

Vermont Insight Meditation Center
2023 Annual Report

Steve Wanhg, President; Lisa Schmitt, Treasurer; Chris Arieta, Secretary; Sarah Cooper-Ellis, Denise Glover, Board members; Drew Kovach, Practice Leaders' Representative; Susan Dreyer Leon, Teacher Council Representative, Paula Swenson, Elders' Council Representative

FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

Last year at this time, our Annual Report began: "We officially inaugurated the new University Way meditation hall with a June dharma-talk and celebration." Ah, how long ago that seems... since, once again this past year, we had to move. But as we wrote in our Spring Appeal letter, we managed that move with relative equanimity—and with a great deal of help from our sangha members.

Through it all, we were able to carry on with all the important work that makes VIMC such a dependable source of inspiration, Buddhist education, community support and personal peace for our members.

As the reports below attest, this past year, our sangha teachers have offered a wide variety of classes and retreats throughout the year, and have invited many highly respected visiting teachers to lead retreats for us on Zoom. Meanwhile, our community outreach has included not only our support of the shelter dinners for Groundworks, but also meditation classes for Turning Point.

To take the pulse of how we're doing, VIMC surveyed our membership, and received a great deal of positive feedback. Our finances are in good shape—see the in-depth report from our treasurer below. And several of our members have availed themselves of our Retreat Assistance Fund to support their participation in intensive retreats.

Below, you will find summaries of each of our 2023 activities. You will be gladdened.

Steve Wanhg, VIMC Board President, May 2023

TEACHERS' REPORT

There have been a number of changes for the Teachers Council this year. First, in January Paul Rodrigue successfully completed the Mindfulness Meditation Teacher Training Certificate Program with Tara Brach and Jack Kornfield. Susan Dreyer Leon is also enrolled in this program and anticipates completion in January 2025.

Through most of 2023 Susan, Paul and Cheryl Wilfong continued to operate as the "tripod," meeting twice weekly and overseeing the visiting teacher invitations and schedule, the organization of courses, and other programing needs for the Center. In the fall, Cheryl

announced her desire to step back from her administrative tasks and just teach classes and on Sundays. In anticipation of this, the Tripod interviewed several senior Sangha members who expressed a willingness to serve on the “Tripod” and we also decided to include an administrative team member in the meetings going forward. This transition happened successfully in December and the new “Quadpod” now consists of Sarah Cooper Ellis, Paul, Susan, and a rotation between administrative committee members Catherine and Paula Swenson.

The Teachers’ Council—consisting of Claire Stanley, Cheryl Wilfong, Paul Rodrigue, and Susan Dreyer Leon also continues to meet monthly. In addition, Susan Dreyer Leon serves as the teachers’ representative on the Board of Directors, while Paul takes the lead on organizing and inviting guest teachers.

The center continued to offer a rich array of visiting teachers throughout 2023, including Kevin Griffin, Matthew Brensilver, Amma Thanasanti, Bodhipaksa, Winnie Nazarko, Vance Pryor, Eric Lindo and Shaila Catherine, plus the annual Women’s Retreat with Claire Stanley.

In addition, the teachers offered classes throughout the year, some topics covered in 2023 were Intro to Meditation at Turning Point with Paul Rodrigue, Why Buddhism is True with Cheryl Wilfong, Compassion, Karma, and Suffering class with Paul Rodrigue, Starting or Renewing Mindfulness Practice with Susan Dreyer Leon, Embracing Change with Cheryl Wilfong, Love: Practicing Boundless Meditation with Paul, and a Working with Comparing Mind retreat with Susan. Claire also continues to teach the long-running Wednesday morning class and Paul has been leading full moon sits each month.

Paul and Susan also continue to offer Meditation and Conversation sessions on the 1st and 3rd Saturday morning of the month.

FINANCIAL REPORT

VIMC again ended in a strong financial position, enabling support for our programming and the meditation space at the Vermont Agricultural Business Education Center and then the Centre Congregational Church.

The two fundraising activities in 2023—the spring and annual appeals--were successful in raising money to support the Teacher Development Fund and to support the move from the Agricultural Center to our new space in the Centre Congregational Church. VIMC continues to make use of volunteer support and augments that support with paid support as needed. VIMC pays for the support of a part-time administrator.

Income: VIMC enjoys income from a variety of sources including sitting dana, the spring appeal, the fall appeal, registration fees, sustaining support, and endowment fund income.

- Income from Sitting dana was \$9942.
- The Spring Appeal generated \$2566 for the Teacher Development Fund.

- The 2023 Fall Appeal generated \$8156 (by close of the calendar year; there were also donations in January 2024, which will be counted in the 2024 Appeal).
- Sustaining donations for 2023 totaled \$2550. Sustaining donations remain fairly steady.
- Income from course registration fees was \$1813 and from retreat registration fees, \$5334, bringing the total from registration fees for 2023 to \$7147. Interest in VIMC programs remains strong.
- Additional income from the endowment fund, bank interest, and “other” (mostly the last of Amazon Smile donations) came to \$1182.

Total Income for 2023: \$31,544.

