2018**

During 2018, VIMC offered eleven courses, one of which was an online course - the first ever for VIMC - and eleven daylong or half-day retreats. The regular Sunday sessions continued every Sunday of the year, except with a weather cancellation. The three-sit Sundays offered by the Practice Leaders continued with approximately one per month. Dharma Friends groups that took place in 2017 continued in 2018 with strong participation.

### **Open Sitting Sessions**

Morning sitting sessions led by Practice Leaders from 7 - 7:45 had a consistent group of 6 - 8 students. Two Friday evening sittings at 5:30 and 6:30 welcome an average of 8 - 12 participants. Three-sit Sundays were well attended with an average of 15 - 20 people.

### **Courses**

The online course offered in 2018 during the winter was entitled “The Eight Worldly Winds and Equanimity.” Participants joined each session on Monday evenings from as far away as Alberta and the Dominican Republic. Other courses offered in the winter and spring of 2018 focused on “Awakening Together,” “Awareness and Wisdom,” and on “Discovering Inner Wealth with the Seven Factors of Awakening.” In June, Buddhist scholar William Edelglass joined Claire to teach “Exploring the Way of the Bodhisattva.” *The Way of the Bodhisattva* is an ancient text from the Tibetan tradition that speaks to kindness and compassion as the path of awakening. In the Fall, courses focused on the teachings of Ajahn Chah with “The One Who Knows” and on the exploration of the Wisdom factor with two courses entitled “Cultivating Wisdom” and “The Dharma and Grace of Surrendering to Old Age, Illness, and Death.” Two courses on Skillful Speech were offered in the Fall. And finally, an exploration of the Third Foundation of Mindfulness with “Mindfulness of Mind” was offered and a course on “Natural Bravery: Working Wisely with Fear.”

## **Daylong Retreats**

January 28, “The Heart Awakened: A Retreat for Women;” February 25, Rae Houseman “Using Inquiry in the Practice;” March 25, Manny Mansbach, “Facets of Love: Empowering the Practice with the Divine Abodes;” April 21, Janet Surrey and Florence Meleo-Myer, “Cultivating Spiritual Friendship: A Day of Insight Dialogue;” May 20, Claire Stanley and Rae Houseman, “We Have a Choice;” June 30, David Chernikoff, “Death as a Spiritual Teacher;” August 26, Michael Grady, “The Dharma and Difficult Emotions;” September 23, Rebecca Bradshaw, “Developing Our Steady and Graceful Heart;” October 21, Jill Shepherd, “Balancing Effort and Enjoyment;” December 29, Cheryl Wilfong, “Writing from Mindfulness.”

Two special events were held with visiting teachers. David Chernikoff offered an evening session in June entitled “Aging and Awakening.” David lives and teaches in Boulder, Colorado and came to Vermont Insight for the first time. In November, poet and author David Hinton offered a morning open teaching on “Landscape Practice: the Original Ch’an (Zen) Buddhist Practice, Then and Now.” In the afternoon, he led a workshop focusing on “Landscape Poetry: Ch’an (Zen) Buddhism in Ancient Chinese Poetry and Modern American Poetry.” David Hinton lives in Northern Vermont and travels worldwide to speak on these topics. This event was offered in collaboration with Marlboro College and was held at Marlboro College.

## **Dharma Friends Groups**

The Wednesday night open Dharma Friends group has been going now every Wednesday evening for the last 9 years. The group continues to welcome an average of between 5 and 10 people each week.” The Eco-Dharma group meetings carried on through 2018, meeting Monday evenings every other week. Bonnie Hill now hosts that group that has an average between 5 and 8 people in attendance. Paul Rodrigue co-facilitates this group with Bonnie.

## **Gratitude**

The offerings at Vermont Insight would not be possible if it were not for many, many people who teach, lead, and support the sessions on multiple levels. For the teachers: deep gratitude to Jack Millett, Cheryl Wilfong, and Manny Mansbach from me and from all of the Sangha. For the Practice Leaders: deep gratitude to Drew Kovach, Rose O’Connor, Paul Rodrigue, Mary Mathias, Fiona Cook, Ann Fielder, and Doug Wessel. For visiting teachers: deep gratitude to Janet Surrey and Florence Meleo-Meyer, David Chernikoff, Michael Grady, Rebecca Bradshaw, and David Hinton, as well as to William Edelglass . And for those who support the Dharma Friends groups: deep gratitude to Paul Rodrigue, Bonnie Hill, Breeze Verdant, Marki Weber, and Nora Riley, and to Lysa Mosca and Gary Graff. Finally, I want to express enormous gratitude to Rae Houseman who is assuming the role of Interim Guiding Teacher as of January 1, 2019. Rae has relocated from New Hampshire initially to teach at Vermont Insight. Her willingness to step into the role of Interim Guiding Teacher takes enormous dedication to the Dharma, to our specific Sangha, and to our Board. Rae brings a wealth of experience with meditation practice and a depth of understanding of the Dharma that is exceptional. She is

stepping into this leadership position in all of its complexity and with all of its unknowns with grace, courage, and compassion. With a deep bow of gratitude to you Rae.

