

# South of the Garden

The Newsletter for the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South

Volume 35, Number 3

September 2014

## Stand With

by Jeanette Stokes

As I stood on the quad in front of Duke Chapel with a piece of rainbow cloth around my neck, I remembered walking past that same spot on many bright August days forty years before. This year, I was wearing rainbow colors as a show of support for LGBTQ students and allies at Duke Divinity School. Forty years ago, I was just starting my own time as a student there.

When I entered the seminary in 1974, I knew almost no women ministers. I had met one or two, along with a few missionaries and some catholic nuns. I found one at Duke. Helen Crotwell, an ordained United Methodist minister by then (deacon 1973, elder 1975), had begun her job at Duke as the Associate Minister to the university. She would soon become the first clergywoman I knew well. But I hadn't met her yet.

I remember wondering if I was really welcome at the divinity school. There were about thirty-five women in our class of 125; at least I had plenty of company. As the weeks passed, it became clear that some of us were more interested in calling attention to our gender than others. I was very interested in the topic and it quickly became a habit to raise my hand in class and ask, "What about the women?" The blank stares I received in return assured me I was exploring new ground.

My second year at Duke, I was the coordinator of the Divinity School Women's Center where we explored the challenges and joys of women training for and entering ministry. When I graduated in 1977, some friends and I founded the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South.

There have been ordained women ministers in the U.S. for well over 100 years. Antoinette Brown Blackwell was ordained by the Congregationalists in 1853. Presbyterians and Methodists began ordaining women in 1956. This summer marks the 50th anniversary of the ordination of Southern Baptists women (the first, Addie Davis was ordained at Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham in 1964) and the 40th anniversary of the ordination of the Episcopal Eleven (the "irregularly" ordained group that included Carter Heyward).

While women have not achieved total equality as clergy, we are not a novelty anymore. A casual glance around the Triangle turns up any number female heads of staff at local churches, and at least two women bishops, Hope Morgan Ward (NC Conference, UMC) and Anne Hodges-Copple (Episcopal Diocese of NC).

One could say that over these past forty years the struggle for full inclusion in church leadership has moved from the struggle to get women ordained to the struggle for full inclusion and ordination of LGBTQ people. My own denomination, the Presbyterian Church, USA, agreed to ordain LGBTQ

(Continued on inside.)



## Joy of Grace

by Deana Vassar

(The following essay, *The Joy of Grace*, won third place in the 2014 RCWMS Essay Contest. Details for the 2015 contest are on the back page of this newsletter.)

She had one of the loveliest faces I have ever seen and I had never known an elderly woman to make her way through the front doors like this. Especially not one in their 90s. It was clear that her walker was just something that her son was having her use to prevent any problems. Her shoulders were squared, she was built like a dancer and she was sure of every step.

"Mama here doesn't really need this walker, but my wife and I want her to use it at all times here at the senior center because we want to always be in broken bone prevention mode." His lilting southern drawl fit with what I had seen on our new client's paperwork. The family was originally from Savannah, Georgia.

We were all amused to observe over the next few weeks that Graces' son was, by appearances, much older than his mother. He was slightly bent and his furrowed face looked like he had lived 70 years of hard days, while the woman who had brought him into this world was always laughing and vivacious. Her hair was a halo of white and her soft milky skin showed a fine web of lines, still she was ageless. Her bright, quick spirit and constant smile made her so.

Grace, the oldest participant at the adult day-care center where I was employed, helped us take care of the clients who were 20 years her junior. She had such compassion with the "young folks" especially--those who were in their late 60s and early 70s spending their days with us usually due to Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease. She also would keep me informed of client needs--she would notice when a participant needed extra attention, she would advise us on music selections for relaxation time--"less Pachelbel, more Sinatra"--and she inspired us all to live with just a bit of her presence and sense that life is good.

Every single Monday through Friday, I was delighted to see her show up in the morning and sad to see her depart in the evenings.

Whatever Grace spoke about regarding her past, it always sounded straight out of a Frank Capra film. She talked about the gift of growing up in a place like Savannah, Georgia and her friendship with the author John Berendt, who had written the newly released best-seller, "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil," but most of all she talked about her dear husband, Hugh. Hugh had made Grace very happy in their marriage. He never spoke harshly to her, always remembered her birthday and her mother's birthday and not once in her marriage did he question how much she had paid for one of her dresses or Sunday outfits. She would always tell about how after she'd go clothes shopping she'd offer to show him the bill. "No need, Dear," he'd say. "I trust you."

