

# History of CIMC Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives

CIMC's exploration of the impact of race in our community began in 2003 when the Guiding Teachers attended a two-day anti-racism training. In 2004, a "Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee" was established, and a "welcome statement" was added to the website. In 2006 CIMC hired consultants to conduct a survey – "Exploring Diversity". The intention of the survey was to help the Center understand the experiences of people coming to the Center as well as the realities and challenges involved in creating a truly welcoming, inclusive and diverse sangha. One outcome was the establishment of CIMC's People of Color Affinity Group which began meeting monthly in 2010.

Starting in 2014, CIMC began more regular and extensive programming related to race, whiteness and beloved community in the context of our Dharma practice. These programs are listed below.

## 2014

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### POC Sangha

Monthly, including these evenings that were open to the entire CIMC community:

- *George Mumford* (Sept. 5)
- *Bhante Buddharakkhita* (Oct. 3)
- *Lama Rod Owens* (Nov. 7)

**"Cultivating A Beloved Community" Community Conversation with Sebene Selassie** (Sept. 27)

**POC Affinity Group Leaders Workshop with Sebene Selassie** (Sept. 27)

## 2015

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### POC Sangha

Monthly, including these evenings that were open to the entire CIMC community:

- *Rev. angel Kyodo Williams: "A Radical Dharma: Where Love Meets Justice"* (May 1)
- *Lama Rod Owens: "Healing Through the Dharma"* (Sept. 11)
- *Bonnie Duran: "The Vipallasa— "Distortions of Perception" and "racial" issues in the U.S."* (Nov. 6)

**POC Retreats with George Mumford**

- *Being Yourself* (June 7)
- *The Four Virtues* (Nov. 1)

### **Beloved Community Circles with Betty Burkes**

A series of conversations over the course of the year, providing a forum for cultivating awareness within the CIMC community about social realities and the Dharma as they relate to our spiritual journeys. The Beloved Community Circles are open to everyone in the CIMC community. (June 7, Sept. 13, Nov. 14)

**Staff Training at BCBS** on racial awareness, diversity and unconscious bias. (Aug. 17-18)

### **Focus Group with POC Sangha with Rochelle Weichman (BoD), Terry Clewley (BoD) and Lynn Whitemore (ED)**

This was one of a series of focus groups and was held as an opportunity to learn directly from POC sangha members about their ways of engaging with CIMC and to identify barriers to their engagement. (Dec. 4)

## **2016**

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### **POC Sangha**

Monthly, including these evenings that were open to the entire CIMC community:

- *Sebene Selassie: Working with Identity and Difference on the Path* (June 3)
- *Rev. angel Kyodo Williams* (Dharma Talk and Book Signing): *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love and Liberation* (July 8)
- *Bonnie Duran: The Third Jewel of Sangha* (Oct. 7)

### **POC Retreats with George Mumford**

- *Wise Reflection* (March 13)
- *Good Friends and Suitable Conversation* (July 26)

### **“Cultivating Connectedness” POC & Ally Retreat with Narayan Liebenson and George Mumford**

We are aware of the social realities that engender our separateness, and of our collective humanity that offers opportunities to cultivate connectedness. We will come together through sitting meditation, walking meditation, and reflections on the Dharma. This precious opportunity of practice provides our Sangha a heart opening exploration of our individual and collective suffering and how we cultivate our beloved and treasured community. (Oct. 16)

### **Beloved Community Circles with Betty Burkes**

A series of conversations over the course of the year, providing a forum for cultivating awareness within the CIMC community about social realities and the Dharma as they relate to our spiritual journeys. The Beloved Community Circles are open to everyone in the CIMC community. (March 20, June 12, Sept. 18, Dec. 11)

**“Mindful of Race” Community Conversation with Meck Groot and Betty Burkes**

An open conversation in service of nurturing and supporting a sangha that is a welcoming refuge for all. We join other Dharma Centers across the country in exploring how the legacy of race in America impacts our Center and our spiritual practice. (Sept. 30)