With this report submitted by Claire Stanley, Guiding Teacher for Vermont Insight, we can confirm that the Dharma continues to deepen and to steadily grow in our local and wider community. With this report, I pass over the leadership of Vermont Insight to Rae Houseman, the new Interim Guiding Teacher as of January 1, 2019.

May wisdom and compassion continue to fuel our liberation in this very life,  
-Claire Stanley

## **Board President's Report**

Susan Dryer Leon, President

The year just past, 2018, marks one of the most significant transitions in Vermont Insight's 14 year history. The Board spent a significant portion of the year on the Guiding Teacher Transition process. Part of our greatest challenge was determining how to restructure the organization in order to continue to accomplish the many tasks that our Founding Guiding Teacher, Claire Stanley, has been doing essentially without full compensation. The first step in the process started in late 2017 with the hiring of a part time administrative assistant. We've been so fortunate to have Kathy Colmenares helping us to define and redefine the administrative tasks it takes to run VIMC. Additionally, Board Member Paula Swenson has been doing extraordinary work on the administrative team and in particular on the functionality of our website. The result is that our new Administrative position has taken over some of the critical functions previously done by the Guiding Teacher. You can read more about this in the Administrative Committee report, below.

After hiring the Administrative Assistant, the Board's next step, in early 2018 was trying to define what kind of structure we wanted VIMC to have going forward. This was a revealing process that turned out to be more complex than we anticipated. We knew from reading the Kim Allen paper *Teacher Transition in the Insight Meditation Movement* (<https://secularbuddhism.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Teacher-Transition-in-the-Insight-Mvt-2016-web.pdf>) that all our sister Sanghas who had been through this transition had approached in different ways. What was the VIMC way? The Board requested input from the Council of Elders (former Board members and organizers of VIMC). We asked them to help us define a process for choosing our next leadership structure, including a way to include the broader VIMC community in the transition. This proved to be a complex and elusive undertaking. With good will on all sides, several visions emerged for different kinds of governance structures, including not being a teacher-led Sangha, forming a "leadership committee" to manage programming, or hiring a new Guiding Teacher right away. After trying to digest these different points of view, the Board reaffirmed our commitment to being a teacher-led Sangha. This is the most common model in our Insight tradition and it is the structure presented in our by-laws. The Board felt that without the leadership of a Guiding Teacher during this transition and without one person designated to coordinate and oversee the teaching of the Dharma within the organization, we probably

would not be able to continue to provide the wide variety of offerings that people have come to expect from VIMC. We were concerned that without a Guiding Teacher, there would be no one to “hold the whole” of the organization on a day-to-day basis. However, we also heard loud and clear that replacing Claire after 14 years, required some kind of breathing space. For this reason, we chose to seek an Interim Guiding Teacher for one year. We have been exceedingly lucky that Rae Houseman was interested in the position as it was constructed by the Board. She applied for the job and was hired by the Board in accordance with our by-laws.

The Board and Rae will lead a more inclusive strategic planning process during 2019. Among the Board’s greatest concerns with our current governance structure is our acute awareness of the sheer amount of work required to keep VIMC running day-to-day. A huge percentage of this work is done on a voluntary basis by our fantastic Sangha members.

Our Practice Leaders and Teachers keep the weekly program running. The Set-up committee and Scott Hausmann from the Board insure that things at Neighbors Hall are prepared for our near-daily events. The Admin Committee keeps our registration processes, marketing, newsletter and website working. The finance committee and Treasurer manage our money and helps keep us on track financially. Sangha Development plans and hosts our social events like movie nights and potlucks. Compassionate Action provides organization for our participation in Shelter Dinners and other community events. We only have two paid people in the entire organization, and when we hired the Administrative Assistant we significantly reduced the pay for the Guiding Teacher’s position under the assumption that some of the tasks that Claire had been doing would now be done by our Administrative Assistant.

Another issue that has faced the Board this year is our trouble recruiting additional Board members. We are operating with six members at present (our bylaws allow for between 3 and 9) and we have two members who are will need to retire from the Board in March of 2020. Because we are a working Board and every Board member needs to sit on a committee (and some of us sit on more than one committee), if we do not have enough board members, it makes it hard for us to be in all the places where committee-Board communication is so important. At a minimum we would have liked to have one new member in 2018. Unluckily, the folks whom we have approached this year have not been able to join us for one reason or another. Board Development is going to be a critical task for 2019.