(Continued inside.)

# Calendar

Now through January 25, 2015

**PAULI MURRAY: Imp, Crusader, Dude, Priest**  
Levine Museum of the New South, Charlotte, NC  
The exhibit, created by the Pauli Murray Project (in Durham) and in collaboration with the Levine Museum, offers a timeline of Murray's ambitions, accomplishments, and struggles. It features life-size photographs of Murray that reflect ways she saw and presented herself to the world. Text panels and interactives allow visitors to discover how Murray navigated her work and journey. This exhibit was developed by Barbara Lau, the director of the Pauli Murray Project at the Duke Human Rights Center.  
Details: [museumofthenewsouth.org](http://museumofthenewsouth.org)

September 8–12, 2014

**TABLE ROCK WRITERS WORKSHOP**  
Wildacres Retreat, Little Switzerland, North Carolina  
An open-hearted writing program for adults.  
Details: [tablerockwriters.com](http://tablerockwriters.com)  
Contact: Georgann Eubanks, [ge@tablerockwriters.com](mailto:ge@tablerockwriters.com)

\*September 9, 2014, Tuesday, 11:30 am–2:00 pm  
(second Tuesday of each month)

**ART OF CONSCIOUS AGING**  
Colony Hills Clubhouse, 3060 Colony Rd., Durham, NC 27707  
Bring a bag lunch. Newcomers welcome. No fee to attend. No need to register.  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

September 13, 2014, Saturday, 9:30 am–4:00 pm  
**COMING HOME TO MYSELF: A Women's InterPlay Retreat**

Friends Meeting House, 625 Tower St., Raleigh, NC  
A time to come home to ourselves and pay attention to what our bodies want and need. We'll explore the wisdom of our bodies through the playful practice of InterPlay. The wisdom of InterPlay is rooted in simple forms grounded in movement, voice, stillness, and storytelling. InterPlay is incremental, you go at your own pace. No prior experience needed, just a spirit of willingness.  
Leaders: Kate Amoss & Ginny Going  
Cost: \$50.  
Contact: Ginny, 919-821-3723, [interplaync@nc.rr.com](mailto:interplaync@nc.rr.com)

\*September 21–28, 2014

**WEEK OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN**  
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC  
A week of quiet days and evening sharing.  
Cost: \$750, includes lodging and meals.  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

October 7, 2014, Tuesday, 12:20 pm

**LECTURE by SERENE JONES**  
Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC  
Rev. Dr. Serene Jones, President, Union Theological Seminary, NYC, will give the Jill Raitt Lecture.

October 13–17, 2014

**WISDOM SHARING: A Deepening Retreat** with Alice Walker, Gloria Steinem, and Dr. Chung Hyun Kyung  
Ghost Ranch, Abiquiu, NM  
Retreat led by teachers with deep feminine wisdom.  
Cost: \$375 to \$1,200 depending on housing options  
Contact: [registrar@GhostRanch.org](mailto:registrar@GhostRanch.org), [ghost ranch.org](http://ghost ranch.org)

October 17–19, 2014

**BARBARA BROWN TAYLOR: Lecture & Preaching**  
Myers Park Baptist Church, Charlotte, NC  
"Jesus the Christ in the 21st Century" features Taylor at a Friday night lecture, Saturday conference, Sunday



morning forum, and Sunday worship.  
Leader: Reverend Dr. Barbara Brown Taylor  
Contact: [cwilliamson@mpbconline.org](mailto:cwilliamson@mpbconline.org)

\*October 23–24, 2014

**HOMEGROWN: NC Women's Preaching Festival**  
Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church, Durham, NC  
Hundreds of Christian clergywomen in NC. This festival will lift up the voices of NC clergywomen to encourage and inspire one another, share and learn, and hone their craft. Hear wonderful preaching from festival attendees and enjoy conversations on the art of proclamation in all its forms.  
Sponsors: Duke Divinity Women's Center & RCWMS  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)  
Details: [ncwomenpreaching.wordpress.com](http://ncwomenpreaching.wordpress.com)