Expenses: Bookkeeper, charitable gifts, liability insurance, rent, office expenses, administrator stipend, PayPal fees, postage and PO box, website development and maintenance, IT support, internet, zoom account, core teacher retreat assistance, and visiting teacher support.

VIMC paid rent of \$900 per month to the Agricultural Center through September 2023. Rent of \$350 per month—to the Church-- started on December 1, 2023. In addition to rent, VIMC covers the cost of liability insurance. The Church covers the cost of internet—which VIMC had paid while at the Agricultural Center; however, as users have experienced, we have had some technical difficulties increasing the need for IT support and some additional equipment purchases.

Part-time administrative support expenses for 2023 were \$5990.

Total expenses for 2023: \$21,602.

Income minus expenses for 2023: \$9941

RETREAT ASSISTANCE FUND

In 2023, the Retreat Assistance Fund committee granted assistance to 1 practice leader and 3 additional sangha members for retreats and intensive classes.

VIMC ended 2023 with a reserve fund (in CDs) of \$35,384 and \$46,653 in bank and PayPal accounts. Total assets at the end of 2023: \$82,037.

Lisa Schmitt, Treasurer

ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM

The admin team is grateful to our dedicated group of Volunteers. Catherine has had help from proofreaders who read the newsletter draft each week to catch errors and inconsistencies. Melissa Hamilton met with Catherine weekly for most of the year with back up from Mary Mathias, Sarah Cooper-Ellis and Fiona Cook. Since Melissa stepped back, Amee LaTour has picked up the weekly commitment. Tom Ragland worked with Paula to keep the website updated, and helped transition to an upgrade of our registration platform as well as to the

selection of a new web host and web manager who replaced Anne McKinsey—our web manager since its inception—who retired.

Catherine and Paula alternate in meeting with Susan, Paul and Sarah. This communication, along with other refinements to our organizational systems, has contributed to a more consistent time frame in getting retreats and classes into the newsletter, the Brattleboro Reformer and onto social media. Catherine manages our communication with the visiting retreat teachers around scheduling and a myriad of other details that make our programs run smoothly. She organizes our inbox, responding to and redirecting email inquiries, as well as filing them so they can actually be found for future reference.

The May Month of Practice daily quotes continue to be a labor of love for the Admin Team.

With Gratitude,

Catherine Rogers, Administrative Assistant

Paula Swenson, Board Member

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Taking up residence at the Centre Congregational Church has brought the challenges of sharing—parking, internet, corridors and soundscape—and the need for mindful communication with our landlord and others who use the space.

Simultaneously, we've experienced benefits from noticing how our presence impacts others.

We participated with other faith groups in a Brattleboro Reformer article highlighting the interfaith community housed at the CCC. On New Year's Eve, we collaborated with the Zen group in a sit that included our different traditions. We hope to continue developing relationships as a result of our downtown location.

Drew Kovach

VIMC DINNERS for the Groundworks Shelter

Volunteers from Vermont Insight, along with other Brattleboro area faith and community groups, have provided dinners for the Brattleboro homeless shelter guests since 2008. Originally the guests were housed in a seasonal shelter during the winter months only, but ever since the new Groundworks shelter, housing 35 guests a night, opened on South Main Street, Brattleboro, in September 2021, VIMC volunteers have provided dinners monthly year-round.

In 2023, the Vermont Insight meal team provided a total of 10 dinners, as the shelter was temporarily closed in April and May after a tragedy at the Morningside Shelter.

A total of 17 sangha members volunteered to contribute to our meal team's dinners during the year, providing a hearty tuna casserole main dish, a vegetarian alternative main dish, salad, bread and butter, desserts, milk and cider, as well as breakfast items.

This valuable program continues to provide a great opportunity for offering generosity to those in need in our community. As the coordinator for Vermont Insight's meal team, I am constantly amazed and delighted by the level of enthusiasm and support from our sangha members for contributing to the shelter meals program.

A deep bow of gratitude to all who helped during the year.

Fiona Cook, Shelter Dinners Coordinator

FACILITIES REPORT

At our University Drive Center, and then again at the Centre Congregational Church, VIMC has provided an ongoing in-person and hybrid meditation experience throughout the year--though maintaining connectivity has required quite a team effort and several interventions by Steve West of Fearless Computing.

Steve Wangh

PRACTICE LEADERS

The current practice leaders are: Fiona, Mary, Drew, Paul, Rose, Maria, Charlene, Ann, Denise, and Arlene Zooming in from Canada.

Practice leaders cover the 5 morning 40 minute sits (Friday's sit is in person only covered by Maria); the Tuesday evening 6:30pm sit; the two Friday evening sits(5:30 to 7:15) and the occasional 3 sit Sundays.

The leaders are always willing to help each other out. We are all learning and developing that hard to define task of "holding the space".

Drew Kovach

ELDERS

The Elders continue to be a support to the board and with their wisdom and guidance.

Paula Swenson

ETHICS AND RECONCILIATION COUNCIL

In 2023 there was no need for the Ethics and Reconciliation Counsel to meet, but the Counsel remains at the ready to provide a respectful and sheltering environment in which all sangha members and visitors may be at ease in their practice.

Jeff Bower