**“Waking Up to Race” Workshop with Eleanor Hancock, Director of White Awake**

For practitioners who self-identify as white. We will look at our deep conditioning around race and explore how the Dharma supports us as we turn towards the continuing reality of racial suffering. (Oct. 1)

## 2017

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**POC Sangha**

Monthly, including:

- Sebene Selassie (May 12)
- Tuere Sala (Sept. 9)

**“Waking Up to Whiteness” Practice Group with Meck Groot (Jan. 3-31)**

For practitioners who self-identify as white who:

1. Long to co-create an inclusive, multiracial, multicultural sangha that is rooted in open-hearted kindness and a vision of Beloved Community;
2. Seek to wake up from the delusions and attractions of whiteness;
3. Are committed to spiritual practice as a means for personal and social transformation.

*NOTE: Several White Awake KM study groups formed at the end of this Practice Group. They initially used the 8-part Spirit Rock Community Dharma Leader White Awake Curriculum as a foundational guide. They meet outside of CIMC and have continued for well over a year.*

**“Cultivating Connectedness” POC & Ally Retreat with Narayan Liebenson and George Mumford**

We are aware of the social realities that engender our separateness, and of our collective humanity that offers opportunities to cultivate connectedness. We will come together through sitting meditation, walking meditation, and reflections on the Dharma. This precious opportunity of practice provides our Sangha a heart opening exploration of our individual and collective suffering and how we cultivate our beloved and treasured community. (Feb. 26)

**POC Retreats with George Mumford**

- March 19 – *Practicing Freedom*
- November 4 – *Cultivating Happiness*

### **Beloved Community Circles** with *Betty Burkes*

A series of conversations over the course of the year, providing a forum for cultivating awareness within the CIMC community about social realities and the Dharma as they relate to our spiritual journeys. The Beloved Community Circles are open to everyone in the CIMC community. (April 2, Sept. 17, Nov. 12)

### **“The Practice of Interconnectedness” Practice Group** with *Betty Burkes and Narayan Liebenson*

We will look at what prevents us from seeing one another with compassion and clarity, and share practices that might liberate us from isolation and misunderstanding. We will investigate interconnectedness, seeking to free our hearts from the oppressive ways in which we have been conditioned and educated. Using the book *Deep Diversity* written by Shakil Choudhury as our reference, we will make meaning of his “Deep Diversity Framework” of tribes (belonging), emotions, bias, and power. (May 2-23)

### **“Race, Identity and the Dharma” Workshop** with *Sebene Selassie and Joseph Goldstein*

Explored how we can wake up from the power of delusion in not seeing racism, internalized oppression and unconscious bias, and how they relate to the five aggregates of experiences, and the connections between personality, identity and selflessness. (May 13)

### **CIMC Board Meeting** with *Sebene Selassie*

The CIMC Board of Directors met with Sebene Selassie to learn from her experience with “beloved community” and diversity work at other Dharma Centers in her various roles as teacher, board member, diversity committee member, consultant and Executive Director. (May 13)

## **2018**

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### **POC Sangha**

Monthly, including:

- May 11 with Tuere Sala
- September 7 with Bhante Buddhakkhita
- November 9 with DaRa Williams

### **Beloved Community Circles** with *Betty Burkes*

A series of conversations over the course of the year, providing a forum for cultivating awareness within the CIMC community about social realities and the Dharma as they relate to our spiritual journeys. The Beloved Community Circles are open to everyone in the CIMC community. (Jan. 14, April 15, Sept. 16, Dec. 9)

### **White Awake KM Study Groups Reunions** with *sangha members*

Small groups of CIMC practitioners are engaged in an ongoing exploration of the experience and impact of racism and whiteness, and ways to work with racial conditioning in the service of

individual and collective liberation. Most have used the eight-week “Waking Up to Whiteness” Dharma and Racism Study Curriculum developed by members of the 2015/2016 Spirit Rock’s Community Dharma Leaders program. Four times a year these groups come together at CIMC to discuss their work, share ideas, support each other and build community. Each meeting is facilitated by one of the groups. (March 25, June 10, September 20)