\*October 23–26, 2014 (7 pm Thursday–3 pm Sunday)  
**HERONS WALK ON WATER'S EDGE, A Retreat**  
Cedar Cross Retreat Center, Louisburg NC (north of Raleigh) [www.cedarcrossretreat.org](http://www.cedarcrossretreat.org)

She walks along the water's wooded edge. Her steps intentional. Heron stands knowing wisdom is rooted in intuition, imagination, and bodily sensations. Her observation is keen. In this intergenerational retreat, we will return to our natural pace and draw closer to Sacred Mystery embodied in the earth community. We will find the Divine in our own reflections, in each other, and in "all of our relations." Through soul circles and eco-contemplative practices, we open to the most relevant reciprocal healing medicine of our time, intimate relationship with the natural world.  
Leaders: Sherylyn Pitt and Anita McLeod  
Cost: \$395 before Oct. 1. After Oct. 1, cost is \$425.  
Single room is \$50 extra. To register, go to [www.rcwms.org/calendar.html](http://www.rcwms.org/calendar.html) & print registration form or follow links to register online.  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

Nov. 3–Dec. 8, 2014, Mondays, 6:30–8:30 pm

**WRITING FOR OUR LIVES: Prompt Writing Workshop**  
Five Oaks Clubhouse, 5109 Pine Cone Dr., Durham, NC  
Grieving can be isolating and grief can be lonely. Take time to remember, reflect in writing, and share.  
Leader: Heidi Gessner, minister and chaplain  
Cost: \$150  
Contact: Heidi, [heidigessner@gmail.com](mailto:heidigessner@gmail.com), 919-357-4148

\*December 14, 2014, Sunday, 7:00 pm

**INTERFAITH CELEBRATION**  
Beth El Synagogue, Watts St. Durham, NC  
All are welcome. Please bring a candle.  
Suggested donation: \$5-10  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

\*February 20–23, 2015, Friday to Monday

**MAKING YOUR ART: Advanced Workshop** with Sue Sneddon at Emerald Isle, NC  
Cost: \$325 plus housing (\$125 double, \$225 single)  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

\*February 27–March 1, 2015, Fri. 2:00pm–Sun. 2:00pm

**FINDING YOUR MEDIUM: A Weekend of Art** at the Beach with Sue Sneddon at Emerald Isle, NC  
Cost: \$300 plus housing (\$125 double, \$225 single)  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

\*March 20–21, 2015, Fri., 7–9 pm & Sat., 9:30am–3:30pm

**WRITING WORKSHOP** with Carol Hendersion  
Durham, NC  
Cost: \$125.  
Register: <http://bit.ly/1kQve4Z>  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

Future Weeks of Quiet & Writing:

January 2–9, 2015

May 3–10, 2015

September 20–27, 2015

# Joy...

When Grace found out that I had just gotten engaged, she was as excited as I was. For months she listened to me as I parsed out the wedding plans.

“The only thing you’ll want to insist upon is that you’re married on a Wednesday.”

I had been carefully taking notes as Grace went with me over things I’d need to make sure were covered for the big day: writing our own vows, I needed to order a sixpence to wear in my shoe, what would my something blue be?, she directed me to have a small wedding and the nicest honeymoon you could afford. “Big weddings just make everybody tired and worried,” Grace would say. Every bit of advice and direction she had to give was a treasure to me, but marrying on a Wednesday? That did not square with my summer weekend wedding fantasy.

“A Wednesday, Grace?” The notion of telling my family that I’d be changing our wedding day to the middle of the week was unnerving at best.

“Yes, Love. The tradition goes like this: Monday for health, Tuesday for wealth, Wednesday best of all, Thursday for losses, Friday for crosses and Saturday no luck at all. I’m not as superstitious as most folk from Savannah, but you’re telling me you want to have a happy marriage so why not cover all of your bases? Do what Hugh and I did--make it a Wednesday! Of course it sounds silly, sure, but I’ve found the old women’s wisdom has at least one foot in the truth. Some kind of truth!” And with that she let out one of her joyful cackles. “When Hugh and I would have a squabble, we’d remind ourselves that we had been married on a Wednesday, so everything had to turn out fine.”

Everything Grace ever said either left me comforted, amused or educated and I cannot say the same of anyone else in this world.

I was 5 months away from getting hitched to my sweetheart and it seemed that I daily heard some new cautionary tale about marriage. But not Grace. She always smoothed the frayed edges of my mind.