Susan Dreyer Leon, Board President

## **Finance Committee Report**

Members: Doug Wessel, Judy Coven, Mary Mathias, and Cheryl Wilfong

The responsibilities of the Finance Committee are to oversee the financial stability of Vermont Insight, to provide support for the Treasurer, to consider issues raised by the Board related to VIMC finances, and to make financial recommendations to the Board as appropriate. This year Finance Committee members included the current treasurer (Doug Wessel) and three former treasurers (Judy Coven, Cheryl Wilfong and Mary Mathias). The Finance Committee meets three to four times a year or as needed.

Deep gratitude to the former treasurers who have been offering their time, experience, expertise and commitment to VIMC.

The Finance Committee began the year by making recommendations to the Board in preparation for 2018 budget planning and noting that teacher transitions may result in changed donations and income for VIMC. We continue to be conservative in our projections to safeguard our financial health. Although the budget was expected to result in a deficit that would be covered by our reserves if necessary, VIMC had balanced income and expenses for the year. The appeals and other donations to VIMC were mostly higher than budgeted although fundraising was much lower than expected. Financial monitoring in consultation with our bookkeeper and report generation continue monthly.

As teacher transition planning proceeded, the Finance Committee reviewed current and anticipated income and expenses and advised the Board on financial possibilities and constraints, noting that some of the Guiding Teacher's (GT) tasks have been absorbed by the part-time administrator. We recommended a stipend to the Interim Guiding Teacher (IGT) as she takes on responsibilities in the fourth quarter, and advised on fiscally responsible support for the IGT during 2019.

The Finance Committee approved offering a childcare stipend for the Parent Group to be taken from the Young Adult sangha restricted fund (not active) so parents can practice during the meetings. The Committee discussed and approved notifying sangha members that they can donate to VIMC through Amazon Smile. We also decided not to invest money in a Vanguard account until further review.

Respectfully submitted by Doug Wessel, Treasurer

## **VIMC Financial Report for 2018**

Vermont Insight Meditation Center ended 2018 in a solid financial position, enabling us to support our interim guiding teacher, pay the salary of our part-time administrative support person, and provide some financial retreat assistance for our three other core teachers as well as to maintain the various offerings of VIMC.

The Board is grateful to the Sangha for their continued generous financial support of Vermont Insight. This support is critical for the continued vitality of the organization. Both the Annual Appeal and the generous support of a stable and growing group of sustaining donors provide necessary funds for VIMC's operating expenses, and our Spring Appeal has provided financial support for our guiding teacher's ongoing education. The VIMC Endowment Fund, administered through the Vermont Community Foundation, provides us with over \$500 income annually and continues to grow. Vermont Insight is a donor to community organizations; we donated \$400 to the Windham County Heat Fund.

This year saw course registrations and daylong retreats close to last year's amounts, while sitting dana from all sittings (including Refuge Recovery, Dharma Friends and the Beginner's Class) increased by 29%. Donations from the Annual Appeal increased marginally while Spring Appeal income decreased by 15%. Sustaining donations increased by 30%. Fundraising at the Vermont Welcome Center brought

in over \$850. VIMC ended 2018 with a surplus available with close to \$22,000 invested in our reserve fund and nearly \$18,000 in our bank and PayPal accounts.

Sources of Income: Sitting dana, spring appeal, annual appeal, movie nights, course registrations, daylong retreat registrations, sustaining supporters, gifts, special events, fundraising activities, endowment fund income. Total Income: \$30,376

Expenses: Bookkeeper, charitable gifts (Windham Heat Fund), liability insurance, rents, office expenses, administrator, PayPal fees, postage and post office box, filing fees, telephone and internet, website development and maintenance, guiding teacher health and education, teacher retreat assistance, visiting teacher support, fundraising and special events costs.

Total Expenses \$30,862

NET DEFICIT: \$486

Respectfully submitted by Doug Wessel, Treasurer

## **Administrative Support Committee**

Vermont Insight continues to operate for the most part with a dedicated team of volunteers. Lysa Mosca creatively manages our Facebook page, Dave Evans, sorts out our web page issues, Rose O'Connor manages the US mail and the banking, Fiona Cook handles the creation and distribution of event flyers and Muriel Wolf manages the library. Denise Glover has agreed to be Vermont Insight's photographer, taking photos of events for the newsletter and the website.

Kathy Colmenares continues in the 8-hour per week paid role of administrative assistant. She produces the newsletter every week, has taken over the registration duties with the expanded role of creating events in our event management system, as well as responding to email and telephone messages and communicating with visiting teachers.