**Why are we doing this “White Awake” work? Community Conversation with Narayan Liebenson and Linda Spink**

For anyone interested in why we are taking on this exploration of race and racism at CIMC. I want to be available, especially to those questioning its need and its place and wondering how and whether it aligns with our mission as a Buddhist center. Narayan will share her perspective as a Guiding Teacher and be available to respond to the questions and concerns you may have. (April 5)

**CIMC Board Meeting (April 25) facilitated by Linda Spink**

Meeting objectives:

- To clarify and reach agreement on what CIMC’s diversity and inclusion efforts encompass and how they align with the mission, vision, core values, and strategic plan.
- To explore what CIMC can do to provide space that is more welcoming and inclusive?
- To review and affirm the roles/responsibility of the Board of Directors, Guiding Teacher, Executive Director and Dharma Teachers with regards to CIMC’s diversity and inclusion efforts, and time allowing to discuss priority actions and needed support.
- To build greater understanding of individual experiences with diversity and explore the collective interest in learning more as a Board of Directors.

**“Waking Up Together, Moving Towards Freedom” Practice Group with Betty Burkes and Narayan Liebenson**

In this four-week class, we will explore the conditionings and constructs -- especially of race and class -- that separate us from others and from the truth of our own experience. This separation causes great harm and suffering, yet often is unexamined. With compassion and clarity, we will look at what prevents us from seeing things as they really are. (May 1-29)

**“Cultivating Connectedness” POC & Ally Retreat with Narayan Liebenson and George Mumford**

We are aware of the social realities that engender our separateness, and of our collective humanity that offers opportunities to cultivate connectedness. We will come together through sitting meditation, walking meditation, and reflections on the Dharma. This precious opportunity of practice provides our Sangha a heart opening exploration of our individual and collective suffering and how we cultivate our beloved and treasured community. (May 20)

**“Exploring White Awareness” Workshop with John Bell**

A “Day of Mindfulness” with other CIMC practitioners who experience being white as part of our identity. We will use deep reflection and deep listening to explore the habit energies and conditioning we hold as white people. We will consider both what we see in ourselves and what we may not be able to see. (June 3)

## **Formation of three new White Awake KM Study Groups. (June)**

### **“Being Mindful of Race” Dharma Talk and Book Event with Ruth King**

Blending an understanding of mindfulness principles with an exploration of our individual and collective racial conditioning and its systemic proliferation. With mindfulness practice, we learn how to stay present to what’s true and what’s difficult with a caring and wise heart. This talk emphasizes how being mindful of race supports a culture of care. (June 26)

### **“Deep Diversity” Joint IMS/BCBS Dharma Leader Workshop with Shakil Choudhury**

CIMC Board President Betty Burkes and CIMC Executive Director Lynn Whittemore joined 60 other Dharma leaders from IMS and BCBS for a day-long exploration of unconscious bias with the author of “Deep Diversity”. (July 7)

## **2019**

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### **POC Sangha**

This year, Matthew Hepburn and the POC AGLs – Novelette DeMercado and Vicky I -- developed a Year-Long Practice and Study curriculum focusing on Wisdom, Virtuous Action and Meditation (The Nobel Eightfold Path), a guide to the end of suffering. This will guide the First Friday meetings, and visiting TOC will be asked to support the curriculum on evenings when they are teaching the Affinity Group. AGLs will continue to hold some of the evenings and will receive guidance from Matthew for the topics on those evenings.

- January 11 and February 1 with Matthew Hepburn
- March 1 with Sebene Selassie
- May 3 with Tuere Sala

### **“Waking Up to Whiteness” Practice Group with Meck Groot (Jan. 8-Feb. 5)**

For practitioners who self-identify as white who:

1. Long to co-create an inclusive, multiracial, multicultural sangha that is rooted in open-hearted kindness and a vision of Beloved Community;
2. Seek to wake up from the delusions and attractions of whiteness;
3. Are committed to spiritual practice as a means for personal and social transformation.