I remember talking with Grace one afternoon in a particularly crestfallen state, I was frankly growing terrified about the upcoming Big Day. Several folks in my life had nearly soured me to the whole idea of marriage telling me that my Gabriel was Mr. Wonderful now, but that once I married him, he’d be a whole different story. Oh, sure, he’s nice now...How many times had I heard that cynical phrase. But was it cynical? Or was I just naive to think by beloved future husband would stay beloved? Oh, sure, he’s nice now, rattled about in my brain like some malignant mantra.

“That is foolish talk, my young friend. They are filling your head with poison; don’t let them do it. Is Gabriel kind to you now?”

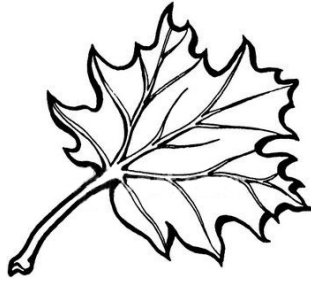
“Yes.”

“Is he kind to his parents and siblings?”

“Always.”

“How does he treat the cashier at the grocery store?”

“Heavens, I don’t know.”



“Well, this weekend arrange for you two to go to the grocery store and watch how he treats the cashier. I watched Hugh like a hawk before we got hitched. And he was the sweetest fellow the Good Lord ever thought up. I watched how he treated strangers. Anybody can treat their own good, but how do they treat the one they don’t know? Hugh treated everyone like they were his brother or sister, so I knew that I had a good man. And, of course I put my eagle eye to how he looked at good-looking women when he didn’t know I was watching. If Hugh had ever had lust for another woman other than me, he never showed it, God bless him. 56 years of marriage and he never once had the roving eye. Some women don’t seem to mind the roving eye, but it would have broken my heart if Hugh was that kind of fellow. I made sure he wasn’t before we bought the rings!”

Grace’s wisdom about what was unfolding in my life brought me such a deep comfort that over the next few months I was actually able to enjoy planning for our July nuptials. And I particularly enjoyed observing my fiancé. In grocery stores. On the street. On the road while he was driving. He looked like he was going to turn out like Grace’s Hugh.

That was nearly two decades ago, and Grace has been gone for almost as long. But she still inhabits my life with her evergreen warmth and beauty. I try not to allow myself to slump when I recall how she carried herself; I try to remember to watch out for others and to treat strangers like family and to have a little more Sinatra in life. And after almost 19 years of being a Mrs., I imagine that I am just as happy as Hugh made Grace. And the fact that we got married on a Wednesday has been added insurance. I’m not superstitious or anything, but like Grace said, most of the “old women’s wisdom has at least one foot in the truth!”

*Deana Vassar is a writer, singer/songwriter, and minister of music who lives in Wake Forest, NC, where she grew up.*

# Stand With...

people three years ago (2011). But many other denominations have not yet done so. This struggle to include LGBTQ people in the leadership of the church is the reason I was standing on the Duke Quad in August.

It seems that Richard Hays, Duke Divinity School Dean, outraged some incoming students by publicly reminding them that the UMC Book of Discipline states, “The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.” I wonder how Duke University reconciles this UMC claim with the university’s prohibition against “discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, sex, genetic information, or age in the administration of its educational policies, admission policies, financial aid, employment, or any other university program or activity.”

As I stood near the front of the imposing Gothic chapel under bright blue Carolina sky, I could easily imagine Helen Crotwell walking out of the chapel and down the front steps to stand with us in support of LGBTQ people and their allies. Though the details of the struggles are different than they were in 1974, they are all the same struggle—to recognize the gifts of and to include all God’s children.

# In Nature

This fall, Sherylyn Pitt and Anita McLeod will lead an intergenerational retreat, HERONS WALK ON WATER'S EDGE, October 23-26 at Cedar Cross Retreat Center, north of Raleigh.

The restorative effects of spending time outdoors in community are well researched and documented in the literature of religion, ecology, psychology, and feminism. It's simple. We are designed to be part of community, the community of the natural world. Many of us feel closest to the deep Mystery of Life, closest to Spirit and to understanding our place in the family of things when we are out in nature. Our mothers were right when they instructed us to "go outside and play," and thousands of years of indigenous wisdom concur.