During 2018 a web update committee formed with Paul Rodrigue, Lysa Mosca, Dave Evans, Paula Swenson, Denise Glover, Kathy Colmenares, Rae Houseman and Manny Mansbach. The committee members worked on updates to the web pages as well as adding new pages for beginning meditators and folks who are new to VIMC. The work done by this committee will become live during 2019.  
Paula Swenson, Board Representative

## **Set up Committee**

Members: Chris Arieta, Kathy Colmenares, Scott Hausmann, Mary Mathais, Petey Mitchell, Rose O'Connor, Paula Swenson, Alison Taylor

The Set-Up Committee is a group of dedicated volunteers that make sure Neighbors Hall is warm and welcoming for all who attend our regular Sunday morning sits, dharma talks, and daylong retreats. The



committee currently includes eight members who take turns assuming responsibility for setting up the hall, greeting practitioners, and supporting the teachers.

We met as a group in August for a lovely summer picnic, and had a productive working session in which we reviewed all our operating procedures. Margaret Wilson did a great job of typing up the protocols before she left for her new job in Virginia, and things have been humming along efficiently ever since.

The committee was happy to welcome Kathy Colmenares to the team earlier in the summer, and the timing couldn't have been better with Margret leaving unexpectedly in September. Scott Hausmann stepped in to take over as the committee coordinator in October, and our new scheduling system seems to be working very smoothly.

Board Representative: Scott Hausmann

## **Sangha Development Committee**

Members: Mary Mathias, Cheryl Wilfong, Fiona Cook, and new member, Jeff Bower

The Sangha Devas met 4 times throughout the year with the purpose of planning events that bring people together for recreation, discussion and socializing in the context of VIMC's mission. In 2018, we planned 3 movie nights, 2 potlucks, and 2 outdoor events.

Movie Nights: In January we showed the PBS documentary, "The Life of the Buddha." February's film was "Fences," a powerful movie based on the play by August Wilson. In December, we showed "The Salt of the Earth," a documentary about the Brazilian photographer, Sebastião Salgado.

The first two Movie Nights were held at the Marlboro Graduate Center, but, since the sale of the building, that venue is no longer available. Diana Bander graciously hosted the December movie. The discussions we have following the films are always interesting and thought-provoking.

Potlucks: On February 11, we held a Valentine's "For Love of the Sangha" Potluck in Neighbors' Hall after the Sunday morning sit, and on June 3, we enjoyed a Spring Potluck at Cheryl Wilfong's lovely home, including a tour of her beautiful gardens. Both were well-attended.

Outdoor Recreation: Cheryl Wilfong also led two "In the Flow of Life" kayaking trips. These were held on June 9 and July 15. Both included paddling, exploration of the lower West River, and a meditation in the linked and floating kayaks.

This committee would welcome more members, particularly younger Sangha members who could help plan events of interest to same.

Fiona Cook

## **Ethics and Reconciliation Council**

The ERC has added two new members and we've updated our information on the VIMC website. The members of the council are: Jeff Bower, Judy Coven, Ann Fielder, Petey Mitchell, Muriel Wolf. Information on the ERC can be found under the "About" tab on the VIMC website.

Board Representative: Jeff Bower

## **Fundraising Committee**

The fundraising committee was not active during 2018. Nevertheless, with the help of our wonderful volunteers and organizational help from Paula Swenson and Petey Mitchell, we successfully hosted our second Coffee Break at the Vermont Welcome Center. In addition, we continue to have successful Annual and Spring Appeals, which are our largest fund-raising events of the year. We are hopeful that the committee may revive in 2019 when the Board can shift some of our focus from Guiding Teacher transition to development, and in particular we are anticipating the need to consider fundraising in order to secure some additional space for the organization.

Board Representatives : Susan Dreyer Leon & Petria Mitchell

## **Retreat Assistance Committee**

Members: Susan Dreyer Leon, Paul Rodrigue

Thanks to the continued support of our incredibly generous donor, VIMC has been able to offer \$1009.00 in retreat assistance money this year. Also after many years of dedicated service, Meghan Littlehales resigned her RAF position in October. We are very happy to welcome Denise Glover, who has joined the committee as Meghan's replacement.

## **Elders Council**

The Elders Council was formed in 2017 at the request of the Board which was looking for guidance, when needed, on matters pertaining to the long-term goals of the organization. The members, primarily retired Board members, were invited because of their experience in understanding and enacting the operation and long-term vision of VIMC. The members appreciated the opportunity to be involved in this way, having missed getting together with like-minded folks who also care deeply about a sustainable future for VIMC.

The EC meets as needed, sometimes as often as once a month. So far, in the two years of its existence, the EC has deliberated about the transition resulting from the retirement of Founding Guiding Teacher, Claire Stanley, has met with the Board several times, and has provided it with suggestions for this transition. The EC has also deliberated about its own policies and procedures, agreeing to a consensus model and an open peer group structure.

Members of the Elders Council in 2018 were:

Fiona Cook, Judy Coven, Anne Fines, Drew Kovach, Mary Mathias, Rose O'Connor Paul Rodrigue,  
Alison Taylor, Cheryl Wilfong.