*NOTE: Four new White Awake KM study groups formed at the end of this Practice Group. They will initially use the 8-part Spirit Rock Community Dharma Leader White Awake Curriculum as a foundational guide.*

### **Beloved Community Circles with Betty Burkes**

A series of conversations over the course of the year, providing a forum for cultivating awareness within the CIMC community about social realities and the Dharma as they relate to our spiritual

journeys. The Beloved Community Circles are open to everyone in the CIMC community. (Jan. 13, May 19, Sept. 22, Dec. 15)

**White Awake KM Study Groups “Reunions” with sangha members**

Small groups of CIMC practitioners are engaged in an ongoing exploration of the experience and impact of racism and whiteness, and ways to work with racial conditioning in the service of individual and collective liberation. Most have used the eight-week “Waking Up to Whiteness” Dharma and Racism Study Curriculum developed by members of the 2015/2016 Spirit Rock’s Community Dharma Leaders program. Three times a year these groups come together at CIMC to discuss their work, share ideas, support each other and build community. Each meeting is facilitated by one of the groups. (March 3, June 23, November 10)

**White Dharma Teacher Training at CIMC with Erin Treat**

CIMC hosted a day of learning for local vipassana teachers who identify as white. The intent is for white dharma teachers to gather to focus on undoing racism and to continue to learn how to be more inclusive in our teaching. Many meditation centers have taken on this work to one degree or another and many teachers have engaged in undoing racism training individually, as well. At CIMC we have had ongoing programs and other initiatives focused on white awake work for the past several years. This training is a continuation of this work. (April 15)

**“White People Waking Up” Peer-Facilitated Study Groups at CIMC with sangha members**

Our conditioning around racial identity deserves to be as much a focal point of our dharma practice as other forms of conditioning that contribute to suffering. Over the course of this peer-facilitated study group, we aim to investigate our racial identity as white people, to understand how race affects our relationships with ourselves and others, and to build our stamina and resilience for the task of confronting and dismantling racism. We also aspire to realize the potential of Buddhist practice and teaching to increase understanding, shift attitudes and behaviors, bring healing to our community, and support collective liberation and Beloved Community. (May/June and Sept./Oct.)

This study group is a six-part series during which we will apply contemplative and embodied practices to explore:

- Our racial identity as white people, and our reactions to being labeled white.
- The historical origins of whiteness.
- Present day dynamics of racism.
- The costs of racism for white people.
- Reclamation of the indigenous cultures and ethnic origins of our ancestors.
- The operation of racism in our sangha, our communities, and our organizations, and ways we can interrupt this karma.

**IDEA Working Group with facilitator Alida Zweidler-McKay and 14 CIMC yogis**

Inspired by Ruth King’s visit to CIMC in 2018, CIMC’s People of Color Affinity Group leaders encouraged CIMC to expand efforts in service of a truly welcoming and inclusive Dharma center. Conversations led to a decision to convene a group of stakeholders to co-conceive CIMC’s steps for the next 12-18 months as we continue to work towards realizing our aspirations for a truly inclusive

and welcoming Center. Care was taken to ensure a diverse and representative cohort, and to find a skilled facilitator to support our work. The Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Aspiration (IDEA) cohort is comprised of 15 yogis representing Teachers, Staff, Board Members, Affinity Group Leaders and community members from the POC, LGBTIQ, Elders, 35&Under, Little Buddhas and White Awake communities. We spent three evenings together this fall. Some of the topics we explored:

- Establish shared working definitions of the terms: diversity, inclusion, equity.
- Look at signals of inclusion and appropriate, effective communication of CIMC's actions and engagement in support of our IDEA.
- Name and learn from what already is working well.
- Look at current gaps/opportunities.
- Establish working groups to focus on creating a vision, reviewing and up-leveling CIMC's communications about DEI work at the Center, ongoing training to explore white supremacy culture as it manifests at CIMC.