When we return to nature, we rekindle a sense of belonging and groundedness. We ignite awe and wonder in the Sacredness of "all our relations." Heron's Walk will offer contemplative, mindful, and ceremonial practices in the natural world. Abundant time will be scheduled for solo as well as group experience. We will move through the days at nature's pace where we are closest to Deep Mystery utilizing wisdom rooted in intuition, imagination and bodily sensations. This practice of returning to nature may be the most powerful reciprocal healing medicine of our time. With intention, we gather in circle to strengthen and restore our relationship with our authentic Selves and the Natural World. Ready? Lets go on Heron's walk!

Sherylyn Pitt is the creator of Feather Path, an organization dedicated to offering immersion retreats, workshops and trainings that assist individuals and communities in healing experiences of disconnection. Her focus is the empowerment of inter-generational relationships with Self, Purpose, Community, Spirit and the Natural World. Sherylyn earned a Master of Social Work and is a licensed therapist in private practice who lives, works, writes poetry, and drums with her two cats and loving husband in Garner, NC.

Anita is the Director of the Elder Woman Project at RCWMS and has led many workshops over the years such as Women's Soulful Circles, Embracing Menopause, Wise Choices and Conscious Aging. She restores her body, soul, and spirit by spending time in the natural world and in circles of women. She is a mother of four and a grandmother of five and lives with her husband and quirky dog in Durham.



# Essay Contest

RCWMS is committed to supporting women as they find their voices and make them heard. Our 2015 Essay Contest will open for submissions on October 15, 2014. Women eighteen years of age and older may submit previously unpublished nonfiction essays of 1400 words or less.

Essays this year should focus on the theme Embodying Faith. We invite submissions that consider this theme in creative ways. How do you embody your faith as a woman? How do you embody your faith or your deeply held values in your life, your work, or your spiritual practices?

Prizes: \$300 for first place, \$200 for second, and \$100 for third. The winning essay will be published in the RCWMS newsletter, *South of the Garden*, March 2015. Winners will be notified by email.

The limit is two essays per person. Submit via our online submissions form at <https://rcwms.submittable.com/submit>. Previous first-place winners and current RCWMS Board members are not eligible. No sermons, please. Do not put your name on your essay(s). Fill out the online cover letter form with the essay's title, your name, address, phone, and email. Submissions open on October 15, 2014 and close on January 15, 2015.

# RCWMS

RCWMS is a thirty-seven-year-old nonprofit dedicated to weaving feminism and spirituality into a vision of justice for the world. RCWMS sponsors workshops, conferences, and retreats on women, religion, creativity, spirituality, and social justice. The organization mentors and encourages young women, religious leaders, writers, and activists.

RCWMS appreciates contributions of time, energy, money, and stock. To contribute, contact RCWMS or visit [www.rcwms.org](http://www.rcwms.org). We are especially grateful for support of the Kalliopeia Foundation, Emerald Isle Realty, Triangle Community Foundation, and the estate of Nancy Ann Monte Santo.

RCWMS Trustees: Emma Akpan, Barbara Anderson, Meghan Florian, Jehanne Gheith, Jenny Graves, Roxane Gwyn, Erin Lane, Marcy Litle, Bonny Moellenbrock, Lori Pistor, and Rebecca Vidra

Jeanette Stokes, Executive Director  
Jennifer McGovern, Administrative Director  
Meghan Florian, Communications Coordinator  
Anita McLeod, Elder Women Project Director



SUBSCRIPTIONS to *South of the Garden* cost \$20 and run for 12 months from the time placed. Foreign or First Class is \$25. A subscription is free to anyone for whom the subscription fee is a burden. Tax-deductible contributions over and above the subscription fee are appreciated. Send checks to RCWMS, 1202 Watts Street, Durham, NC 27701, or go to [www.rcwms.org](http://www.rcwms.org).

YOUR MAILING LABEL shows the year and month your subscription will expire. 1503 = 2015 March.

ISSN 0890-7676  
[www.rcwms.org](http://www.rcwms.org) [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com) 919.683.1236  
RCWMS book blog: [wordsandspirit.tumblr.com](http://wordsandspirit.tumblr.com)

The Resource Center for Women  
and Ministry in the South  
1202 Watts Street, Durham, NC 27701  
919-683-1236  
Return Service Requested.

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Durham, N.C.  
Permit # 1054