



Navigating Our Worlds Mindfully

A mindfulness meditation retreat for veterinarians, veterinary technicians/technologists, staff, and veterinary students.

Monday, October 20, 2025 – Thursday, October 23, 2025

Bellarmino Jesuit Retreat House, Barrington, Illinois

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Each of us occupies various worlds: home, work and country. With many familiar structures seemingly in chaos and with anger and division on the rise, how do we navigate difficult times with equanimity and courage? How do we speak our truth with kindness? Mindfulness meditation provides a still point from which we can engage with those we meet in ways that can help heal divides and allow us to treat ourselves compassionately.

VIN Foundation is inviting interested members of the veterinary profession the opportunity to take time and participate in a few days of didactics and dialogues that help participants return to our professional and personal lives with greater clarity, meaning and gratitude. The didactics will be a combination of group discussion and speaker presentation.

While formal meditation training is not a requirement, in order for this retreat to be most beneficial, familiarity with meditation and yoga practice is highly recommended. Participants should be able to hold a quiet position for 30 minutes, several times daily. Retreat participants should plan to attend all didactics, group discussions, yoga, art and meditation sessions. There will be ample opportunity for private time, so that participants are able to enjoy the beautiful facilities and grounds of the **Bellarmino Jesuit Retreat House in Barrington, Ill.**

PLEASE NOTE: One-hour shiatsu massage (conducted fully clothed) will be offered by Nathan Torrance, a shiatsu practitioner and educator, on Wednesday, October 22nd. There will be a separate charge of \$100, payable to Mr. Torrance, for those interested. In order to receive full CE credit for this retreat, massages must be scheduled outside of lecture times. VIN Foundation is not responsible for booking massages. Upon registration, the contact for scheduling will be provided.

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Non-medical

TOTAL CE CREDITS: 8

TOTAL COST: \$695.00

COURSE AGENDA

Monday, October 20, 2025

1:00-3:00 PM: Check-In/Meet fellow attendees and enjoy the beautiful grounds/facilities

4:00 PM: Welcome/information session/meet and greet

5:30 PM: Dinner

7:30 PM: Meditation

8:15 PM: Retire

Tuesday, October 21, 2025

7:30 AM: Yoga with Gwen Jeun, DVM

8:00 AM: Breakfast

9:30 AM: Meditation

10:00 AM LECTURE 1: Practicing equanimity in the real world

PRESENTER: Michele Gaspar, DVM, MA, LCPC

CE CREDITS: 2

Michele Gaspar is a veterinarian and psychotherapist. She is a member of the Vets4Vets® program of the VIN Foundation and provides one-on-one support to veterinarians and veterinary students with personal and professional challenges. Michele has had a mindfulness practice since 1972 and facilitates an annual mindfulness meditation course on VIN, as well as coordinating the annual mindfulness retreat. In addition to her VIN Foundation activities, she has a private psychotherapy practice in Chicago providing mental health services to physicians and other health care providers.

Our lives are filled with periods of grief and joy; accomplishments and failures; and periods of exhilaration and times when there seems to be no momentum forward. It is normal to want the positive times in life to continue unabated and work to avoid the inevitable downturns in life. In this lecture we will consider how mindfulness allows us to develop equanimity, which is an acceptance of the present moment, and to use mindfulness practice to remind ourselves of the impermanence of our emotional states and events around us.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Be able to define “equanimity” and discuss how it differs from anhedonia.
- Understand ways in which the practice of equanimity has been used historically by various groups to effect social change.
- Be able to discuss clinical vignettes in which an attitude of equanimity can enhance patient care, client communications and staff well-being.

12:00 PM: Lunch

1:30 PM: Meditation

2:00 PM: LECTURE 2: When Things Fall Apart: Navigating relationship losses in our families and in our hospitals

PRESENTER: Michele Gaspar, DVM, MA, LCPC

CE CREDITS: 2

Ruptures in relationships, whether professional or personal, often result in significant emotional distress. In this lecture we will consider relationship dynamics using the Minuchin Family Therapy Theory and then discuss the role of forgiveness in forging new relationships. We will consider what forgiveness is and what it isn't; whether all ruptures should be forgiven and why forgiveness is considered to be fundamental to mental health.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Discuss basic relational dynamics from a Minuchin Family System theoretical perspective and understanding how these dynamics present in a variety of scenarios, including home, work and community.
- Understand how forgiveness is fundamental to mental health and the limits of forgiveness.
- Discuss on how incorporating forgiveness minimises shame and perfectionism.