(September 26, October 10, October 24)

**Online Meditation Practice Group for People with Life-Altering Pain or Illness** *with Reya Stevens*  
CIMC's first online program, an 8-week practice group which included pre-recorded Dharma talks and videos and met via Zoom. (October 16 to December 11)

From the description: *This course could be for you if any of the following (or something similar) applies:*

- *Health-related challenges are the dominant issues on your mind. You want to explore them in light of the Buddha's teachings—whether you consider yourself a Buddhist or not.*
- *You had already been practicing meditation, but when health issues arose or intensified, you felt either that your practice floundered or that it needed to change course somehow.*
- *You want support to explore this. You have been interested in meditation for a while, but classes and retreats have been inaccessible to you. Fortunately, you can attend this online class from home.*

**“Exploring White Awareness” Workshop** *with John Bell*

A “Day of Mindfulness” with other CIMC practitioners who experience being white as part of our identity. We will use deep reflection and deep listening to explore the habit energies and conditioning we hold as white people. We will consider both what we see in ourselves and what we may not be able to see. (November 2)

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**2020** (all programming moved online in April because of COVID closure)

### **POC Sangha**

This year, Matthew Hepburn and the POC AGLs – Novelette DeMercado and Vicky I -- developed a Year-Long Practice and Study curriculum focusing on The Three Characteristics. This will guide the First Friday meetings, and visiting TOC will be asked to support the curriculum on evenings when



they are teaching the Affinity Group. AGLs, Gina LaRoche and Fez Aswat will hold some of the evenings and will receive guidance from Matthew for the topics on those evenings.

- January, April and October with Matthew Hepburn
- February with Tuere Sala
- July with Devin Berry
- November with Bhante Buddharakkhita

#### **POC Retreat** *with Tuere Sala*

“Recognizing the Importance of the Three Characteristics”, this retreat dovetailed with the POC Sangha’s theme of the year. (February 8)

#### **Beloved Community Circles** *with Betty Burkes*

A series of conversations over the course of the year, providing a forum for cultivating awareness within the CIMC community about social realities and the Dharma as they relate to our spiritual journeys. The Beloved Community Circles are open to everyone in the CIMC community. (February 23; subsequent meetings were canceled because of the move to online)

#### **CIMC Board of Directors Racial Justice Task Force** *with Terry Clewley, Judy Johnson, Emily Kale and David Gumpert*

In the July 2020 board meeting, the board realized the need to respond more directly to racial injustice and a task force was created to focus on CIMC’s response and responsibility.

#### **NEW: White Awake Sangha** *with Ben Pittman-Polletta, Beilah Ross and Valerie Spain*

In September 2020, CIMC established a new CIMC Community/Affinity Group -- The White Awake Sangha – which meets monthly and is facilitated by three Affinity Group Leaders who are long-time CIMC members. They were also facilitators of the 6-week *White People Waking Up Study Groups* held in 2019. (September 13, October 11, November 8, December 17)

Here’s the description on our website: *The White Awake Sangha is a community of white CIMC practitioners doing the emotional work of examining racism and white supremacy, how we internalize them, and how we perpetuate them interpersonally, culturally, and institutionally, both as individuals and collectively. Our goal is to bring our spiritual practice to the work of interrogating and dismantling white supremacy in ourselves, our relationships, our communities, and especially at the meditation center we call our spiritual home. The White Awake Sangha is appropriate for any white practitioner no matter what meditation style they practice or where they are on their antiracism journey. Our goal is to build community as well as resilience, capacity, and commitment for the work of fighting systemic oppression. All are invited to explore issues of whiteness and racism, and our role as white practitioners: to not just be good allies in antiracist work, but to be actively engaged and taking initiative in dismantling racism within ourselves, at CIMC, and anyplace we may encounter it.*

#### **POC Practice Group** *with Matthew Hepburn*

The first-ever POC practice group offered at CIMC: *The Unshakeable Heart for People of Color*. (November 9 to December 14)

## 2021

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### **POC Sangha**

In January, we shifted from a POC AGL-led sangha to a Teacher-led sangha, taught by Matthew Hepburn, Yong Oh, and Dawn Scott.

