

Vermont Insight Meditation Center Lights Up the Way

BY CHRIS MAYS *Vermont News & Media*

BRATTLEBORO: Vermont Insight Meditation Center was pretty quiet except for the birds.

"What a serenade they gave this morning," said Claire Stanley, VIMC co-founder and teacher Claire Stanley.

About 40 minutes of silent meditation were followed by about 15 minutes of walking meditation at a celebration Sunday morning at VIMC, which is at the Vermont Agricultural Business Center in Brattleboro. Teachers then provided a dharma talk.

Stanley expressed "deep gratitude" for a small committee that moved mats and other items to a bigger room at the center for the annual celebration.

This year's theme for the celebration was "sangha," which refers to Buddhist communities or associations. Stanley noted the religion started in India then took on different forms in other Asian countries over time.

Teachings of the Buddha date back to 2,600 years ago and continue to be passed down over generations, Stanley said.

"Be a lamp unto yourself," she said, quoting the Buddha, who suggested one's questions light the way.

Cheryl Wilfong, VIMC co-founder and teacher, said she and her neighbors use daily meditations and readings to help become "benevolent people."

"Letting go" is the fundamental act of meditation or nearly every spiritual practice, said assistant teacher, Paul Rodrigue. Meditation practitioners are advised to return to focusing on their breathing if they get too lost in their thoughts.

"VIMC is able to sustain itself through donations," said assistant teacher Susan Dreyer Leon. The center continued to offer a remote option for meditation sessions even when other groups went back to being fully in person, allowing it to hold on to those who aren't necessarily local or can't make it to the physical location for whatever reason.

"Meditation with people in the flesh is so powerful," Stanley said, after a practitioner spoke of only being able to do so in a group setting.

VIMC offers classes and guest teachers from the Buddhist community come once a month. Drew Kovach, co-founder and board member, said the group started at Solar Hill in 2005 and follows the Vipassana tradition.

A strategic plan for 2022 to 2027 calls for strengthening the VIMC Sangha in a way that meets the needs of current members and invites new people to participate. Long-time members happily noticed new faces Sunday.

The plan also calls for developing offerings to help community members undergoing major changes, identifying and promoting VIMC Dharma Friends Groups, conducting more community outreach and continuing to invest in a teacher-led leadership model, among other things. VIMC's website is vermontinsight.org



From left: Teachers Paul Rodrigue, Cheryl Wilfong, Claire Stanley and Susan Dreyer Leon take turns speaking after meditation at an annual celebration for Vermont Insight Meditation Center on Sunday. CHRIS MAYS, VERMONT NEWS & MEDIA

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