4:00 PM: Mediation

5:30 PM: Dinner

7:30 PM: Meditation/Fireside Conversation

Wednesday, October 22, 2025

7:30 AM: Yoga with Gwen Jeun, DVM

8:00 AM: Breakfast

9:30 AM: Meditation

10:00 AM: LECTURE 3: Bringing calmness and clarity to clinical practice

PRESENTER: Mahesh C. Patel, MD. CT. Attending Physician, University of Illinois, Chicago, IL.

CE CREDITS: 2

Mahesh Patel is a physician, board-certified in Infectious Diseases. He completed his undergraduate degree at the University of California-Berkeley, from which he graduated with the highest distinction, and completed his MD at The Ohio State University College of Medicine. Dr. Patel completed a residency in Pediatrics at the Indiana University College of Medicine and a Fellowship in Infectious Diseases at the Montefiore Medical Center/Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City. He currently is an attending physician in Infectious Diseases at the University of Illinois Chicago Hospitals, where he works with transplant patients; coordinates a telemedicine program for incarcerated individuals with AIDS; and teaches first-year medical students enrolled at the University of Illinois College of Medicine. He is the author of numerous journal articles and medical textbook chapters.

Physicians and veterinarians share many commonalities, chief among them is the necessity of accompanying patients and family members through chronic and terminal illnesses. That presence to the suffering of others can activate a variety of emotions in clinicians and can cloud our abilities to be fully present and provide care. In this lecture, during which the presenter will share clinical vignettes from his own practice, we will consider how we can be aware of what is arising in us when we attend to patients and how we can be fully human to others while ensuring our own well-being.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Understand the shared clinical challenges of One Medicine, from the perspective of a practicing academic-clinician physician.
- Discuss ways in which physicians navigate complicated patient scenarios and be able to incorporate some of these in attendees' veterinary clinical practice.
- Become familiar with communications strategies being employed in human medical education. Discussing ways physicians effectively manage their responses to patient and patient family responses to chronic and terminal diseases.

12:00 PM: Lunch

1:00 PM: LECTURE 4: Finding Equanimity in Difficult Places: For people with well-established empathy, how does this work?

PRESENTER: Rabbi Michael Oblath, PhD

CE CREDITS: 2

Michael Oblath received a PhD in Biblical History from the University of California at Berkeley and is a retired Reform Rabbi who lives in Anchorage, Alaska. He is an annual presenter at the VIN Mindfulness Meditation retreats and his lectures are geared to making ancient texts and narratives relevant to 21st century challenges.

The worlds of veterinarians and clergy may seem to be separated from each other by many degrees of freedom. Yet, when considering the quest for equanimity, we are inexorably linked. We share strong tendencies toward helping others, and powerful drives to heal (animals, people, the world) all matched up against the overwhelming pressure of a “world” that pushes back. Through discussion and reflection we will seek to identify ways to find balance.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Become aware that the empathic well within us is one that should be tapped, and not wasted.
- Become aware that equanimity, in simple or difficult places, is something best cherished in company with others.
- Become aware that we, ourselves, must be comfortable with the idea that the equanimity we seek can only help us help others when we are balanced within.

3:00 PM: Meditation

3:30-5:00 PM: Meditative Art Exercise with Jane Charbonneau, DVM

5:30 PM: Dinner

6:30 PM: Movie (to be announced) and Meditation

Thursday, October 23, 2025

7:30 AM: Yoga With Gwen Jeun, DVM

8:00 AM: Breakfast

9:00 AM: Meditation

9:30 AM: Closing Discussion

12:00 PM: Departure. Safe travels home! See you next year!

FACILITY NOTES:

- Bathrooms: There are shared bathrooms, and a few rooms with private baths. This will be first come, first served. Towels and linens are provided, but toiletries are not.
- Rooms: All rooms with a single occupant are furnished with a single twin bed. For rooms where a couple is sharing, there are queen beds available on a first come, first serve basis. Bed linens provided. If ADA is needed, please let us know.
- While exploring the beautiful outdoor spaces, a sense of the sacredness and an atmosphere conducive to prayer and reflection must be observed.
- All first floor common areas, including the conference center restrooms, are considered “Quiet Zones”. Behavior of all participants is expected to be consistent with a spiritual retreat, including respect for our facility and staff.
- The use of alcohol or any controlled substance anywhere on the property is prohibited without a valid prescription.
- Outside food/beverages *are* allowed on the campus. You are encouraged to bring your own snacks. Michele Gaspar will also be bringing snacks to share with the group. 3 meals will be provided and there will be a convenience pantry near the dining room and a kitchenette near the conference room that both have free coffee, tea, and water available all the time. The convenience pantry also has free cookies and some items for sale (small toiletry items and a few snacks). There is also a pop machine.