### **NEW: Disability & Chronic Illness Sangha with Reya Stevens**

In January 2021, CIMC established this new CIMC Community/Affinity Group which will meet monthly and is facilitated by Reya Stevens. Here's the description on our website:

*These gatherings are an opportunity to practice together and build community for those who self-identify as disabled and/or chronically ill\*. We welcome the great variety of experiences and perspectives this includes, and we seek to view our experiences through the lens of dharma. Most meetings will include introductions, guided meditation, small and/or large group discussion, dharma teaching and a brief closing. The sangha will be led by Reya Stevens who has had a disabling illness since she was a teenager, including 20 years' riding a wheelchair and decades spent mostly lying down at home. Reya has been practicing dharma since 1984.*

*\*This includes those who prefer "person-first" language (e.g. 'person with a disability'), a more specific descriptor (e.g. 'blind' or 'neuro-divergent'), or to simply explain their situation as needed. Please note, however, that this group is not geared towards people whose conditions are expected to be fully cured or healed in a relatively brief time (e.g. three months or less).*

### **POC Retreat: Mindfulness: Our Strength & Confidence in Difficult Times with Tuere Sal.**

We are living in exceedingly difficult times filled with a lot of uncertainty and worry. This uncertainty and worry can bring with it a whole host of unpleasantness. The more we worry about the uncertainty, the more our emotions intensify, leaving us frantically looking outside ourselves for a return to normalcy and safety.

Mindfulness reminds us of the true source of our stability. It is in the wisdom of impermanence that we experience the light of the dharma enabling us to clearly see that our strength comes from the stillness within us not from conditions outside of us. In the solitude of retreat practice, we gently disengage the thinking mind by turning towards and investigating the nature of uncertainty and worry. Gradually, through awareness, we become renewed, inspired, and empowered.

**Everyone who identifies as a person-of-color is welcome.** This program is appropriate for both new and experienced meditators and will include meditation (with instructions), walking and reflective periods, and a Dhamma talk. February 27, 2021

## **¡Únicamente Latinx! (Uniquely Latinx!)**

Join **nakawe cuebas berrios** and **bruni dávila** for CIMC's first Spanish language Dharma program on Sunday, March 21st from 1:00-4:30pm. [¡Únicamente Latinx!](#) is for anyone who wishes to build sangha and deepen their spiritual practices with other Latinx meditators. March 21, 2021

## **White Awake Sangha** *with Ben Pittman-Polletta, Beilah Ross and Valerie Spain*

The White Awake Sangha meets monthly and is facilitated by three Affinity Group Leaders who are long-time CIMC members.

## **2022**

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### **POC Sangha**

We shifted back to POC AGL-led sangha.

### **Disability & Chronic Illness Sangha** *with Reya Stevens*

This continued throughout the year.

### **White Awake Sangha** *with Ben Pittman-Polletta, Beilah Ross and Valerie Spain*

This continued throughout the year.

## **2023**

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### **POC Sangha**

We have been working with POC leadership to support them in doing the work needed to expand this Affinity group. We have also made plans to pay for this and other leading of affinity groups.

### **Disability & Chronic Illness Sangha** *with Reya Stevens*

This continued throughout the year.

### **White Awake Sangha** *with Ben Pittman-Polletta, Valerie Spain (until September 2023) and Sherri Zitter*

This continued throughout the year.

### **Open House**

On October 29, 2023, in coordination with their Sangha Life Committee, CIMC held a very successful open house. Many people who had never been to the Center came to the open house.